

# How To Respond To False Teachers

Our study is from 1 Timothy 1:3-11. We are going to learn that there was a problem in the church in the ancient city of Ephesus. In Acts 20:17-18, we are told the elders from Ephesus had traveled to Miletus to meet the apostle Paul. During their meeting the apostle warned these men that after Paul left, savage wolves would come in among them and seek to create a following. Here are Paul's words,

*I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. Acts 20:29-31 (NASB)*

It is important to not miss verse 29 which describes the character of false teachers. God the Holy Spirit tells us that false teachers are like savage

wolves. They do not care about the flock of God. They do not care about God, His plan, the gospel, or what happens to the people. Notice that Paul said they do not spare the flock. They just want a following.

Usually, it is not obvious that a false teacher is a false teacher until they have a following. It takes some time. As they teach, their doctrine becomes more obvious. People are usually

drawn to them because they like their teaching. As Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:3, people like to have their ears tickled. So they come. Once it becomes obvious they are teaching error, the people have already begun to believe them. As Paul said, they speak perverse things and "draw away disciples after them."

The point is that false teachers are extremely dangerous and many churches are infected by them. Church splits have occurred because of them. Denominations have been divided and new ones created as a result. We often think that church splits are bad. But that is nothing compared to the dishonor shown to the Scriptures that God wrote and the people who have been damaged by false doctrine. Some churches tolerate false teaching as just a difference of view, but to do so is an error.

So Paul warned the Ephesian elders before he left to watch out for false teachers. That was in A.D. 53-56. It is now A.D. 62-64. About ten years have elapsed. Now Paul

urged Timothy to not permit certain men to teach error in the church. It appears the church did not listen to Paul.

Our study is about false teachers, how to identify them and how to respond to them. The study can be outlined in four sections: false teachers' treachery (v. 3-4), Paul's goal (v. 5-6), false teachers' desire (v. 7a), false teachers are biblically uneducated (v. 7b-11). In these four sections, Paul reveals four



characteristics of false teachers.

**FALSE TEACHERS' TREACHERY.** In verses 3-4 Paul explained the treachery of the false teachers. He said,

*As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. 1 Timothy 1:3-4 (NASB)*

Paul told us something that was not revealed in Acts 20. Paul said that he had urged Timothy, when both of them were in Ephesus, to instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines. That command was not recorded in Acts 20. This fact illustrates again that Scripture does not always tell us everything that happens on a particular occasion or about a subject. We find this trait also in the gospels. Each gospel provides different sets of information. When we try to put them all together like a jigsaw puzzle, we learn more about what happened.

In verse 3, Paul refers to "certain men" who were in the church in Ephesus. Now it is possible that Paul had warned the elders in Miletus about these "certain men." But that does not seem reasonable since it is now about ten years later. It is also possible that the "certain men" to whom Paul referred were men who were aspiring to be elders, since later he gives the qualifications for elders in chapter 3 and refers to men aspiring to become elders. In chapter 5 he also discusses the discipline of elders. If so, these "certain men" were well-known in the congregation and were teachers already. Or, if that conclusion is not correct, then the "certain men" are just significant individuals in the church who are teaching and already have some people following them. Whatever the answer, Timothy has a problem.

Now let's look closer at two very important words that Paul used in verse 3. The first one is the Greek word that is translated as "instruct." A better understanding of the word is "to order" or "to command." That is, Paul urged or begged Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus, to command these "certain men" to not teach. What were they not to teach? Paul mentions three things that these men are not to teach.

*Do Not Teach Other Doctrines.* The first thing these "certain men" were not to teach was strange doctrines. The Greek word that is translated as "teach strange doctrines," is one word. It is a compound word made of the *heteros*, which means "other," and *didaskalos*, which means teaching. That is, the word literally means "other teachings" or "other doctrines." This helps us understand that Paul was not referring to sensational teachings. On one occasion, Benny Hinn did that very thing. He announced at a crusade that God the Holy Spirit had told him that God was not a trinity. Instead, he said "there were nine of them." He explained that "God the Father had a body, soul, and spirit. Jesus had a body, soul, and spirit, and so did the Holy Spirit." That is how he concluded that "there were nine of them." Now, that is sensational teaching and is also "other doctrines." Paul's command would have included such teachings.

When Paul said that "other doctrines" could not be taught, he was referring to any teachings that were not given by himself or another apostle. "Other doctrines" is much broader than just the sensational. There are many different doctrines in the Bible, ranging from the simple to the complex. All of them are important because God communicated them through the prophets and apostles. This means teachers have a very heavy responsibility to understand what God has written and teach what He has communicated. That is why Paul commanded teachers in 2 Timothy 2:15 to . . .

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)*

Paul used two words that reveal teachers are to work hard at interpreting Scripture. The words are diligent and workman. The point is that Bible study is hard work, and the goal of any teacher is to be "approved."

The same message is given to us in Jude 3. There we are told to fight for "the" faith. The last part of Jude 3 says,

*. . . I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. Jude 3b (NASB)*

Remember that the word “contend” in this verse is better translated as “fight.” That is, Jude 3 says we are to fight for the Word of God. That means church pastors, leaders, and people need to fight for the accuracy of the truth of the Bible. But some pastors and leaders of churches do not follow Paul’s instruction. Instead, they strive for unity in the congregation and allow false teaching to flourish. Some are more concerned about pleasing people or the size of the congregation than they are about teaching what God wants communicated. The longer they wait to take action against false teachers and biblically illiterate teachers, the more difficult it is to deal with the problem. So Paul reminded Timothy to command these men to stop teaching “other doctrines.”

*Do Not Teach Myths.* The second thing these “certain men” were not to pay attention to were myths. That is, they were not to teach things that were false. Paul’s warning would have included Jewish legends. In my library I have a two-volume set of books titled, “The Legends of the Jews.” The author’s name is Ginzberg. The title of the book describes the contents. It is about legends or myths. Paul was talking about myths. One of the legends in Ginzberg’s book is about the creation of man. It claims that God asked everything He had created, including animals and angels, if they agreed that the creation of man was a good idea. The legend states that the angels did not have an opinion. The Angel of Love and the Angel of Justice favored the idea, but the Angel of Truth and the Angel of Peace opposed it. Now that is a myth.

Another example of myths is that people have contacted NeverThirsty and insisted that the Bible once said, “the lion will lie down with the lamb.” But a careful search of Scripture reveals that the Bible never says that and has never said that. We checked with the Apocrypha, the pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint. None of them say, “the lion will lie down with the lamb.” Yet, people insist that Isaiah 11:6 and Isaiah 65:25 once did say that. The truth is that both passages only state that the wolf will lie down or graze with the lamb, but not the lion. Yet, people will argue that the Bible used to say the lion will lie down with the lamb. That is a myth.

Some Christians argue using quotes from the early church fathers, Gnostic writings, and other sources. Since they are not Scripture, they are not to be considered inspired. We have to

treat them as if they might be myth.

*Do Not Teach Endless Genealogies.* The third thing these “certain men” were not to pay attention to are endless genealogies. Yet, people do. The important word is “endless.” It refers to a series that has no end. The Mormon church does that. Some believers do. The truth is the genealogies in Scripture are given to us primarily so that we can trace the ancestry of Christ. The other purpose is for Jewish heritage.

*Rather Than the Plan of God.* Next, notice that in the middle of verse 4, Paul said that such doctrines and non-biblical topics result in “speculations.” The Greek word for “speculations” has the sense of disagreements, disputes, and arguments. That is the result of believers being preoccupied in such topics that only result in arguments. There is no spiritual benefit. Yet, I know that some Christians think that Ezekiel 1 describes alien spaceships. What is the spiritual benefit? It only leads to arguments and speculations. That is Paul’s point.

Then Paul ends verse 4 by saying that these false teachers do not help “the administration of God which is by faith.” They are more interested in the sensational and controversial than the gospel. The phrase “which is by faith” helps us understand “the administration of God” refers to the gospel. But false teachers use the sensational and controversial to create a following. They seek a following. They want to entertain the listeners. So they look for the unusual. That is one way to create a following and they are all over the Internet. They are easy to find. If the teacher is sensational enough he will usually create a following.

**FALSE TEACHERS’ GOAL.** Why do false teachers do this? Verses 5-6 reveal their goal. Verse 5 says,

**But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 1:5 (NASB)**

First, Paul gives us the goal of his instruction in verse 5 and then in verse 6 he gives us the goal of the false teacher. Paul is going to compare himself to the false teachers. Paul says the goal of his teaching was love. Paul was referring to his own commitment to teach. His commitment to teaching them was because he loved them. Then because Paul loved them, he would also want them to love others. Now notice that he said

his love came “from.” The Greek word for “from” is important. It actually means “out of.” That is, his love comes out of three things: a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

Let me quickly define these words. This will help us understand what otherwise would be difficult to understand. The pure heart refers to a clean heart. Here are a few verses that will help,

**Hide Your face from my sins  
And blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Psalm 51:9-10 (NASB)**

**But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you  
became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which  
you were committed . . . Romans 6:17 (NASB)**

A clean heart is one that is obedient. It is a heart that desires to obey. The second word “good conscience” is a conscience that is not feeling guilty due to some sin. That is, a clean heart and conscience that is not feeling guilty go together. Last, the phrase “sincere faith” means the person is a true believer. This is necessary before the first two can occur. Paul’s point is that he is a believer. He strives to not sin, and not feel guilty. Such a godly man will love other people. He was a godly man who loved them, and that affected his teaching and them.

But in verse 6, Paul said that was not true of the false teacher.

**For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to  
fruitless discussion . . . 1 Timothy 1:6 (NASB)**

Their commitment to teaching was not for the people. They had sinful hearts, guilty consciences, and were unbelievers. As a result, their teaching was nothing but fruitless discussions. The Greek word for “fruitless” means “empty talking.” Because of their disobedient hearts, guilty consciences, and being unbelievers, their teaching was empty. Oh, the people loved it, but the people did not learn and become more like Christ. The false teachers simply used the Bible to entertain people. We can see that on television and the internet. Their

goal is entertainment.

So, the first characteristic of false teachers is that they teach error. The second characteristic is that they are unbelievers and do not truly love the people.

**FALSE TEACHERS’ DESIRE.** In verse 7, Paul now shifts from the goal of the false teacher to their desires. In the first part of verse 7, Paul said there were some in the church in Ephesus who were . . .

**. . . wanting to be teachers of the Law. 1 Timothy 7a (NASB)**

When Paul said this, he was referring to individuals who wanted to be recognized as teachers of the Law.

I remember the first time I taught the Bible. I was a junior high school teacher and was asked by a student to teach the book of Revelation after school. So, she organized a Bible study and I taught the book of Revelation. I had never taught the book before. I knew very little about the book, but I agreed. Now I did not start teaching because I desired to be a teacher. I taught the book because I did not want to disappoint the young people. After some time, I loved them with agape love.

It is not uncommon for individuals to buy a book by some well-known Bible teacher and then teach the book. Some individuals are motivated by love. Others desire to be teachers. But they do not always realize they will be punished if they teach any of the errors the author has put into his book. He or she will be held responsible for teaching error (James 3:1-2). So, Paul has given another characteristic of these false teachers. They are driven by their desire to be teachers.

Therefore, the first characteristic of false teachers is that they teach error. The second characteristic is that they are unbelievers and do not truly love the people. The third characteristic of false teachers is that they want to be known as Bible teachers.

**FALSE TEACHERS ARE BIBLICALLY UNEDUCATED.** Then Paul added that there was another problem with these false teachers. He said,

**. . . they do not understand either what they are saying or the  
matters about which they make confident assertions. 1 Timothy  
7b (NASB)**

*Teachers Did Not Know Scripture.* Our English Bibles do not accurately communicate what Paul meant by “they do not understand.” The Greek reveals that Paul was saying these teachers were in a state of being biblically illiterate.

They were uneducated in the Scriptures. This reminds me of the apostle Peter’s statement in 2 Peter 3:16 that the untaught and unstable distorted the apostle Paul’s teachings and . . .

**... also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 2 Peter 3:16 (NASB)**

This occurs when men and women want to be teachers and do not have a strong knowledge of Scripture. They know enough Scripture to think they are ready to teach the Bible. Then they teach without having a complete understanding of Scripture and they make many mistakes. This is a sad truth. It is happening in many churches today. I have sat in Sunday schools and listened to teachers. It is amazing how many errors are taught. What is worse is that the people who are listening think they are being taught the truth.

*Teachers Made Confident Assertions.* Then Paul added that these men were making confident assertions about what they are teaching. This is an important lesson for us. Just because someone is confident, dynamic, and energetic does not mean they are empowered by the Spirit and speak truth. This is a serious problem on the Internet. Some think they are capable to handle Hebrew and Greek because they can use Strong’s Concordance or some Bible software. They fail to realize that seminarians study Greek for two years in order to understand Greek. Yet, I have seen some men make dogmatic statements about the meaning of Greek words. The truth is, they are not ready to teach.

*Correct Teaching of the Law.* Then Paul gave us a hint as to the error these false teachers are committing. He says in verses 8-11,

**But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and**

**kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. 1 Timothy 1:8-11 (NASB)**

What was the error of these false teachers? Paul explained in verses 9-11. He said the “law is not made for a righteous person.” That is, these false teachers taught that salvation was the result of keeping the Law plus the gospel. Then in verses 8-10, Paul gave a long list of sins and connected those sins with the glorious gospel of God. Paul’s point is that the gospel is for those whom God considers to be unrighteous. The gospel is for people who recognize that they are sinners because they have committed sins. The Law was designed to bring sinners to Christ. Galatians 3:24 says,

**Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. Galatians 3:24 (NASB)**

Now that is why the Law is good. The Law helps us see our sin and leads us to Christ. There is only way to heaven, and it is through faith in Jesus Christ. It is not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So these false teachers were teaching that believers must keep the Law in order to go to heaven. They needed to be stopped.

**CONCLUSION.** In conclusion, the first characteristic of false teachers is that they taught error. The second characteristic is that they were unbelievers and did not truly love the people. The third characteristic of false teachers is that they desired to be Bible teachers. They lacked humility. The fourth characteristic is that they distorted the doctrine that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. They distorted the gospel in some way.

Therefore, if you find someone who is a false teacher in your church, contact your pastor or an elder of your church so that false teaching can be stopped. This is the command of Paul. False teaching is an abomination to God. False teaching can send people to hell and it does not result in spiritual growth. The second thing to do is to stop listening to them. The third thing is to pray for them and those who have been deceived by

them. May the Lord Jesus be honored.