

FALSE TEACHERS **Romans 16:17-18**

by Dr. Jack L. Arnold

The task of the faithful minister of Jesus Christ is not only to preach the truths of God, but also to expose error. "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (II Cor. 2:17). "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (II Cor. 4:2).

As today, there were many false teachers among God's people during Paul's ministry. Paul warned the spiritual leaders of his day to beware of them.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:28-31).

He also warned Timothy, the pastor of the local church at Ephesus, that in the last days professing Christians would turn from the true faith.

"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; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 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; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:1-4).

The Bible tells us that the faithful minister must uncover and reveal any and all teaching that would be contrary to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

I do not mean that ministers are to be "heresy headhunters," but where there is obvious, proven heresy, it must be exposed as such for the good of the true Church of Jesus Christ.

As a personal aside, some may accuse me of being just such a headhunter, showing little or no love for men or organizations that call themselves Christian. If this is your reaction to this teaching, please reevaluate it in prayer. Before the Lord, I believe it is love that has motivated me. I love God, Christ, the Holy Scriptures and the true Church more than I love the praise of men, and I know full well that one day I will give an account of my ministry to God.

Faithful ministers of the past were misunderstood by the masses. Elijah, Jeremiah, the Apostle Paul and Jesus Christ all spoke out against the spiritual evils of their day. They were all accused of being loveless, and while they had their weaknesses, they were faithful to God's call. Jeremiah was put in a dungeon, Elijah had to flee for his life, Paul was imprisoned, and Jesus Christ was crucified.

Please understand that this is not written out of hatred, retaliation or malice. It comes from a broken heart — I've seen the pain and loss connected with false teaching. I'm concerned for the glory of God and the revival of the true Christian faith in the hearts of men.

FALSE TEACHERS CAUSE DIVISIONS — Romans 16:17

"Now I beseech (plead with) you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences " — Paul exhorted true Christians to keep an eye out for false teachers in their midst who were counterfeits, unbelievers, and heretics. There are always both wheat and tares in the professing church. This is not a reference to Christian believers who have differences of opinion on secondary theological issues or over matters of questionable practices.

"Contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned" — Paul had instructed these Romans in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. There are certain basic truths that unite all Christians and each of these is essential to the Christian faith. One cannot be a Christian and deny any of them: (1) The Trinity; (2) The deity and humanity of Christ; (3) The bodily resurrection of Christ; (4) Christ's death for sin; (5) Christ, the only way of salvation; (6) A literal heaven and a literal hell; (7) An acceptance of miracles (8) The bodily return of Jesus Christ to this earth in his second advent; (9) The authority of Scripture for one's life; and (10) The sinfulness of men.

Most Christians are united on the fundamentals of the faith (some might quibble with me about the matter of literal hell), but there are differences of opinion among Christians on secondary theological issues: (1) Modes of baptism — immersion, sprinkling or pouring; (2) Types of government — episcopal, pres-

byterian or congregational; (3) Calvinism or Arminianism; (4) Amillennialism, postmillennialism and premillennialism; (5) Infant baptism or believer's baptism.

Differences over secondary issues possibly gives legitimate reasons for various denominations, but all who hold to the fundamentals of the faith are in the true, universal and invisible Church of Jesus Christ.

The false teachers in Rome were denying the fundamentals of Christianity and Paul made it clear they were to be exposed and avoided.

“Mark them that cause divisions and offenses“ — Christians are to keep a watchful eye for false teachers. Such teachers cause divisions. They slyly come into a local church or a denomination with their evil doctrine and sow seeds of doubt among professing Christians. Historic Christianity has always held to the fundamentals of the Christian faith but at this very hour there are men standing in pulpits across our nation who are undercutting and destroying the true Christian faith.

In our day the sinfulness of man is scorned, the deity of Christ is thought unimportant, the concept of a literal hell is mocked, and universalism is running rampant in so-called Christian churches. Nobody seems to get excited and there are only a few “voices crying in the wilderness.” As one false teacher said when he was questioned about how he could preach against the Apostles' Creed and his denomination's doctrinal statement, “Well, nobody in my church or denomination has stopped me, so it must be all right.”

A candidate for ordination into the ministry in the PCUSA (the liberal branch of the Presbyterian church from which the founders of the PCA left) was asked by the committee examining him if he believed in the divinity of Christ. He answered, “I do not believe in it, excepting in the sense that we are all divine.” This man was ordained to preach.

In another ordination service a young candidate for the Presbyterian ministry (in the same denomination) was asked if he believed that Jesus Christ was coming again to reward believers and judge unbelievers. He replied, “I believe that Jesus has already come a second time into our hearts.” He was ordained.

It is the liberals who have brought awful division to the church. Fundamentalists have made some big mistakes in the area of separation and legalism, but they have been true to the Bible and the Lord Jesus Christ. False teachers cause scandal (offenses). They make a mockery of the Bible and the precious truths of Christ.

“And avoid them” — Christians are to avoid false teachers. Don't listen to them. Don't pay attention to them. Don't give them an audience. Don't let them

take your time with false ideas. Whether they be in Protestantism, the cults or Roman Catholicism, we are to avoid false teachers like the plague. This is not an isolated teaching, but throughout different situations and different authors, the wisdom of God is clear.

“A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10).

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (II John 9-11).

We are free to give false teachers and heretics the gospel, but we are not to hear or accept their teaching. We are not given authority to burn false teachers at the stake, but those who are in the church should be declared spiritually dead — excommunicated for unfaithfulness to Christ, the Bible and their ministerial vows.

FALSE TEACHERS ARE IN THE MINISTRY FOR THE MONEY — Romans 16:18a

“For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ “ — False teachers are not dedicated to Jesus Christ but are dedicated to their own self-interests. How could they be committed to Christ when they don't even know God?

A woman once asked a young minister point-blank, “What is the purpose of life?” It was one of those questions every minister hopes will come but never seems quite ready to answer.

“To know God,” the young minister ventured.

“Do you know Him?” she asked.

“No,” he said. “That's why I'm a minister.”

“But their own belly” — False teachers serve their own selfish ends because their motives are low and base. They have not been called to salvation by God nor called to the ministry, but are in the profession of the ministry for the money. The ministry can be a racket if there is no true dedication to Christ. There have been phonies in the professing church since its inception, but today it seems we have an overabundance of them.

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phil. 3:18, 19).

FALSE TEACHERS SPEAK FLATTERING WORDS — Romans 16:18b

“And by good words and fair speeches” — False teachers use smooth words and flattering speeches to win people over to their way of thinking. False teachers are often nice, educated and moral people. They refuse to speak outright, roughly or boldly so as to disturb people. Instead they speak sweetly — they seem to be such lovely people and they quite understanding. Yet they never tell men and women of sin, judgment or hell because they don't believe them and they don't want to offend anyone, which is a terrible thing to do.

“Deceive the hearts of the simple” — Paul says that false teachers are deceivers who take advantage of the ignorance of people, wooing them away from Christ who is their only hope of salvation. The Bible calls false teachers “ministers of Satan” whose end will be destruction.

CONCLUSION

God instructs true believers to separate themselves from apostasy and serve him in truth:

“Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (II Cor. 6:14-18).

If you do not know Christ, do not listen to men who tell you that Jesus is just a good man, for Jesus Christ said he was God incarnate. Do not listen when they say men are basically good, for the Bible says that all men are sinners and separated from God. Do not listen when these false teachers say there is no hell, for God declares that after death there is a judgment where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. Do not listen when men say that all religions will lead to God, for Christ said that He is the only way to God.

If you choose to listen to false teachers, you have willfully fallen into the hands of deceivers, become a rejecter of Christ, and this will ultimately lead to your eternal judgment. Yet, if you will trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Which will it be — false teachers and the way of destruction or Jesus Christ and the way to God? The decision is yours!