

Identifying False Teachers and Teachings

Introduction

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character... for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**" (Acts 17:11 NIV)

The purpose of this document is to help Christians discern biblical teaching from unbiblical teaching. While some teachers may fall under the category of false teachers, others may teach *certain* doctrines which are false - or not in accordance with the Word of God - while most of what they teach *is* in line with Scripture. Some teachers whose teachings are analysed in respect to what the Bible teaches when all related scriptures line up perfectly, may prove to be fine teachers overall, but where they depart from Scripture, it is only prudent and wise that we as believers recognize these discrepancies and affirm only the truth that is in full agreement with God's inspired Word.

As Paul told Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; **correct, rebuke** and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men **will not put up with sound doctrine.** Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **They will turn their ears away from the truth** and turn aside to myths." (2 Timothy 4:2-4 NIV)

It is also quite possible that those who analyse the teachings of others may themselves have unbiblical teachings or perspectives - or end up "nitpicking" over non-essentials - going far beyond reason in their critiques. Some critics may have a very narrow, legalistic, or extreme fundamentalist perspective and seem to have little understanding of unity in the Body of Christ. And some write disparagingly of nearly all teachers over simple disagreements needlessly where much more important and major doctrinal issues are at stake. This is certainly unnecessary and not honouring to God.

Our hope is that those who read this document will find balance in how they evaluate which teachers they listen to and learn from. Some teachers should be avoided altogether, others must be carefully filtered, and many other teachers can, of course, be trusted almost implicitly. By grounding yourself in the unchanging Word of God and considering it your final authority in all matters of faith and practice, you will have a greater ability to distinguish between truth and error and avoid deception. Until we reach heaven, however, none of us will be able to completely define all truth or perfectly interpret all Scripture, but we can be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures daily to see if what we hear is true - *or not!*

Our goal as followers of Christ should be to always seek after truth with the discernment to recognize and beware of deceptive, unbiblical teachings (many of which are harmful or even heretical), while also striving for *unity in love* among believers, whenever possible. Sometimes for the sake of love and unity we may have to agree to disagree.

There is no doubt that discernment itself is a very controversial issue. Many of those whose teachings or behaviours are "judged," even according to Scripture, condemn their accusers and despise their criticism. Some criticism is indeed divisive and unnecessary (some is even bitter or mean-spirited), but in case you tend to think that those who would dare to judge or criticize apparently unscriptural teachings would be much better off just preaching the Gospel and minding their own business, consider this: What if manufacturers had no quality control departments, how would the products eventually end up? What if police departments had no internal affairs divisions, how much more would police corruption increase? What if the taxman never audited anyone, how many people would continue paying their taxes? If we know the teaching will lead to hell fire beyond all doubt, do we just sit back and do nothing? Within the Body of Christ, it seems very reasonable to believe that God has intentionally called certain ones in His Body to focus on keeping *His message* pure.

The simple truth is that if no one ever held preachers accountable for what they teach, false doctrines would abound much more than they already do. If small errors in doctrine are left unaddressed, they will only grow worse and worse over time. So discernment ministries are a good and necessary part of the Body of Christ, as imperfect as they may be. False teachings must be exposed and the cancer of deception in the church must be treated, even if it is unpopular and often painful. Perhaps as you begin to understand and recognize common false teachings in the church, you can become involved in solving the problem by writing letters (in love) to those you hear making the errors. Some do it for financial gain and will only ignore or reject any efforts to admonish them and will probably even criticize you in the process. Others who are truly seeking after God may eventually see their errors and correct them. Either way, it is the responsibility of all of us in the Body of Christ to keep our leaders accountable to Scripture and to do our best to ensure that God's sheep are not led astray by unworthy or unbiblical under-shepherds, *especially for the sake of future generations!* Now more than ever, Satan is spreading false doctrine and false prophecy to lead as many from the kingdom as possible in the end.

UNBIBLICAL & HARMFUL TEACHINGS

1. False Teachings on FAITH

FALSE: "Hyper-faith" or "word-faith" teachings, which seem to promise that believers can "name it and claim it," or speak their desires into existence (similar to meta-physical teachings). Attributing power to words as if they were "containers" of faith, with power in and of themselves. Also called "positive thinking" or "possibility thinking" in the milder (though still unbiblical) sense. Sometimes this teaching on the power of the spoken word becomes more like that of occultism.

TRUE: God answers our prayers and petitions according to His will. God is not obligated to do our will, but as we seek Him with our whole heart, He gives us *His desires* so that our heart is aligned with His, and answers our prayers accordingly, in His time.

2. False Teachings on CHRIST

FALSE: Teachings which undermine the deity of Jesus Christ or alter the biblical doctrines regarding the nature and character of Christ, the Holy Spirit, God the Father, or the doctrine of the Trinity.

TRUE: Jesus Christ came to this earth as God in the flesh. He is the second person of the Trinity and was not created, but "always was" from the beginning. There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

3. False Teachings on MAN

FALSE: Teachings which elevate Christians to god-like status, such as "little gods," some even teaching that since "the fall," God is limited by man in what He can do on earth. This is typical from those in the "faith healing movement."

TRUE: Man was created in the "image of God," a "little lower than the angels." Once redeemed through Christ, man is indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do God's will. We are servants of God, called to serve His purposes and not our own. God is sovereign and omnipotent, and man is simply a created being, whose only power comes from above.

4. False Teachings on PROSPERITY

FALSE: Prosperity teachings which claim (erroneously) that not only was Jesus wealthy on earth, but that God desires all believers to be wealthy - and that prosperity, in health and wealth, is guaranteed in the covenant of salvation.

TRUE: God desires for us to have "abundant life" in Christ, living in the power of the Holy Spirit and experiencing the fruits of the Spirit. But oftentimes God's will may include such things as suffering, infirmities, sickness, trials, tribulation, persecution, or even martyrdom as Scripture and history so clearly testify. Jesus lived on earth without even a "place to lay His head," and Scripture teaches that His lifestyle was far from the wealthy lifestyle some have erroneously taught Christ lived. This lie originates in an effort by such teachers to not only justify their own indulgent lifestyles, but also to promote their popular prosperity teachings and increase giving to their ministries from those who are seeking the promised health and wealth, especially since the two are often tied together in a not-so-subtle method of deception. Christ calls us not to seek after worldly riches, but instead to store up our treasures in Heaven and to give our lives as "living sacrifices." As we seek first to serve His Kingdom, and of course, work as God's Word commands, we can be assured that He will provide our needs.

5. False Teachings on HEALING

FALSE: Teachings which claim that God's will is always to heal all sickness, disease, and infirmity, and that Christ's death guarantees that believers should live without these ailments if only they have enough faith, meet certain other conditions, or even give financially to a ministry or teacher so God will "see their faith" and "give them their miracle."

TRUE: God does heal and can perform miracles as He pleases. He has *not*, however, removed us from the sin-cursed world in which we live or redeemed *our bodies* from the curse of sin and death - as He has redeemed our spirits. Christ bore our sickness and infirmities, and He has absolute power to heal and restore at will, but even *in His will*, believers still suffer pain, sickness, calamity, infirmity and even still in some countries today, martyrdom. He chooses to heal some and not others in His sovereignty and for His own glory. Even so-called "faith-healers" and their families get sick, suffer diseases and infirmities, and eventually die. Not until Heaven will we receive new everlastingly-perfect bodies. Until then we should pray for healing (and follow biblical direction regarding healing), seek medical treatments, live wisely and strive for good health trusting that God is sovereign and knowing that nothing can harm us unless He allows it. And no man or woman on earth has the right, Scripturally or otherwise, to even imply that by giving financially to any ministry or teacher, God will look favourably upon them and grant their healing or miracle.

6. False Teachings on GIVING

FALSE: Teachings or statements made regarding fund-raising, tithing, and financial giving which are expressed as promises or guarantees (supposedly but erroneously based on the Word of God) that by giving financially, a person will become debt free, will receive a miracle (financial or otherwise), will be blessed by a certain multiplied amount within a certain period of time, or will benefit in any other way that even sounds like a "new" or "special blessing" other than what God has already told us in His Word. These statements are made even more ludicrous and discrediting to God and Christianity as a whole when promoted as if these "special offers," supposedly from God, were for a certain number of people calling in or giving a certain amount on a certain day to a certain teacher or ministry like a cheap, hard selling advertisement.

TRUE: God asks us to give to His Church and His work with a cheerful heart, and not under compulsion. God blesses those who give to further His Kingdom, and has expressed in His Word that He desires for His people to give a tithe of at least ten percent of their income, plus additional offerings, to support their local church and other ministries. But God does not make "special offers" for certain numbers of people giving certain amounts on certain days to certain ministries. In fact, God looks at the heart, and much more importantly than a certain amount, God looks at the amount of one's gift *in proportion* to the amount of one's wealth or income, and not as is often shamefully presented, especially on television as if it were today's special for God's special blessing.

7. False Teachings on the LAW

FALSE: Teachings or statements that claim the Ten Commandments or the fourth Commandment were nailed to the cross or that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday in honour of the resurrection. Also false is that one can choose to observe the day or not or we can choose whatever day we desire to keep God's Holy Sabbath on.

TRUE: All Ten Commandments are an eternal law of love, (Romans 13:9-10) as God is love and love is eternal as God is eternal. The Commandments are called the perfect law of liberty (freedom) not bondage. James 1:25; 2:11-12. God made the Sabbath at creation (why we have a seven day week) before sin and before Jews and asked us to "Remember" the day when He personally gave His law. God showed the correct day matters when he tested His children to see if they would keep His Commandments by testing if they would keep THE seventh day. Exodus 16:4-30. We are told we will keep the Sabbath in the new Heaven and new Earth. Isaiah 66:22-23. The Ten Commandments or the Sabbath was not nailed to the cross according to Colossians 2:16. Paul speaks of the ordinances (ceremonial law) which had ceremonial holy day sabbaths that were nailed to the cross. Galatians 4:9-10 does not say that we can observe any day or that the Sabbath was bondage. Paul refers to the ceremonial law here also which he called bondage and was, and included Days, Times, Months and Years which were all part of the ceremonial law. We cannot decide to keep or not keep the Sabbath based on Romans 14:5, which is about Jews and Gentiles judging one another and was over the yearly feast days of the ceremonial law. The real truth is that this is one of Satan's best accomplishments and deceptions on Christianity. Satan gave power to the Papacy (Revelation 13:2) so he could have them change God's Sabbath to Sunday in 321 AD in honour of Sun worship, hence the name Sunday, and millions died keeping the seventh day Sabbath. When we keep Sunday, we do so in reverence to the Roman Catholic Church according to them. Jesus said, "That till Heaven and Earth pass not one jot or tittle will pass from the law." Matthew 5:17-19.