

1 Timothy 6:3-5 A Sermon

[Scott Lindsay](#)

This morning we are continuing in our study of Paul's First Letter to Timothy, picking up at chapter 6, verse 3 and working through to verse 5. Now, as you have heard me say, *ad nauseam*, Paul's over-arching purpose in this letter has been to encourage Timothy by promoting the good order and functioning of the church in Ephesus. In pursuit of that, He has addressed Timothy - the pastor of the Ephesian church and his closest disciple- on a number of different issues. And not only has he addressed different *issues*, but he has also taken aim at different *persons* or *groups of persons*. Most recently in the letter - ever since chapter 5 - he has made some specific remarks about widows, and then switched his attention to elders, and then turned his eye on slaves, and - in the verses before us this morning - is once again addressing a group which he would prefer NOT to be present at Ephesus - but nevertheless they still *were* - the false teachers.

In verse 2 of chapter 6, as he is concluding his comments about slaves, he says, "teach and urge these things" - referring there, in the first instance, to the sorts of things he has just been saying to them about slaves, elders and widows, but beyond that he is also referring to the letter as a whole. All of what he has been saying he wants Timothy to take to heart and urge upon the Ephesian people.

But in telling them to "teach and urge these things" Paul is reminded, as he has been on at least two other occasions in this letter, of the fact that there are *some* in Ephesus who are NOT going to teach and urge the things he is passing on to Timothy. There are some in that city - as there were in every city in which he planted a church - who, by their message, and through their methods, and in their motives - were threatening to destroy the church. Now, whether *they* would have described their actions in that way was doubtful, but that is exactly what they were doing. For example, we heard earlier in the letter, in 1 Timothy 1:3-7, these words from Paul,

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the

law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

When we looked at those verses we saw Paul addressing these false teachers who were promoting a “different doctrine” and who were pre-occupied with “myths” and “speculations” and did not understand what they were saying - even though they were saying it with great confidence! That was our first brush with the false teachers in 1st Timothy. Then, in chapter 4 of this letter, Paul wrote,

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.....

When we looked at those verses we saw how Paul, right after describing the qualifications for *true* leaders in chapter 3, again took aim at the teaching and practices of some other persons in Ephesus who were NOT true leaders - describing what they were promoting as the “teaching of demons” and those that promoted these things as “liars whose consciences are seared”. That was our second brush with the false teachers in Ephesus.

So, it is that Paul’s reminder to Timothy in chapter 6 of what he IS to teach brings us to a *third* set of comments aimed at those in Ephesus who *are not* teaching the right things, and are not ministering in the right way and who do all that they do - not with the aims Paul describes in chapter 1 - i.e., not from love and pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith - rather, their motivation is much more worldly and self-serving than all of that - it is simply greed, a desire to make an easy buck.

And so Paul, with these words in chapter 6, issues a final warning about the false teachers and, in giving this final warning, Paul provides Timothy and his congregation with even *further* criteria by which they might recognize these teachers and then deal with them as the “wolves” and destroyers of the Body of Christ which they are.

(Read 1 Timothy 6:3-5)

The first criteria we come across is found in verses 3 and 4, and has to do with the *message* that the false teachers are proclaiming – “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, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.”

Now, while Paul uses the word “if” at the beginning of his sentence - saying “If anyone....does such and such” – the fact that he uses a conditional word like

“if” to begin his statement does not mean that what he is talking about is a purely hypothetical situation. We know from what he has already said that he is dealing with a real, live circumstance. The false teachers ARE in Ephesus and are *already* having an impact.

So, Paul is saying that those who do the kinds of things he is describing here - those who teach a different doctrine - are operating out of conceit and understand nothing. And what is it that qualifies their teaching as a “different doctrine”? What sets it apart, and what is it set apart *from*? We can see at least two things here that help answer that question.

First, it is a doctrine or truth or teaching that does not agree with “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ” - as Paul puts it. By that he is simply referring to the things that Jesus Himself taught and which he entrusted to his apostles to hand down - including what was entrusted to the Apostle Paul. Now we see this connection between the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the Apostles quite clearly in Paul’s *second pastoral letter* - 2 Tim 1:13-14, where he writes,

Follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you...

So, Paul and the other apostles have been entrusted with the “good deposit” which are the “words of Jesus”, the teaching *by* Jesus and *about* him - i.e., the Gospel - and he wants Timothy to take that good deposit and guard it himself - even as he passes it on to other “faithful disciples”. So, a different doctrine is one which opposes or contradicts the things that Jesus himself taught - and which His apostles have continued to teach and which the prophets taught before them.

But there is something else said here about the “different” doctrines that are being taught. They are not only things which disagree with the sound words of Jesus Christ - which is referring more to the *content* of what is being taught - but they are also out of accord with *godliness* - which is referring more to the *results* or the effects of what is being taught. In other words, the problem with the false teaching in view here is not only that it is incorrect but that it is also not that which will promote godly behavior, Christ-like actions and attitudes, etc.

Well that’s what the different doctrine IS. But what does Paul think about all this? What is his attitude toward these alternative doctrines? Notice what Paul says here. He does not simply pass off this “different” doctrine as being of no consequence, as if it is no great concern. Paul clearly does not regard what was being taught as something which is harmless and benign and which can

be safely ignored or else allowed to peacefully co-exist alongside the sorts of things he and the other apostles were teaching.

Paul regards these different doctrines as neither safe, nor benign. And far from being of no consequence, they hold grave consequences for those that cling to them. For the false teachers it was a recipe for vanity and conceit and pride. For the false teachers - and those they taught - it left them foolish and understanding nothing - even when they themselves would have felt they understood all. Even worse, it was teaching that had the ultimate consequence - for both its promoters and those that received it - of shutting up the heavens, and leading people away to a Christ-less eternity.

And what a message there is in this for our own society. We live in a pluralistic world - that is, a world that is a collection and clash of competing worldviews and cultures. The advanced state of our communications has brought all this about - closing all the gaps and creating a "global village" where everybody can find out what is going on with everyone else, pretty much any time they want to do it.

So this unprecedented coming together and mixing of cultures and worldviews has created an environment where the social cost of holding to particular truths and exclusive ideals is dramatically and painfully increased.

As a result, the pressure to compromise and cut corners and water-down is greater and greater all the time. And the temptation to do this is nowhere greater than it is in the area of our religion and our ultimate beliefs.

However, while our culture wants to level the playing field in these and other matters, while our culture wants us to say that all beliefs are legitimate and have a "right" to exist, and are to be regarded as having equal value and worth, and that what we regard to be "truth" is subjectively determined - in spite of great pressure to conform to this sort of thinking, we must take our place beside Paul in these matters and say that those who teach things that do not agree with the sound, true, healthy, life-giving doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Further, we must be prepared to say that *those that teach these doctrines* are conceited and *know nothing* - they have no earthly idea what they are talking about.

To be sure, what they are saying may have the *appearance* of wisdom - like the drivel that regularly falls from the lips of the Dalai Lama - it may receive great applause and approval all around. The opinion of the world may be that it is "really something" - but Paul says - if it's out of step with Jesus it's not "really something" - it's really *nothing*. It is meaningless. It is worthless. Indeed, it is *worse* than worthless because it is mis-leading in its content, and it is damning in its results.

And where does the “conceit” come from that Paul speaks of here? From precisely this: The teaching that the false teachers are promoting is not that which has come to them from God - via the apostles - that is, it is not *revelation* but rather it is that which ultimately has a human origin and is a human invention. And the result of that kind of so-called knowledge that has its source in the heart and mind of humankind - the consequence of that sort of knowledge cannot be anything but pride and self-satisfaction and conceit.

But the doctrine that Paul and the other Apostles taught was strikingly different than that. It was knowledge that no human mind ever conceived of, it was truth that was not invented or figured out but was *received* as a *revelation* from God. And the nature of *revealed* truth is that it has the effect of *humbling* those who receive it - by its very profundity and simply by virtue of the fact that the recipient can take no credit for being clever enough to figure these things out. The nature of the Gospel truths is such that the more one understands them, the more a person’s pride is not nurtured but is, instead, starved and assaulted leaving a person who is increasingly humbled and broken in its wake.

Indeed, this reality is in itself another telling indicator that reveals the character of the various teachers all around us - i.e., If the person is teaching that which is in accord with the sound words of the Lord Jesus Christ - that fact ought to be evidenced by a pattern of growing humility as God applies more and more of that which He is teaching to the teacher’s own heart. If, however, what the person is teaching is that which is NOT in accord with *revealed* truth but has its origins in *human ideas and human wisdom* - then it will tend to evidence itself in a kind of self-satisfied assurance, that is increasingly, and proudly convinced as to the rightness of its own opinions.

So, as we look at Paul’s final warning about the false teachers in verses 3-5, we see that the first criteria for identifying such persons is that they have a different *message* - one that does not agree with the sound words of Jesus Christ - and it has a different *result* - it does not promote or encourage godliness in those that hear it.

Now I’ve said a lot about the first criteria and you will no doubt be overjoyed to know that I don’t have nearly as much to say about the second and third criteria - at least not this morning. But if the first criteria has to do with the *message* of the false teachers, the second criteria we can discern from these verses has to do with the *method or manner* of the false teachers. Paul writes, “*He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth...*”

Paul’s meaning here is fairly obvious isn’t it? One of the characteristics of those that set themselves against sound doctrine is that their conceit and lack of understanding and selfish motives make them into quarrelsome, calculating,

abrasive, and divisive people, always stirring up trouble, challenging others, starting arguments, ready for a fight at a moment's notice.

As one commentator points out, the words Paul uses here are very telling. The false teachers he is describing here possess many unhelpful characteristics. They are *envious* because they resent the gifts of others and perhaps the response that these gifts generate. They create *dissent* because of their highly competitive spirit - seeing every person as a potential battleground. I myself have witnessed this very thing on numerous occasions. They are *malicious talkers and slanderers* when they abuse other teachers - the true teachers - whom they consider to be opponents and rivals for the affections and approval of others.

And the effects described here are not only seen in the lives of the false teachers - but also in the lives of those who respond to what they are doing and saying. In other words, the false teachers are not only envious themselves, but they create envious people. They are not only divisive themselves, they breed and nurture divisiveNESS. They are not only malicious slanderers - they clone themselves in others, creating whole armies of malicious slanderers sometimes. Even further, they raise *evil and unfounded suspicions* in other peoples' minds and create an atmosphere of *constant friction*.

In short, the effect of their teaching is that it promotes godLESSness, not godliness. It creates strife and division and fighting and mistrust. Such was and is the sad legacy of false teachers in Paul's day and ours. To be sure, Paul is not suggesting here that *every* false teacher will have this - or every other characteristic. But he IS saying that when a person *does* have these sorts of qualities, and *is* leaving this sort of destruction in their wake - then be on your guard for you may well be dealing with a false teacher.

The third and final criteria for discerning false teachers - which we might gather from these particular verses - has to do, not with their message, or their manner, but with their *motives*. As we have already seen, the false teachers that Paul has in mind here, and about which he is worried, are those that seem to be motivated by a desire for financial gain - to take advantage of the situation presented to them in order to make some quick and easy money.

Now, we'll have much more to say about this when we look at the verses which follow, but it is worth at least noticing at this stage how Paul speaks of this sort of motivation as being the mark of a mind that is *depraved* or *corrupted* and which is *deprived* of the truth. The sad reality is that, in spite of what Paul says on this subject, the blatant teaching and pronouncement of a large number of prominent ministries in this country is shamelessly saying just the opposite - that godliness IS and *indeed* ought to be regarded as a means of financial gain - not just for those who teach about it, but for every Christian. And, sadly, judging from the response to these sorts of teachings, there is a depressingly

high number of people who claim the name of Christ and who are happy to believe these patent and manipulative lies.

Now, as I have already said, we will look at these things further in our next study. But for now, let me summarize and conclude the things we have seen this morning. Paul's concern that Timothy should be careful to teach and urge the things Paul has passed on to him has led him to *another* consideration and round of warnings about the false teachers.

In verses 3-5, Paul makes a number of comments which, taken together, point us to three criteria which we can add to what we already know about false teachers - and which will help God's people to be discerning about those who present themselves as teachers of God's people. The three areas highlighted in these verses are *message, manner or method, and motivations*. Perhaps the most helpful way to apply what Paul is to say that you and I need to make it a practice to exercise greater discernment when it comes to seeking out and listening to those who would profess to be teachers in Christ's Church. As you consider such persons and situations and possibilities in the future, ask yourself some or all of the following questions:

1) Is the message being presented by this person something that agrees with the Scriptures? How does it line up with what God has said in the Old and New Testaments - and with the central message OF those testaments - the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Are there areas of obvious and significant disagreement with some of the central truths of the Christian faith?

2) What is the obvious effect of this person's ministry? What does the track record show? Are people under his ministry becoming more Christ-like or are they becoming less like Christ? Is godliness being promoted or is god-less-ness being promoted?

3) Is the person in question a humble person, and is he being humbled more and more with time, or is this person proud, conceited and growing more so with each passing year? What is the effect of his teaching upon *him* in this regard?;

4) While there are times and places for discussions, debates and even disagreements - if they are handled respectfully - ask yourself whether the person in question seems to have a morbid or *unhealthy* interest in being quarrelsome and divisive. Does this person seem to *like* getting into a good argument with someone, especially over theological matters? What is the effect of this on others?

5) What are this person's discernible motives for ministry? Does it seem as if greed or material prosperity is a significant, driving factor in this person's life?

Or does there seem to be a genuine love for God and His people, evidenced by a sincere faith, a pure heart, and a good conscience?

These are the sorts of questions which God's people might legitimately and continually ask, in order that the Church of Christ would be spared - as much as is possible - the sorts of hardships that the Ephesians faced - and which Paul intends to warn us away from by means of this letter.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [RPM Forum](#).

Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).