

#172 “Characteristics of False Teachers”

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1 Timothy 6:3-6 is a guidebook for identifying deceivers. Satan is invisible so we do not often sense his trickery. But we can see his tangible attacks and strategies. The passage says,

“If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.”

Here are the characteristics of false teachers in list form:

- **#1 False teachers advocate a different doctrine besides what Christ advocates.**

Perhaps they encourage the church to get involved in associations with compromised missions and objectives. Possibly they encourage the church to look for some new, innovative, and creative ways of doing ministry that violate sound doctrine. Quite likely they go for the jugular and slightly alter the message of the gospel so that it becomes more palatable and less offensive, typically by removing the concept of repentance. Frequently, false teachers deny the sufficiency of Christ and of His Word, opening the door to other “truths” so that the Bible becomes one truth source among many others rather than the final, authoritative means of defining truth. We need to beware of activities and teaching that sound Biblical but are really far from the truth. It can start small, but ultimately the result is that we are led away from a complete trust in the Bible such that we cease looking to support each and every claim with the Scripture.

- **#2 False teachers do not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

When confronted about their teaching, false teachers typically refuse to listen to what the Bible has to say. They prefer playing mind games using the intellect, anecdotes, stories, and quotations rather than quoting chapter and verse from the Bible. If they use chapter and verse, their interpretation is slanted and out of balance with the whole counsel of God. But we can only identify this if we know the whole counsel of God.

- **#3 False teachers promote a lifestyle of ungodliness due to the errors in their teaching.** As soon as teaching places man above God, man becomes prideful and decays into a variety of sinful patterns. Typically, the false teacher himself or herself has a variety of sin issues, typically hidden, which are a driving force behind their incorrect theology. Their agendas, pathologies, or sick and twisted minds encourage them to use the Bible to advance their sinful desires. Sadly, it also encourages moral decay among those that they teach, and it makes them vulnerable to being taken advantage of by the false teacher.

• **#4 False teachers are conceited and yet they understand nothing.** False teachers tend to be extremely arrogant people, being unafraid to teach God's Word incorrectly. They do not fear the judgment of God, and they are far too overconfident in their intellect, abilities, and accomplishments. Thinking they know it all, while everybody else is inferior, they enjoy making people feel dependent upon them for truth. God, however, says that they know nothing.

• **#5 False teachers have a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words.** They enjoy playing devil's advocate, not realizing that they are actually genuinely living the role. They like to create debates, cause doubt, stir up controversy, and create confusion. They seek to create not unity but division in the church with the objective being to create their own platform and their own followers to build up their own destructive egos. While possibly appearing intelligent, truth-seeking, and humble, false teachers ask questions to make themselves look good, to distract from what the Holy Spirit is trying to teach, and to waste much precious time in meaningless debate and discussion.

• **#6 False teachers create within the body of Christ envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth.** The result of false teachers' labors is envy, evil suspicions, abusive language, and constant friction. Those are potent terms that speak to intense division, hurt, anger, and a total loss of spiritual unity, peace, and love. This, of course, delights the false teacher inside even if he denounces it externally. The people particularly vulnerable to the tactics of false teachers are those who already have depraved minds, that is, those who are already pursuing other agendas besides wholeheartedly pursuing the truth and loving Jesus Christ. The second group that is particularly vulnerable are those who are not well-taught in the truth. The naïve and those lacking Biblical knowledge are easily prone to being led astray (Hosea 4:6).

• **#7 False teachers use a form of godliness to advance some selfish agenda for their own advantage.** They believe that they can use religion and people's spiritual fervor to take advantage of them. Many false teachers can be known simply by the fact that they are fleecing the sheep by taking their money, or worse yet, their dignity. The bottom line is that they are not about Jesus Christ and the gospel but about themselves and earthly gain.

We must take false teaching seriously as being the plague that it is. It cannot be tolerated (Revelation 2:20). A little leaven can leaven the whole lump of dough (1 Corinthians 5:6), and bad company corrupts good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). From Satan's perspective, what better way to deceive God's church than by getting his own people to lead it and thrive in it? We must take false teaching seriously and deal with it. Just because people might sound smart, have advanced degrees, be excellent communicators, or create large followings does not mean that they are truly of Jesus Christ. We must think through what we are hearing in light of God's Word and particularly with these characteristics in view. God gave them to us for a reason, so let us not be naïve.