

Avoiding False Teaching

Family of Faith, 1 Timothy 3:1

Introduction

- Do you have those friends that you can just pick up where you left off?
 - Paul and Timothy are friends and partners in the gospel.
 - The church-planting missionary bypasses his usual thanksgiving section and jumps right into one of the main reasons for his letter – dealing with “strange doctrines” or false teaching in the church. (Read passage)
- 2,000 years later & we are still dealing with false teaching in the church.
 - Unbiblical teaching and wrong philosophies exist in our world – for sure – but sometimes they filter into the church.
 - Paul urged Timothy & all the people to distance themselves from it.
 - This directive is still relevant: **God’s people must avoid false teaching.**
- I used to think about false teaching as a specific set of heretical beliefs – sort of like a list of unhealthy foods that you should skip. You know: processed meats, sugary beverages, deep-fried foods – all the stuff you can get at the state fair, right? As long as you stay away from them, you should be fine. But after spending more time in the books of 1 & 2 Timothy, I’ve started to think about false teaching differently – like MSG, sodium nitrate, artificial food coloring. I haven’t given up aspartame (Don’t mess with my Diet Coke). These items can be added to otherwise healthy food, and they can have a profound impact on it.
 - Avoiding false teaching today is less like avoiding doctrine that is unbiblical & more like avoiding ideas that alter, distort, or obscure the gospel.
 - It’s more than opposing cults; it’s preserving the evangelical gospel - the message that people can receive forgiveness and eternal life through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- *As we study this passage today, we’ll discover 3 ways to identify false teaching. This is the 1st step in avoiding it because you can’t avoid it if you can’t spot it.*

Body

I. Look at the results of the teaching (v. 3-4)

- A. The “certain men” here were probably elders in the church.
- B. The “strange doctrines” literally means “hetero teachings.”
- C. These strange doctrines were related to legacy stories and lists of ancestors that came from the genealogies of the Old Testament.
- D. Verse 4 mentions 2 possible results of the teaching:
 - 1. Are people engaged in ongoing speculation?
 - a. It was derived from Scripture, but it didn’t go anywhere.
 - b. It was focused on obscure details without any direction.
 - 2. Are people equipped for godly living?
 - a. “Administration” can refer to God’s actual plan for salvation and/or the persons who are responsible in that plan.
 - b. They should have been teaching how to participate in God’s plan.

- E. Beware of theological information that doesn’t lead to heart and life transformation!

II. Look at the motivation of the teacher. (v. 5-7)

- A. Love is the ideal motivation for any preacher or teacher.
 - 1. This includes a love for God & for one’s neighbor. (Matt. 22:35-40)
 - 2. This flows from a pure heart, a clean conscience, & a sincere faith.
- B. Verse 6 says some men have “strayed” from this ideal, leaving 2 possibilities:
 - 1. Does the teacher seem to be motivated by affection?
 - 2. Does the teacher seem to be motivated by reputation?
 - a. They wanted to be known as teachers of the Law
 - b. They were in it for themselves, not for their students.
- C. Think about this as you would think about a new doctor.
 - 1. Are they qualified?
 - 2. Are they competent?
 - 3. Are they caring?

III. Look at the ways the teacher uses Scripture. (v. 8-11)

- A. These verses reinforce the value of the Mosaic Law, but challenge the way the false teachers were using it in Ephesus.
 - 1. The Law wasn’t made to make the righteous person righteous, but to make the sinful person sinful.
 - a. The righteous are righteous by their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, not in following details of the Law.
 - b. The sinful realize their sinfulness when they are confronted with standards of the Law.
 - 2. There are 14 behaviors, arranged according to the 10 Commandments.
 - a. They all describe someone who is living a “lawless” life.
 - b. They are all “contrary to sound teaching.” (Let’s touch on 2)
 - i. “Unholy & profane” – relate to keeping the Sabbath holy
 - ii. “Immoral men & homosexuality” relate to no adultery.
- B. Here are 3 options:
 - 1. Do they use it at all?
 - 2. Do they use it to point people away from sin? (or license)
 - 3. Do they use it to point people towards the Savior? (or legalism)

Conclusion

- These are 3 ways to identify false teaching which are important because, together as **God’s people, we must avoid false teaching altogether.**
 - This means the obvious cults and the less obvious church leaders
 - Anything that alters, distorts, or obscures the gospel is false teaching.
- Don’t just take my word for it, or some curriculum writer’s word for it, or podcast preachers’ word for it – put it to the test!
- May we give ourselves to sound teaching so that we can experience heart and life transformation!