

Unit Theme: Timothy, Titus, Philemon

June 2, 2024 (Lesson 1)

STAND AGAINST FALSE TEACHING

- 1. Do Not Be Seduced by False Teaching** (1 Timothy 4:1-3; 6:3-6)
- 2. Preach and Teach the Word** (2 Timothy 4:1-5)
- 3. Avoid False Teachers and Their Teachings** (Titus 3:8-11)

Central Truth: Christians learn to detect false doctrine as they are instructed in the Word.

Focus: Recognize the lure of false teaching in contrast to the truth of the Word and promote true doctrine.

Evangelism Emphasis: Christians proclaim the truth of the Gospel to turn sinners from error.

Golden Text: “They shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:4).

There has never been a time the church was totally free of false teachers—as will be pointed out in this and subsequent lessons. The gravity of the situation and the need for concern is exacerbated in our times by the easy access contemporary false teachers have to media sources, and by a worldwide epidemic of Bible ignorance.

Surveys show one of the few positive outcomes of the Covid pandemic was during this time, Bible reading increased. Lifeway Research estimated 181 million Americans read at least some portion of Scripture in the surveyed year, up 7.1 percent from the year before. That’s good news! Amid these few encouraging soundbites, however, the sad fact remains that only 32 percent of Protestant churchgoers read their Bible daily. Twelve percent of regular church attenders say they rarely, if ever, read the Bible.

Discipleship ministries are being challenged as never before to equip the saints through sound exegesis of Scripture. Much of today’s false teaching is couched in familiar terms and rooted in passages of the Bible that are lifted out of context. Many false teachers practice deceit through so-called prophetic words that are exalted to a level higher than or equal to inspired

Scripture. Believers can detect such false teachings only when they are rooted and grounded in the Word of God.

1. DO NOT BE SEDUCED BY FALSE TEACHING

A. Deceiving Spirits and Demonic Doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1-3)

1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

Paul is emphatic! This is not a casual warning. Paul isn't hastily speaking in a moment of emotion. The Holy Spirit speaks through him, saying, "In the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits" (v. 1 NLT).

Not all who disagree with our personal interpretation of Scripture are apostate or false prophets. Differences of understanding date back to Paul and Peter disputing over the imposition of Jewish traditions in the church. One writer called their meeting a "smack down" because Paul boasted, "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 2:11). Until we all come to "the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13), we will not have full agreement on all matters. Yet, it is important we remain charitable to those with whom we do not always see eye-to-eye.

Paul speaks here of more than charitable disagreements. This goes beyond differing interpretations to a warning about those who will "abandon the faith" (1 Tim. 4:1 NIV) because they are deluded by deceiving spirits. They mislead because they are misled. In some instances, they may have once walked with God, but are now inspired by deceiving spirits and they twist the Scriptures to "their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

There are two primary ways to discern if someone is teaching false doctrine: They will either offer us a relationship with God founded on less than God's Word requires, or they will demand things not supported by the Scriptures. Doctrines of demons seldom settle for Scripture alone; they usually produce another testament, another inspired book, or lay claim to a special revelation apart from the Bible.

In the beginning, Satan sought to distort God's words to accomplish his evil purposes. God said man could eat of any tree in Eden except one, warning if Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of that tree, they would "surely die" (Gen. 2:17). The serpent [Satan] countered, "You will not surely die . . . your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (3:4 NKJV). The determined purpose of deceiving spirits is to twist the Bible to make it appear to say what it does not say or to imply what the context never intended.

One would think Satan would have learned he is a defeated foe and can never exalt himself to the throne (Isa. 14:12-17), but he persists in his delusion, masquerading as if he is at least God's equal. He seeks unsuccessfully to exalt himself and others to divine status. Likewise, demon-inspired false teachers hypocritically claim what they do not possess and require what they themselves do not do. Their conscience has been "seared," a term borrowed from the ancient custom of branding the forehead of a criminal, marking them with thick scars (1 Tim. 4:2). With the criminal, the skin is hardened; with the apostate teacher, the conscience.

A key component of the doctrine of demons is their effort to deify man so he becomes his own god. Whether the suggestion made in Genesis 3 to Adam and Eve, or the Mormon idea that Jehovah is an exalted man and "as man now is God once was, and as God now is man may become," all such attempts at the deification of man are doctrines of demons. Likewise, when

teachers declare the faith-filled believer is “a little god” possessing creative powers like those of omnipotent Jehovah, we have witnessed another demonic attempt at the deification of man.

§ *In 1 Timothy 4:3, what two specific false teachings did Paul identify? How did he urge believers to respond (vv. 4-5)?*

B. Ministers of Greed (1 Timothy 6:3-6)

3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Much of modern Christianity is sadly based on the distorted idea that we serve God for what we can gain from it. Best-selling authors tout faith in Christ as the way to make more money, have more friends, possess more stuff, or have a better sex life! False teachers promise an abundant return on seeds sown into their ministry. Jesus did promise blessings when we invest in Kingdom work (Luke 6:38), but certain false teachers see prosperity as the *goal* of faith, whereas the Bible teaches we are blessed *because* of our faith. Jesus scolded some in His day because they were not following Him because of who He is, but because they had seen the miracle of the loaves and fishes and were hoping they could benefit when He did it again (John 6:26). Greedy false teachers encourage gullible souls to follow them for the sole purpose of what they can get in return.

Paul said, “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). “Contentment” here is from the Greek word *autarkeia*, meaning “a God-like all-sufficiency and satisfaction.” “And

having food and raiment let us therewith be content” (v. 8). God has everything He needs (Ps. 50:10-12) and is content. When our basic human needs are supplied, we live in the fulfillment of God’s promises and should be content.

“Great gain” does not come merely from having all our needs met, but from learning to be content with what we have. Let’s say it this way: Godliness without contentment is not true godliness. Those whose teaching does not promote godliness are arrogant and lack understanding; their teaching produces “envy, quarreling, slander, evil suspicions” (1 Tim. 6:4 CSB). They prey on individuals whose minds are “corrupted . . . and deprived of the truth, who think that godliness is a source of profit [a lucrative, money-making business]” (v. 5 Amp.). Paul said believers must “withdraw” themselves from such teachers and their doctrine.

A Biblical View of Money

Three clear principles . . . differentiate the Scriptural view of our money from the “American dream” view:

1. It’s not our money—it all comes from God.
2. We are not *entitled* to it but *entrusted* with it.
3. God expects us to use it in the interest of His kingdom.

—Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*

2. PREACH AND TEACH THE WORD

A. Preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Those who teach the Word of God must understand the gravity of assuming this sacred charge. The Greek word translated “charge” (v. 1) connotes a legal testimony as in a court of law. The Christian teacher is under a sacred oath and will give an account to God at the Judgment. James wrote, “Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1 NKJV).

In his charge, Paul gave Timothy a specific command as to what he was to preach. “Timothy was not required to merely know the Word or like the Word or approve of the Word; he was required to preach the Word; it was to be the content of his message” (David Gusik, *Enduring Word Commentary*). A temptation for preachers and teachers is to find a topic or doctrine they want to talk about and then go to the Scriptures to find Biblical support for their topic. This is sometimes called “concordance teaching.” Paul did not allow for that; rather, Timothy was to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15), understanding “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (3:16). The concordance is a gift to the contemporary student of Scripture, great writers are among a teacher’s best friends, and Bible commentaries can assist us in understanding deep Biblical truths. Yet, the teacher’s textbook must be the Bible alone. Teachers must not teach current events, politics, points of view, or their personal convictions. Instead, they must “preach the word” (4:2).

Paul’s instructions reveal the teacher must not study only when preparing to teach; the teacher must be a perpetual student and must never give the excuse, “I’m not prepared.” There are two specific times when a teacher must be ready to teach—“in season” and “out of season.” This means the teacher teaches, regardless of circumstances. Large crowd or small crowd. With notice or without notice. With pay or without pay. Balanced teaching of the Bible will bring correction, warning, and encouragement, delivered with patience and faithfulness.

Open the Door

When we preach or teach the Scriptures, we open the door for the Holy Spirit to do His work. God has not promised to bless oratory or clever preaching. He has promised to bless His Word.—Billy Graham

B. Fulfill Your Calling (2 Timothy 4:3-5)

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Paul challenged Timothy to faithfully discharge his duties as a teacher, understanding teachers may be subjected to opposition (v. 5). The teacher runs the risk of rejection and must understand accolades and pats on the back are not guaranteed. The God-called teacher cannot quit but must endure affliction with eyes wide open, practicing “self-control in everything, [and enduring] hardship” (v. 5 CSB). The reasons for this are multiple, but primarily stem from the unwillingness of some to accept sound doctrine. The nearer we come to the end of the age, the more likely we are to have those among us with ears that itch to hear a comfortable word rather than what the Lord says (v. 3).

The desire for a pleasant word gives rise to the unscrupulous teachers mentioned in this study. Timothy had to be watchful and stay true to the Word, although some would turn away from him toward those charlatans who would scratch their itching ears with cleverly devised “fables” (v. 4). In making “full proof of [one’s] ministry” (v. 5), the teacher must be so well-versed in Scripture that they can offer an appropriate rebuttal to false gospels [“convince” NKJV], confront falsehoods with truth [“rebuke”], and challenge students with sound doctrine

["exhort"] (v. 2). The teacher must do this with patient waiting, even when there may be little visible response or repentance ["longsuffering"], all the while never wavering from the revealed Scriptures.

§ *What are some of the "fables" (v. 4), or "myths" (CSB), that false teachers are teaching today?*

3. AVOID FALSE TEACHERS AND THEIR TEACHINGS

A. Good and Profitable (Titus 3:8)

8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

Writing to Titus, his "son in the faith" (1:4 NLT), Paul reminded him we are not saved by our own "works of righteousness . . . , but according to [God's] mercy" (3:5). The teacher must be faithful to declare this truth above all others, insisting although good works can never produce salvation, a genuine salvation experience will produce in us the desire to "maintain good works" (v. 8).

The teacher's assignment is to proclaim the balanced, transformative Gospel. As a coin has two sides and as a battery has both a positive and negative pole, so Biblical teaching reminds us of who and what we were before Christ, and who and what we have become in Him. Before Christ, we were "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (v. 3 NKJV). But through His kindness, love, and mercy, God "saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (vv. 4-5). Because God poured His love on us, we have been born again. We are "justified" (declared righteous as if we had never sinned) and "made heirs according to the hope of eternal

life” (v. 7). In the context of these verses, we see the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in action. We also see hope, grace, mercy, obedience, and the fruit of the Spirit. These are “good and profitable” subjects (v. 8).

Good Works

We shall be judged according to our works—that is why we are exhorted to do good works. . . There is no faith without good works, and no good works apart from faith.—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

B. Divisive and Self-Condemed (Titus 3:9-11)

9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. 10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; 11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

The teacher must not become entangled in avoidable debates and arguments; they are “unprofitable and useless” (v. 9 NKJV). Having just reminded Titus that we are not saved by our own works of righteousness but according to God’s mercy, Paul lists several divisive situations we must avoid.

Foolish questions. Several translations call these “controversies.” These are verbal arguments, dissensions, or tongue-lashings coming from the teacher or someone else. A godly teacher will not engage in or allow such controversies to be entertained in their classroom or pulpit. In every generation there have been strong-willed agents of chaos who will try to dogmatically impose their controversies onto others or insert them into their teaching or conversation. These are to be given no place in the church.

Genealogies. This seems contradictory to the numerous places in the Bible where lineages and genealogies are listed. The problem was some people in the early church were insisting that new members be examined as to their genealogical connection to Abraham and the other patriarchs. This indicated the unwillingness of some to break with Jewish tradition, thereby segregating along familial lines. A godly teacher cannot permit or encourage discrimination based on race, nationality, color, or gender. Paul insisted the church is to be interested in a person's potential future more than in their social standing or family pedigree. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28).

Contentions. Unlike the controversies already mentioned, this one concerns disagreements that had escalated into full-blown quarrels and strife. Foolish disputes are caustic disagreements, but contentions create factions and cliques in the church. Contention breeds more contention and, left unchecked, it will spread through the body like a wildfire. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matthew 12:25).

Strivings about the Law. Portions of the New Testament, including passages in the books of Hebrews and Galatians, warn those who have embraced Christ not to revert to the traditions of the Law. Paul told the Colossians they were "dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world," and no longer subject to those old ordinances. They were instructed to "touch not; taste not; handle not" but to view those old Hebrew traditions as "the commandments and doctrines of men" (Col. 2:20-22). As we said earlier, there are two primary ways to discern if a teacher is teaching false doctrine: They will either offer us a relationship with God founded on less than

God's Word requires, or will demand things not supported by the Scriptures. By staying true to the Scriptures, godly teachers declare what is good and profitable.

Paul is adamant and unapologetic about giving no place to divisive and contentious teachers, and he says such a person should be corrected and dealt with quickly. If, after one or two admonitions, that person persists, they must be rejected (v. 10). Why? "Such a person has gone astray and is sinning; he is self-condemned" (v. 11 CSB).

In an article called "Three Ways to Handle False Teaching and False Teachers," Matthew Harmon says Gospel-centered churches must recognize, rebuke, and resist false teachings and false teachers. Clearly, Paul would agree!

§ *Why is it easy to get caught up arguing over minor matters at church, and how can we overcome this?*

REDISCOVERING TRUTH

Truth today has been laid aside in a backroom of God's house, collecting dust and hidden by volumes of proposals designed by man. Although truth ultimately will triumph, for now, man adjusts it to accommodate his nearsighted objectives. Consequently, God's Word must be recovered. If it continues to lie hidden away from sight and mind, the religious landscape in many places will look more and more like a barren wasteland, unable to sustain a population hungry for spiritual nourishment.

If the larger Christian body is to experience spiritual restoration, it first has to return to truth, to the indestructible Word of God. Jesus Christ—His person and work—has to once again become the focal point of preaching and teaching, and not just another component in a religious system much too encumbered by the human element. Yet, at best, there are distractions, and at worst, disillusionment and deception that keep that from happening.

The assurance we have is that *the* truth is still liberating. If we tenaciously cling to it, it will never fail us. The world around us may be shaking uncontrollably, and the whole creation may be groaning and travailing (Rom. 8:22), but we know that through Jesus Christ the Truth, we are “more than conquerors . . . and shall never be separated from the love of God” (see vv. 37-39).—

Bobby G. Duncan, *Is Truth Enough?*

Daily Devotions

- M. Speak Only What Comes From God (Numbers 23:3-12)
- T. Stand Against False Prophets (Jeremiah 23:23-32)
- W. Shepherds Are Held Accountable (Ezekiel 34:1-10)
- T. Jesus Christ Is the Judge (Matthew 7:15-23)
- F. Discern the Source of Truth (Acts 16:16-26)
- S. Christians Delivered, False Prophets Condemned (2 Peter 2:1-9)