

The sermon

Intro

False teachers again. I guess Paul cares a lot about elders and false teachers.

Who we listen to affects our beliefs. Who we imitate affects our behavior.

I guess leadership matters to Paul. And to God. Since God moved Paul to write these words.

Who we follow matters. Choose wisely.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: How can I spot a false teacher? (6:3-5)

What a false teacher is not

Word of caution. A false teacher isn't someone who disagrees with you on about the millennium. A false teacher isn't someone who disagrees with you about election and predestination. A false teacher isn't someone who teaches infant baptism.

We practice believer baptism by immersion. But there are outstanding Christian teachers who teach infant baptism.

Kevin DeYoung, David Powlison (deceased) Paul David Tripp, Ed Welch, etc. produce outstanding literature on addiction, anxiety, decision-making, depression, the fear of man, guilt, holiness, etc. Those who teach believer's baptism have much to learn from them about the human heart.

These men believe the Bible is inerrant. They believe in the Trinity. They believe in the fall. They believe in the new birth. They believe in justification through Christ alone. They preach the gospel really well. I learn from and am challenged by Kevin DeYoung's *The Biggest Story Bible Storybook* when I read it to Lydia.

There are doctrines true, legitimate, Spirit-gifted Christian teachers disagree on.

Now to false teachers.

Different doctrine

If anyone teaches a different doctrine

Paul's painting the portrait of the false teacher. **First**, they teach a different doctrine.

Doctrine is a fancy word for the truths about God we believe.

Different doctrine = a different faith. A different gospel. A different salvation. A different God.

For false teachers salvation might be rescue from poverty or rescue from racial oppression or rescue from sickness, but it isn't rescue from sin.

For false teachers the path to salvation might be the power of positive thinking or looking within or following your heart or doing a better you or hoping your good outweighs your bad, but it isn't faith in Christ alone.

For false teachers God might be whoever you envision him to be (a figment of the imagination) or a genie or an impersonal force or a hands off creator who left the world to go wherever it might, but he isn't a God who directs history, enters history by taking on human flesh, dies on a cross, and holds us accountable for our sins.

A God who's passionate for his own glory, an inerrant word of God, and judgment on sin are nowhere to be found. I could go on and on. Different doctrine means a set of beliefs that isn't the Christian "*faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3).

Don't agree with Scripture

"and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness"

Second, they don't agree with Scripture. They reject the Bible. Their teachings communicate "the Bible is wrong."

They don't agree with what Jesus and the apostles said about sin and the human heart and the new birth and the cross and the final judgment. Sometimes they go to sources other than the Bible (e.g., *Book of Mormon*). Sometimes they give the prevailing opinions of modern culture priority over the Bible (redefining marriage). Sometimes they make it up on their own (cult leaders claiming they're the only one who ever got it right). Sometimes they straight up say the Bible is wrong (Paul wasn't inspired by the Spirit when he wrote 1 Timothy 2:12). Sometimes they twist the Bible's words by coming up with creative interpretations that contradict the clear teaching of Scripture (universalism, all will be saved).

Prideful

"he is puffed up with conceit"

Third, they're prideful. They think they're really great. Bloated head. Inflated ego.

False teachers like to draw attention to themselves, not God. They'd rather draw attention to their eloquence and insight than bring people into contact with the Bible. They have a high view of themselves, not God. Religion is about them, not God.

Conceit means they think they know better than God. They might point out where the Bible's wrong. They might be selective in which commands you should follow.

Clueless

"and understands nothing"

Fourth, they're clueless. They don't get the gospel. They don't understand God. **1 Timothy 1:7** puts it like this:

desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

They don't know what they're talking about. But they think they're experts.

They're clueless because they've disregarded the only source of knowledge for faith and conduct: the Bible.

Unhealthy craving for controversy

He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words,

Fifth, they crave controversy. They love debate for the sake of debate. They love a good argument.

Particularly, they quarrel over words. Having rejected the Bible and being clueless about the Bible's meaning, they incite controversy by disputing the meaning of words.

In our day, defining the word "woman" is a subject of controversy in Supreme Court hearings.

Words aren't a bad thing. God wants us to know words. God wants us to know what atonement means: appeasement of God's wrath, removal of sin, a substitute absorbs the punishment we deserve.

God wants us to know words. He's given us words so that we'd have assurance of salvation and hope for the world to come. The word quarrels were likely fruitless disputes about philosophical terms or, being clueless about Scripture, maybe they debated bizarre, inaccurate understandings of biblical words like atonement, justification, redemption.

It's common for false teachers to redefine words. In the 20th century, Rudolph Bultmann redefined justification as moving from inauthentic existence to authentic existence and Paul Tillich redefined sin as the act of falling into a state of estrangement = not being what we actually are and should be.

Think religion is a way to get wealthy

imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Sixth, they think godliness is the path to riches.

6:4 starts out talking about the false teacher ("he"). Then it moves into the fruit of their teaching ("which produce"). The description in 6:5 would seem to describe both the false teachers and their students. So I'm taking "*imagining that godliness is a means of gain*" to include the false teachers.

The Christian faith is "*the mystery of godliness*" in 3:16, so Paul means they think faith is a path to riches. They can use the church to get a mansion, a yacht, and a leer jet. Health and wealth preachers are doing this today.

Note the self-seeking. They use religion and the church for personal gain. They want a large church. They want a national platform. They want to be on TV.

Identity

In the New Testament, false teachers aren't saved. They teach a different gospel. For the first hundred years of their existence, the Seventh Day Adventists were labeled a non-Christian cult by the church. Kenneth Samples noted dialogue between Seventh-day Adventist scholars and evangelicals in the 1950's led many evangelicals to conclude that "SDA was not an anti-Christian cult, but rather a somewhat heterodox (i.e., departing from accepted doctrine) Christian denomination (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-seventh-day-adventism/>)." Because Seventh Day Adventists believe in the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and justification by faith alone, they are not false teachers. Even if they have questionable origins and some unique, incorrect conclusions.

Application: who am I sitting under?

You don't want to be learning from this sort of people. You don't want to be reading their books or listening to their podcasts.

Sources of false teaching abound. The celebrity social activist who pushes the normalization of sin. The cult leader who's the only one in the world who got Christianity right. The health and wealth preacher who promises you total prosperity...if you give a lot of money to him. The new age guru who tells you to still your mind and look within.

False teaching isn't found only in "Christian" circles. Satan spreads his lies in a variety of avenues. Music lyrics, movies, sitcoms, talk shows, the nightly news, etc.

Application: am I imitating false teachers?

We ought to ask ourselves, am I imitating these people?

1. We reflect false teachers when our doctrine differs from Scripture.

I can't tame my tongue. I can't forgive this person. It's not possible. Denying the power of the new birth to change sinners is denying the gospel.

2. We reflect false teachers when we don't agree with Scripture.

When we think the purpose of life is ease and leisure and accumulating things and being entertained our life ambitions don't agree with Scripture.

3. We reflect false teachers when we think too much of ourselves.

When we think I'm the best at everything or I have to be the best at everything or I'm more important than others (I deserve the best piece of cake) or I need to be celebrated, we have an inflated ego.

4. We reflect false teachers when we're clueless about spiritual matters.

Paul David Tripp observed, "I have listened to many of my Christian brothers and sisters tell stories of their vacations and the elaborate plans they made for many months to ensure that their families would have a good time. One day as I was listening to yet another account of a well-researched vacation package to Orlando, it hit me that many parents are more organized, more intentional, better researched, and more goal-oriented in planning their vacations than they are in raising their children (*Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*, Revised and Expanded, 37-38)."

He's insinuating some parents are experts at vacation planning while having given little thought to their parenting. We can be clueless in matters we should give much thought to.

5. We reflect false teachers when we crave controversy.

This is a common problem among those who study apologetics (fancy word for defending the faith) and theology (fancy word for the study of God). We can be more interested in proving we're right than reaching the heart of non-Christians. We can be more interested in proving our theology than living out the spirit of the doctrine we're passionate about. It's possible to advocate a correct doctrine in a divisive way.

This isn't to say that it's always wrong to discuss theology. Paul engaged in debates in his letters. Not because he craved controversy. But because he wanted people to know God correctly and reject error.

We should be able to discuss the Bible together. We shouldn't be so insecure in our beliefs that we can't look at the Bible together. We should be able to respectfully communicate ideas, listen to others, and understand where they're coming from.

I'm involved in a pastoral group where we use the Bible to counsel and encourage one another. I don't want to be a part of a pastor group where we can't open our Bibles because we're afraid of division.

6. We reflect false teachers when we think religion is for personal gain.

We might not join a church to get wealthy, but people might sing or play instruments so they can be praised. A preacher might preach because he wants to feel important. That's using religion for personal gain.

There's nothing wrong with being helped by a church. We want to be receivers and contributors.

Point 2: What do false teachers produce? (6:4-5)

Their fruit

What's the fruit of their "ministry"?

False doctrine taught by corrupt people will produce the sort of stuff we find in 6:3-5.

which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth,

Passion for personal gain and wealth dominates their teaching. So they produce envious people. Quarrels about words produce dissensions or rivalries. Disputes separate people. Divided people slander one another. Where there's jealousy, division, and slander, people are suspicious of one another. The end result is "*constant friction.*" Continual, ceaseless arguments. Feeding selfishness and feeding debate, the enterprise is a sinful mess.

Selfishness

Self-seeking guides produce self-seeking followers. If my message is it's all about me and my personal preferences, I teach you that your life should be all about you and your personal preferences.

If I teach you life is all about God, knowing God, adoring God, trusting God, depending on God's grace, submitting to God, living pleasing to God, seeking to honor God in the world, I teach you that life is all about God.

Depraved and deprived

The verbs depraved and deprived indicate a past event with ongoing consequences. These verbs also indicate someone or something brought them into this depraved and deprived state. "*depraved in mind*" meaning their thinking was corrupted. "*deprived of truth*" meaning prevented from having the gospel.

The false teachers were depraved and deprived by other false teachers and Satan. The followers of Paul's false teachers were depraved by these teachers and Satan. Satan's work is to corrupt minds and prevent the truth from reaching sinners.

This is happening today. False ideas are corrupting the minds of Americans. God's word is kept in the closet. This is our mission field: people with corrupt minds. People kept from the truth.

How can we avoid these things?

These can be problems in Christian churches too. How can Palermo Christian Church avoid this sort of sinful implosion?

1. Promote the Bible.

It's true. It's helpful. Everything it says is just and right. In doing so we promote human flourishing, not sinful implosion.

2. Promote God not ourselves.

Our agenda is to make much of Jesus, not ourselves. We're not in it for recognition. We're in it to glorify God, help one another, and rescue others from the wrath to come.

3. Strive for godliness in disagreement.

Where there's disagreement about words, instead of quarreling, we individually submit our thoughts to the Bible. We allow our thoughts to be renewed by Scripture. We don't assume bad motives of those who disagree. We talk with each other instead of suspecting the worst. We talk with each other instead of slandering each other.

When someone has a different view, listen. Both sides. Question the strength of your own views. Figure out why they think the Bible teaches that. What verses? What's their strongest argument? What Scriptures challenge their position? If their view is substantiated by the Bible, we revise our thoughts accordingly.

If we're rigidly settled every which way, we give the Bible no room to inform our thoughts. If we're open to anything, we're susceptible to false teachers.

If agreement can't be reached, allow room for disagreement. Acknowledge good motives. Acknowledge their strongest arguments. Be Bereans.

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. – Acts 17:11

Disagreement, while uncomfortable, puts godliness to the test. Can I love those who disagree with me?

Non-Christian

This morning we've learned there's truth. There's lies. Some embrace the Bible. Some don't. Some misuse the faith for their own ends. Some stir up sin with their lies and corrupt character.

We were created to know and love and serve God. But we've rebelled against his rule. Maybe because we've been deceived?

God holds us accountable for our rebellion = sin. The Bible speaks of torment in a place called the lake of fire.

In his great love, God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross as a substitute.

Whoever believes in Jesus will not face judgment but rather experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

There's two ways to live. We can go on rejecting God like the false teachers. Or we can humble ourselves by believing the Bible, turning to Jesus for forgiveness, and joyfully submitting to God's rule.

If you turn from rebellion and believe, you're totally forgiven of every sin you've ever committed and you're born again with a new heart to fight sin.

Conclusion

Love the truth, not the lies of our day. Pursue godliness, not sinful implosion.