**Why Do Some Teach False Doctrine?**

Before he died, the apostle Paul wrote two letters to the younger preacher, Timothy. Paul summarizes the theme of those letters well in 2 Timothy 4:5: “Be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” Part of Timothy’s ministry was to deal with false teachers, and Paul had a lot to say about them in these two letters.

Truth is important in any discipline, but the spiritual truth of the gospel is the key to the eternal salvation of the souls of men and women (Romans 1:16-17). Paul made it clear in Galatians 1:6-9 that some teachers distort the gospel of Christ and that a distorted gospel is no longer a saving gospel.

All of this begs the question: With the eternal salvation of the souls of men at stake, what in the world would motivate a person to teach religious doctrines that are untrue? The insights Paul offers will help us both to avoid false teachers and to ensure that we don’t join their ranks.

**Ignorance.** Most folks who are teaching untrue religious concepts are sincere in their faith and their teaching is a reflection of their beliefs. Also, ignorance is not stupidity. Many errant religious teachers are intelligent, highly educated people, they are simply listening to the wrong voices. Paul said that some want to be teachers “even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions” (1 Timothy 1:7).

Smart people go astray when they “pay attention to myths” and “mere speculation” (1 Timothy 1:4). Reasonably intelligent people can be influenced by “worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’” (1 Timothy 6:20). Paul admonished Timothy that the key to being approved by God is to give diligence to handle the word of truth accurately, (2 Timothy 2:15), not by trusting in the philosophies of men.

**Love of Controversy.** We’ve all seen them: the pot-stirrers; the folks who are dogmatic about their unorthodox opinions with no legitimate basis in Scripture. They almost seem to relish the dissention that comes with wrangling over matters about which divine revelation is silent. Paul describes these people this way: “He is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth…” (1 Timothy 6:4-5). There is a critical difference between standing for truth and controversy for the sake of controversy.

**Greed.**  It is difficult to imagine that there are people callous enough to tailor religious teachings to relieve as many dollars as possible from the wallets of their sincere listeners, but the painful truth is that they exist and have been around since Paul’s day. He said that some false teachers “suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Timothy 6:5). But TV evangelists notwithstanding, there are some who maintain lucrative preaching positions by scratching the itching ears of their flock; by telling them what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Paul gave Timothy the perfect formula for dealing with false teachers and remaining sound himself: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). What a great mantra for disciples of every age.

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