

The Sound Words of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Overcoming the Folly of False Teaching

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:3-5

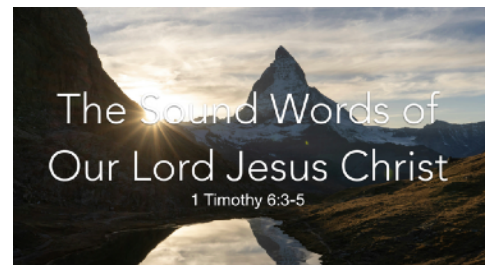
Sermon Series: *Timothy's Charge*

Topic: False Teaching, Truth

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 1 Timothy 6:3-5 (ESV)

I. Introduction

Paul is drawing his letter to Timothy to a close. As he approaches the end, he returns to the subject with which he began, namely, the problem of false teaching. Paul reminds Timothy that the false teaching he sent Timothy to Ephesus to refute is anything that is different from *"the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ."*



Review

Let's quickly review where we are in this letter. Paul is giving a "second charge to the church" (4:6 and following). Two weeks ago pastor Steve Chin lead us through the end of chapter five and explained what it meant to "Honor elders." Last week Mark Ashpole lead us through the opening verses of chapter 6 and what it meant to "Honor masters."

Preview

Today we begin a new paragraph (6:3) in which Paul returns to the topic of the false teachers who were

Outline of Timothy

- I. A Sweet Salutation
- II. An Urgent charge to Timothy (1:3-20)
- III. An Urgent charge to the church (2:1-4:5)
 - A. Prioritize prayer (2:1-15)
 - B. Appoint godly officers (3:1-15)
 - C. Behavior and truth in the church of God (3:14-16)
 - D. Prepare for departure (4:1-5)
- IV. Second charge to Timothy
 - A. Train Yourself for Godliness (4:6-10)
 - B. Live as an Example (4:11-16)
- V. Second charge to the Church
 - A. Honor widows (5:1-16)
 - B. Honor elders (5:17-25)
 - C. Honor masters (6:1-2)
 - D. The Folly of False Teachers (6:3-11a)
 - (1) **The Sound Words of Jesus** (6:3-5)
 - (2) The Great Gain of Godliness (6:6-11a)

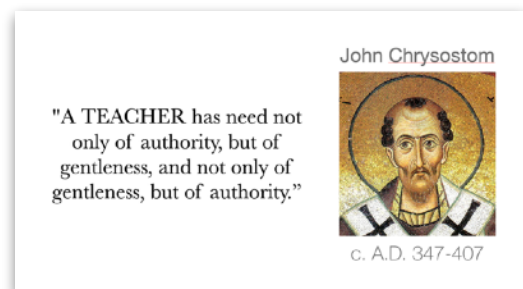
plaguing this Ephesian church. Paul states the standard of true teaching, which is “*agreement with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ*” that results in *godliness*.

Paul then describes the evil *character of the false teachers*, the poisonous *fruit* that results from their false teaching, the corrupt *mentality* of false teachers, and the selfish *motivation* that stands behind their false teaching. We will begin with the problem—these false teachers and their teaching—and then consider the solution to the problem, which is knowing the words of Jesus.

II. Main Idea: The Sound Words of Jesus is the Key to Discerning False Teaching

Last week Mark concluded with the final sentence in v.2, “*teach and urge these things*.” This phrase is a transitional phrase and relates to all that Paul had just written. We’ve seen this phrase before¹ and it makes a move to a new topic. The phrase also reminds us of the *urgency* with which Paul is writing. Paul not only expects Timothy to convey truth to this church as a teacher, but he also expects him to *urge* the people to respond to what he teaches.

The word ‘*urge*’ means “to encourage, exhort, console.”² It entails the idea of a gentle pleading. The early church father John Chrysostom said, “A TEACHER has need not only of authority, but of gentleness, and not only of gentleness, but of authority.”³ The effective minister of Jesus in the church must exercise authority but he must do so with gentleness. The issues that prompted Paul to write were deep and serious. They were urgent and necessary.



The primary issue that burdened Paul is the presence of false teaching in the church, to which he now returns for the third time (1:3-11; 4:1-5). The false teachers and their false teaching are significant and serious issues in Paul’s mind. He returns to this for a third time. False teachers and false teaching in the church is not a benign issue. To address this crisis is the primary

¹ 1 Timothy 1:3; 2:1; 3:14; 4:6, 11, 13, 15; 5:7.

² Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

³ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. James Tweed and Philip Schaff, vol. 13, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 467.

reason for which Paul sent Timothy to this church.⁴ A healthy church can tolerate neither false teachers nor their false teaching.

Paul quickly comes to the main point, which we find in v.3, and is the absolute necessity of remaining true to the teaching of Jesus. Timothy must not allow any teaching in the church that is different from the "*sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ*" and the application and result of that teaching which results in "*godliness*." The words "*different doctrine*" translates one Greek word that Paul may have coined, which is *ἐτεροδιδασκαλέω* (*heterodidaskaleō*). The only other place we find this word in the NT is in the beginning of this letter, 1:3, where Paul writes,

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine... 1 Timothy 1:3

In the introduction of this letter Paul had reminded Timothy of two examples of men who had "*swerved from these and wandered away into vain discussion*" (1:6). They were Hymenaeus and Alexander. They had "*devoted themselves to myths, endless genealogies, and speculations*" (1:4). They had "*rejected*" the truth and the teaching of Jesus and as a result had "*made shipwreck of their faith*" (1:19). They knew the truth, but they rejected it. They willingly and knowingly turned away from an accurate knowledge of Jesus and thus, their former faith was destroyed and abandoned.

This is why the issue of false teaching is so serious. If you embrace false teaching, then it will destroy your faith. If you dabble in "*different doctrine*"⁵ your faith will begin to weaken and eventually it will break up, like a ship breaking up on the rocks. If you skirt the edges of the truth and play with lies, then you will fall into the trap of the devil. Wandering away from the truth with a sinful curiosity will be spiritually deadly.

A. The Problem

The problem was, as we have seen earlier in the letter but to which Paul now returns, is that false teachers had crept into the church and were teaching falsely. Paul, about 10 years earlier, had predicted that some of the elders of the church would rise up and spread lies in the church.⁶ That prediction had come true. Paul explains the problem by exposing 1) the unhealthy character of the false teachers, 2) the poisonous fruit of their false teaching, and 3) the corrupt mentality and selfish motivation behind their false teaching.

1. The Unhealthy Character of False Teachers (v.4)

Paul very clearly identifies four unhealthy character defects in these false teachers.

⁴ 1 Timothy 1:3.

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:3.

⁶ Acts 20:28-30.

1. ***Puffed up with conceit*** (v.4). False teachers are filled with pride. They think of themselves more highly than they should. They view themselves as having access to truth or secret knowledge that no one else does. They have been given special revelation that is exclusive to them. They have insight or intelligence to a degree that the average person does not possess. Pride will eventually but always contradict the teaching of Jesus.
2. ***Understands nothing*** (v.4). Pride always results in thinking that presumes knowledge, but actually manifests in ignorance. In the beginning of the letter Paul explained about these false teachers,

...desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. 1 Timothy 1:7

False teachers filled with pride “make confident assertions” about things which they truly do not know. In fact, they “understand nothing,” but nevertheless they are confident about what they do not know.

3. ***Unhealthy craving for controversy*** (v.4). The word behind “*unhealthy craving*” (νοσέω *noseō*) literally means “to be sick in body or soul.”⁷ In this case, it means to have a sick desire for controversy. These people are spiritually ill. These false teachers enjoy controversy. They have a sick craving for contention. They like arguments. They desire disputes. They do not desire to know the truth, but rather they desire to “stir the pot” and “poke the bear.” These are unhealthy and sick people.
4. ***Unhealthy craving for quarrels about words*** (v.4). Their sickness extends to “*quarreling*” as well. They have a sick desire for quarreling. They yearn for arguments. This phrase, “quarreling about words,” translates one Greek word, λογομαχία (*logomachia*), which “is a compound of λόγος, “word,” and μάχη, “fight.”⁸ This is the only place in the NT that this word appears and it may mean both fights *about* words—meaning disputes about the meaning of words, and fights *with* words—where words themselves are used as weapons against the opponent. Paul’s meaning is clear. Such a desire for word wars is sick and unhealthy.

Summary

Paul’s assessment of these false teachers is that they are sick and sinful. They are filled with pride, lacking in true understanding, and they possess a kind of “mental illness”⁹ that draws

⁷ Albrecht Oepke, “Νόσος, Νοσέω, Νόσημα (μαλακία, Μάστιξ, Κακῶς ἔχω),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1092.

⁸ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2000), 338.

⁹ Ibid.

them toward controversy and verbal fights. We recall that Paul has already called godly men to reject quarreling¹⁰ and godly elders must be men devoid of both conceit and a quarrelsome nature.¹¹ That which is present in false teachers must be absent in godly teachers.

2. The Poisonous Fruit of False Teaching (v.4-5)

Paul now lists five poisonous results of false teaching. One commentator called this list “a fivefold collection of calamities.”¹² The truth is that poisonous teachers bear poisonous fruit.

1. **Envy** (v.4). Envy is a state of ill will towards another person for some real or perceived benefit they enjoy. False teaching does not lead one to rejoice in the good that comes to others, but rather it leads one to burn with desire because others possess what you do not. False teaching focuses the mind primarily on the benefit of self, and not on the benefit of others.
2. **Dissension** (v.4). This word refers to strife, bitter conflict, discord, and rivalry. The heart of this word is division. False teaching divides. It pits one against another and pulls people apart.
3. **Slander** (v.4). The word here is βλασφημία (*blasphēmia*) which is “abusive speech”¹³ falsely spoken against another person’s name or reputation. The context here points to abusive language leveled towards people within the church community and not directed toward God himself. But of course we know that to attack the people of Jesus is to attack the person of Jesus.
4. **Evil suspicions** (v.4). This means to inwardly think (ie. to yourself) someone or their motives are evil based upon incomplete information. It refers to prejudging someone before you’ve heard the whole story or received and considered all the fact. It means concluding someone is evil because they may have a different perspective than you.
5. **Constant friction** (v.5). This word means “to engage in continuous and repeated arguing.”¹⁴ There is constant irritation. It’s like driving across the middle of the country in the hottest part of the summer in car with no air-conditioning and windows that will not roll down and three 8, 9, and 10 year olds in the back seat who can’t keep their hands off each other. There is no peace. The arguing is non-stop. There is never

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:8.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 3:3, 6.

¹² Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 310.

¹³ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 251.

¹⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 439.

agreement, never consensus, never smooth sailing, but rather only the heat of constant friction and endless irritation.

The fruit of false teaching is poisonous. It produces only to envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction.

3. The Mentality and Motive of False Teachers (v.5)

After describing the evil character of false teachers and the poisonous fruit of their false teaching, he now uncovers the mentality and motivation.

1. **Depraved in mind** (v.5). Both the false teachers and those who follow them are described as being "*depraved in mind*." Paul used this same language to describe Jannes and Jambres, the names given in early extrabiblical Jewish writings to the two Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses at the beginning of the plagues poured out before the Exodus.¹⁵ In Jewish history, these two men became paradigmatic examples of people who persistently oppose the truth in the face of obvious evidence.

Being "*depraved*" means "to cause someone to become perverse..." to undergo "moral destruction—to pervert, to ruin."¹⁶ The word carries the idea of continuing destruction and ongoing corruption. The word is used "to describe the effect of rust on iron and moths on clothing" and of starvation on the body.¹⁷

Persistently denying the truth is mentally disabling. Persistently rejecting the truth of the gospel results in and reveals the "depravity of the mind." The mental state of the false teachers and their students is that they are "depraved in mind."

2. **Deprived of truth** (v.5). This could also be translated as "*having been robbed of the truth*."¹⁸ The verb is passive and almost certainly hints at the work of the devil taking away the truth from those in whom the truth of the gospel is not well rooted. Recall the Parable of the Sower. In the first instance, of the seed sown on the path, Jesus says,

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. Matthew 13:19 (ESV)

The consequence of all the arguing, quarreling, and disputing that had been allowed in the church was that truth was lost. In all the "word fights" and "constant friction," the truth had been eclipsed and now the people were "deprived of the truth."

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 3:8; cf. Exodus 7:8-13.

¹⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 769.

¹⁷ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2000), 340.

¹⁸ NIV.

The mentality of these false teachers and their followers is that they were deprived in mind and deprived of the truth. Now Paul turns to the motivation behind false teaching.

3. *Imagining godliness is a means of gain* (v.5). The singular motivation at the root of these false teachers is economic *gain*. They want to make more money. They desire material increase. There is nothing wrong with earning your living through church ministry—as pastor Steve spoke about two weeks ago—but these false teachers are pretenders. They are teaching lies in order to pad their pockets. They are not being godly because they love being like Christ. They are pretending to be godly so that their financial position will be strengthened. They're simply preaching and pretending to be godly so that they can get rich. Nothing more.

Summary

Paul has revealed the evil character of these false teachers, the poisonous fruit of their teaching, the depravity of their minds, and the monetary aim of their motivation. They are deprived of the truth. There is no truth in them.

What should the church do then to fortify itself against such falsehood, such poison, depravity, and deception?

B. The Solution

The solution is to believe that the words of our Lord Jesus Christ are sound, knowing what his words are, and then living in accordance to his words (i.e. remain in agreement with his words and teaching).

1. The Words of Jesus are Sound (v.3)

The first step in avoiding false teaching is to be clear about where to find true teaching. Paul is convinced that the words of Jesus are "*sound*" and therefore are not to be deviated from.

The word '*sound*' the word *ὑγιαίνω* *hygiainō* (hēyānō), which is the word from which we have our word hygiene. The word means "to be healthy, well, correct, sound."¹⁹ If you have the ESV, then you will notice a footnote that indicates 'healthy' is an alternative translation. Since the words of Jesus are healthy, then diverting from them is unhealthy or sick. The false teachers have rejected the *healthy* words of Jesus which reveals their "*unhealthy craving for controversy and quarrels about words.*"

Do you believe that the words and teaching of Jesus are sound and healthy?

¹⁹ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

2. Know the Teaching of Jesus (v.3)

The second step in avoiding false doctrine is to understand that true doctrine flows from the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Truth is found in teaching of Jesus.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

Jesus claimed to be Truth. Jesus said to Pilate,

For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” John 18:37

Jesus summed up his whole life as “*bearing witness to the truth.*” Therefore, ***Jesus’s teaching is the foundation of true doctrine.*** Anything that contradicts his teaching is false. This is an amazingly clear fact of Christian doctrine. Jesus is the full and final word of God. Jesus himself and all that he taught is the one binding standard of true doctrine.

This does not mean that only Jesus’ words are truth (as if only the red letters are true), but it also means that the 27 books of the New Testament—written by the apostles whom Jesus personally chose, and who were helped by His own Holy Spirit (who is called “*the Spirit of Truth*”²⁰) whom he sent to “*guide you into all truth*”²¹ in writing down (i.e. in written form) and explaining and applying all that Jesus taught—are also the foundation of all true doctrine. Therefore, if anyone would know what Jesus taught, then one must know the New Testament.

What did Jesus teach? Jesus taught that he is Messiah.

²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.” John 4:25-26

Jesus taught that he came from heaven.

“I am from above. ...I am not of this world.” John 8:23

Jesus taught that he alone was the source of forgiveness of sin.

“... unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” John 8:24

Jesus taught that he existed before his incarnation.

²⁰ John 14:17; 15:26.

²¹ John 16:13.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." John 8:58

Jesus taught that he is the Son of God.

"I am the Son of God" John 10:36; Mt 27:43

Jesus taught that he is God.

"I and the Father are one. If you have seen me, then you have seen the Father."
John 10:30; 14:9

Jesus taught that he died, was resurrected, and is able to give eternal life to anyone who would believe in him.

²⁵ "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26

"Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys to Death and Hades." Revelation 1:17-18

Jesus taught that his teaching is true and authoritative forever and will never not be true.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." Matthew 24:35

This is the teaching of Jesus. And there is so much more to be found in NT and nowhere else.

Any teaching that is different from this standard is false teaching taught by false teachers who are puffed up with pride, lacking true understanding, who are sick in soul, and motivated by material gain.

The only way to discern false teaching is to know true teaching. The place to find true teaching is in the 66 books of the Holy Bible alone.

III. Conclusion

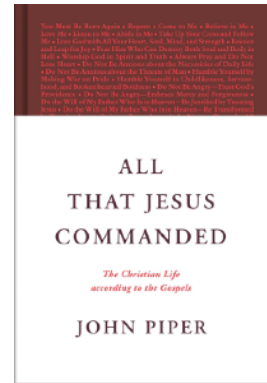
Do you believe the words of Jesus are sound, healthy, and true?

Do you believe false teachers and false teaching are sick, unhealthy, and untrue?

What will you do to know and learn the teaching of Jesus?

There's a wonderful book that might help you learn the teaching of Jesus. It's called **the Bible**. You should read it. There is no substitute for the discipline of daily Scripture reading.

I'd also recommend a book by John Piper called, *All That Jesus Commanded*. The book is devoted to understanding and obeying all the commands of Jesus. The book is published by Crossway.



When other teachings or teachers conflict with the teaching of Jesus, which will you believe?

Which will you base your life on?

Which will you obey?

IV. Discussion Questions

1. What does Paul mean by “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ” in 1 Timothy 6:3? Why is agreement with Jesus’ teaching the standard by which other teaching must be evaluated?
2. Why is false teaching such a serious threat to the church? The sermon describes false teaching as spiritually destructive, even comparing it to a shipwreck of faith. What are some ways Christians can become vulnerable to “different doctrine?”
3. Paul identifies pride, ignorance, a craving for controversy, and quarrels about words as characteristics of false teachers. Which of these characteristics do you think is most dangerous in a church, and why? How might these characteristics appear in seemingly orthodox Christians?
4. How can a desire to debate theological issues become unhealthy? What is the difference between faithfully defending biblical truth and developing an unhealthy craving for controversy or “word fights?”
5. Paul describes five poisonous results of false teaching: envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction. Which of these can you most readily see damaging

relationships within a church? What does this teach us about the connection between sound doctrine and godly living?

6. What are “evil suspicions,” and why are they particularly destructive to Christian fellowship? How can we guard against assuming sinful motives about another believer when we do not have all the facts?
7. The sermon argues that false teaching can arise from a desire for personal or financial gain. Why is it important to examine not only what someone teaches but also the character and motivations behind their teaching? What warnings should this give us as we evaluate teachers today?
8. The sermon says, “The way to discern false teaching is to know true teaching.” Why is knowing Scripture more effective than simply learning to recognize particular false teachings? What practical habits would help us become better acquainted with the teaching of Jesus?
9. The sermon emphasizes that knowing the teaching of Jesus requires knowing the New Testament. How should this shape the way we approach Bible reading, preaching, discipleship, and theological study?
10. When other teachers, ideas, cultural pressures, or even our own desires conflict with the teaching of Jesus, which will we believe and obey? What is one specific area of your life where you need to become more firmly grounded in the “sound words” of Christ?