

Five Signs of the False Teacher

By Doug Hamilton

On a return to Jerusalem in the third missionary journey, Paul made a stop at Miletus. He sent for the elders from the church of Ephesus in order to provide them with some final instruction. He stated the following:

- Acts 20:28-30, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

He reminded the leadership to be on guard so that false teachers would not creep in and destroy the lives of those in the church. To "*be on guard*" meant to watch out for the false teachers by making them obvious to all in the church. As explained in 2 Peter 2:1, "*false teachers...secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.*" False teachers erode the foundational teachings of the church and with it the structure collapses. They must *be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict* (Titus 1:9).

Wouldn't it be nice if there was a simple list of indicators which each of us could easily pick out a false teachers before they infect a congregation? What if we were able to *test the spirits to see whether they are of God* (1 John 4:1)? This is why the lesson is titled *The Five Signs of a False Teacher*. When you notice any of these five patterns, WATCH OUT, for you are about to empower false teachings.

1) If you teach more questions rather than answers, YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER.

There are teachers who seem not to be able to make an absolute statement, but only dwelling on the relative positions. One of the tools they use to hold to this non-position is through the constant bombardment of questions that are never intended to have a concrete answer. They shun definitive answers in exchange for endless questions.

- 1 Timothy 1:3-4, As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, ⁴ Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.
- 2 Timothy 3:7, "...always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

We have all run into those who will kick around a topic just for the sake of hearing themselves talk. There have been many classes which I have attended where there was really nothing ever resolved and everyone was more confused in the end. This was because they were raising controversies through questions without the goal of rather than raising questions with the goal of truly finding answers. If you are teaching more questions rather than answers, YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHERS.

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2) If you teach for the sake of dishonest gain, YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER.

Throughout history, men have sought to take hostage the name of Jesus through the means of dishonest gain. There is a saying in the modern world of politics "Follow the money!" Behind many of the decisions which politicians make tend to be for the purpose of their own personal gain. This seems to be the same purpose behind Paul's statement in Titus chapter one.

- Titus 1:10-11 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.

There have been many false teachers of the past who had a vested interest in sordid gain rather than truth.

- Simon the sorcerer: Acts 8:18-19, Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
- The idol makers of Asia: Acts 19:26-27, And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods {at all.} ²⁷ "And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence."

In the modern era people have been fed doctrinal error to minister to the treasury. False teachings about purgatory, transubstantiation, infant baptisms, once saved always saved, predestination and a plethora of denominational teachings are spread for the ultimate purpose of churning the coffers. Tele-evangelist charlatans over the past decades have made it a point to teach for sordid gain.

This is tolerated because the hearers of the word want their ears tickled. Paul warned about this in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but {wanting} to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.* If you are teaching for the sake of dishonest gain, THEN YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER!

3) IF you quote what the Bible doesn't say MORE than what it does, YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER.

There are many in the religious world who have embraced ignorance as the basis of the truth. Instead of holding to what the Bible says, they often follow the traditions of men rather than God.

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- Mark 7:7-8 'But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'⁸ "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."
- Colossians 2:8, See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

A tradition in the context teaching of man rather than the teaching of God. People like this may be experts, but they are not experts on what the Bible is teaching. *1 Timothy 1:7, "Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (KJV).* This is a dangerous game which false teachers embrace and it has become more prevalent in our ignorant culture. Here are some examples of such:

People will have a tendency to say things like the following:

- "The Bible doesn't say you can't have women elders and deacons."
- "The Bible does not say, 'Thou shalt not have a musical instrument in church.'"
- "The Bible does not say 'A preacher must wear a suit on Sunday morning.'"

This list could go on and on, but you get the point. When someone focuses more on what the Bible does not say rather than what it does say, it opens the door for false teaching. We are to be a people who know what the Bible does say. Using the same topics...

- The Bible does say that deacons must be men and both the elders and deacons must be the husband of one wife.
- The Bible does teach that Christians are to pluck the heart strings by singing and to offer the fruit of our lips in praise to the Father.
- The Bible does teach us that we should not put a stumbling block before our children and others.

These type of teachers emerge from their laziness in study. We must be leery of the teacher that behaves in this way. If you are quoting what the Bible does not say more than what it does say, THEN YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER!

4) If you do not teach self-discipline, YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER.

There are many out there who refuse to teach self-discipline. The Bible teaches God's grace through Jesus and man's obligation to become the obedient slave to Christ. We have an obligation to teach the whole truth not just the truth that makes us feel good.

- II John 1:9-11, Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into {your} house, and do not give him a greeting;¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.
- Jude 1:3-4 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend

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earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

You can always tell a false teacher by the way they refuse to teach a committed life to Jesus Christ. If you do not teach self-discipline, **YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER.**

5) If you do not live a godly life, YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER.

Matt 7:15-20 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn {bushes,} nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

The reason this is correct isn't because they might not be preparing accurate lessons, but that they are actually contradict their teaching in the life they live. James warned that great judgment is reserved for those who take this path. James 3:1, *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.* We must be doers of the word.

Paul summarized it well in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.* Immoral teachers have and always will be around. If you are not living a godly life, **YOU MIGHT BE A FALSE TEACHER.**

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2. If you teach for the safe of dishonest gain
3. If you quote what the Bible does not say more than what it does
4. If you do not teach self-discipline
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