

Plague of False Teachers

Plagues

Throughout history deadly epidemics and plagues have ravaged mankind. Sin, disease and death entered into the world after the fall of Adam. A plague that many of us studied in school during the history of Medieval Europe was the spread of “Black Death” or Bubonic Plague. In a matter of 5 years, from 1347 to 1352, the Black Plague killed 60% or 25 million people of Europe’s approximate 45 million people. The disease spread geometrically beginning slowly and doubling and doubling until it was catastrophic. As people traveled, worked and ate together the disease fanned out through Europe.

The same has been true in our time with the spread of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). It began in the early 1960s in Africa and was not recognized for 20 years as it accelerated geometrically. Its spread was not confined to Europe as the Black Plague because of global travel AIDS spread to every corner of the world. The difference in the outcome between the 14th and 20th century is the medical advances to treat those infected and the ability to educate large numbers of people worldwide through media helping prevent its spread. The Black Plague, AIDS and other plagues have killed millions, but there is a plague more deadly, it has spread over the last 2 millennia with its expansion and at times its retraction it has killed billions spiritually and condemned them to eternal hell. That is the plague of false, heretical and man-twisted teaching of the Bible.

The spread of false doctrine by false teachers, like all plagues, has an observable pathology or abnormal traits that identify this disease. One can study a disease in order to better understand how it infects and destroys, and how it is transmitted causing it to spread. Also, as one studies a disease it may be learned how it mutates

in order to resist the methods employed to stop it. This is also true of false teachers and false doctrine.

Christians and especially Christian leaders are called to become spiritual pathologists in order to understand the plague spreading throughout the world, which is false doctrine. Satan wants to change who people think God is and how He works and what His plan of redemption is in order that people will believe there is no God or that God is a pseudo god that is not involved in the world and with people. False teaching defines God by human terms and designing a god people crave. Through the spread of this spiritual plague of false teaching millions are dying each and every year and they are condemned to eternal death. The mounting death toll is staggering.

Paul knew that the evil of false teaching was invading the church from the very beginning. He knew that many of the lies of the evil one were subtle and the men the devil sent to deliver his lies were designed to take people step by step from the true path and deliver them to destruction. Paul wrote to the brethren in Corinth, “[For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.](#)” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15) False teachers wrap themselves in a thin layer of shallow light that deceives many.

A doctor first learns how a healthy biological system looks and how it works. Then the doctor learns how a disease affects a healthy system. He must recognize the differences of healthy and infected tissue and know whether to surgically remove the disease or treat it with medicines. So too, it is with spiritual disease. One must learn the right and true spirituality of the one and true God. This eternal truth is only found in the Bible, the inspired words of the only true God given to mankind in order that they might know Him. Paul writes inspired instructions to Timothy here in chapter 6 so that he will know how to diagnose the dark disease of Satan that

impersonates the divine truth of God. Paul gives Timothy six symptoms in verses 3 to 5 that indicate who those are that are infected with the spiritual disease of false teaching that will spread like a plague to others if not stopped. The markers of disease are; advocates a different doctrine, attitude of conceit, envy, depraved deception, apostasy and self-promoting gain.

Just as physical disease has identifiable symptoms or markers, which are used to diagnose, so too, the disease of false teaching and false doctrine can be identified. Those infected by the evil one will manifest symptoms. We may see these markers of disease quickly or it may take time but those who hold everything up to the light of the scriptures will observe shadow to darkness in those who are false.

Plague of Different Doctrine

Paul begins his instruction to Timothy concerning false teachers in verse 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, he is puffed up with conceit.” Paul begins with the word “if” which assumes the problem is present. We already know from chapter 1 that there are false teachers in Ephesus. Paul wrote to Timothy, “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,⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.” (1 Timothy 1:3–4) From both chapter 1 and here in chapter 6 Paul is not limiting his instruction to a specific false teacher but rather to all who are discovered to have the disease of heresy.

The first marker of a false teacher is that they teach a “different doctrine.” A “different doctrine” is anything that contradicts God’s Word as revealed in the Bible. These people are heretics or people who hold unorthodox religious beliefs. False teaching may take various forms; changing who the God of the Bible is, adjusting the

scripture to get it to say something it does not, denying the Trinity, or Mary's virgin birth or that Mary was perpetually a virgin. They may teach that Christ was a man and a prophet, but not the Son of God or He was not bodily resurrected. They may change who God the Holy Spirit is or what He is assigned to do. They often teach that the Bible needs to be changed to make it pertinent to our times and society. They work to change the divine roles of men and woman, sexuality and what is right and wrong. Paul used strong words concerning false teachers who teach false doctrine and spread their sickness in his letter to the Galatian Christians, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:6–9) Paul uses the word "accursed" which means to be damned to hell. I cannot think of a stronger condemnation than this.

In order to see and know heresy, Christians must be well taught in the Word of God, the Bible. If one knows the true Word of God it is easier to know when someone is teaching a lie and calling it God's truth. The Apostle John wrote, "... the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1 John 2:14) They were able to overcome the evil one because they knew the Word of God as intimately as a husband knows his wife. Without knowing the Word of God both intellectually and spiritually one cannot know truth or identify the false. This is why Satan works so well through false religions or cults. Common threads that run through them is they are all works based for salvation and not grace based. They all have books that have had many corrections and still need correction because they are man-made not God inspired.

People change, times change, but the Scripture stays the same. Praise God! When the Protestant Reformers wanted to bring people back to the basics of true and right faith and to separate themselves from false doctrine. The reformers came up with the Five Solas.

- *Sola Fide*, by faith alone.
- *Sola Scriptura*, by Scripture alone.
- *Solus Christus*, through Christ alone.
- *Sola Gratia*, by grace alone.
- *Soli Deo Gloria*, glory to God alone.

These five solas presented the foundation of proper faith simply and clearly. They helped bring into focus who and what is of God and what is not. These Five Solas help His children know what God wants them to see, believe and live.

Paul in his farewell address to the Ephesians elders charged them to live up to their responsibility to diagnose the disease of false teaching and error. I suggest you read Acts 20:27-32. After Paul gave them warning concerning false teachers, he said the only antidote to false teaching was “[the word of His grace](#)” found in verse 32. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul said to withstand evil one must put on the whole armor of God. Our best weapon against false teaching is the “[sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.](#)” (Ephesians 6:17) If we feed our souls upon the Word of God we will know sound doctrine and we will be able to use the sword of God to cut through the falsehoods and expose the sickness that lies beneath.

False teachers can also be identified by what they deny. Their teachings are filled with error and “[... does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness.](#)” (1 Timothy 6:3) Healthy teaching from the true Word of God causes one to grow as opposed to false teaching that causes one to be stunted or wither. False teachers are not committed to teach the Scripture.

They may speak of God and Christ but the Scripture of God is only alluded to just enough to try and gain creditability. False teaching does not result in people living holy before God. Jesus said clearly, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:15–20) When examined and compared to the sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, false teaching rationalizes sin. False teaching or heresy has no power to produce true godliness in people.

Plague of Conceit

Paul continues in verse 4 saying false teachers are “puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.” Or to say it in one word, false teachers are consumed with “pride.” Their ego convinces them that they can judge and correct the Bible. History is filled with those whose arrogance gave them the ego and pride to rewrite the Bible or create man-made alternatives to God’s Bible. There are many, but some you might recognize; Mohammad, Joseph Smith, Ellen White, Charles Russell, Sun Myung Moon and others. Peter wrote false teachers “Speaking loud boasts of folly” (2 Peter 2:18) and their speaking reveals their egos. Simon the sorcerer and magician was such a man. “There was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great.” (Acts 8:9) He claimed to be someone great and special. He offered Peter money to buy the power of the Holy Spirit. Writing to the Colossians, Paul said such a person is one “puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind.” (Colossians 2:18) These types of people are among us today, Cash Luna of Guatemala, Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn and many others. False

teachers have an overinflated ego and sense of their own importance. We can know who they are by holding firm to the Word of God. When a person claims new insights or interruptions of the Bible we can evaluate these by the Bible. We need to understand these people function the way they do because they have been infected with a deadly spiritual disease. They are not seeking the glory of God but their own glory.

Paul says a false teacher is “[puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.](#)” Because their ego and conceit they think they have special knowledge, but in truth they understand nothing. Instead of focusing on the truths of the Bible, false teachers seek the provocative. Paul continues speaking of false teachers, saying, “[He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions.](#)” Desiring to please people they work hard to make the scriptures support culturally accepted and appealing positions on evolution, behavior that God says is sin is not really sin, they may work to discredit authors of different books in the Bible in order to discount what these books teach. These men suffer from spiritual disease of deception and are being used by the evil one. As James wrote these people teach “[not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.](#)” (James 3:15) Because what they teach is not true to the Scripture they fail to bear good and lasting fruit.

Plague of Envy

Paul says at the end of verse 4 that the teachings of false teachers “[produces envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions,](#) ⁵ [and constant friction among people.](#)” (1 Timothy 6:4d-5a) So, just as false teaching fails to teach God’s truth and fails to produce holiness in people’s lives, it also fails to produce unity. False teaching results in friction among people. Paul wrote to Titus about those teaching different doctrines saying, “[They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.](#)” (Titus 1:11) False

teaching does not produce unity. True unity comes from the truth of God because no matter what culture or language all of value is based on the Word of God.

Plague of Deception

The root cause of false teaching is that people are born in sin and they are spiritually dead. Until the Holy Spirit regenerates ones soul they live in the fallen world and under the deception of the evil one. Verse 5 continues explaining that false teachers are those “[who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth.](#)” Paul wrote plainly to the Christians in Rome that those who do not belong to God, which includes false teachers have “[Set their mind on the flesh which is death ...](#) ⁷ [For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.](#) ⁸ [Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.](#)” (Romans 8:6–8) So a false teacher is, in truth, unregenerate and therefore does not have a mind renewed by God the Holy Spirit and they can only teach error. A good lie has some truth and this is what makes it believable. False teachers always mix in some truth from the Bible so that the uneducated in the Spirit and the Bible may be deceived.

Plague of Apostasy

False teachers have been exposed to the truth of the Scripture and they have learned enough scripture to rob from it to build lies upon its truth that they have disjointed from the whole truth. Verse 5 continues, “[people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth.](#)” In fact the word “deprived” in the Greek means to rob or steal. These false teachers steal from the truth of God in order to create their lies. These false teachers are “[always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.](#)” (2 Timothy 3:7) Their spiritual condition is terminal and they will infect people with this deadly plague as they spiritually waste away. Many cannot be helped because the only cure is Christ and they reject Him. The writer of Hebrews warns of the result of being exposed to the truth of the Bible and Christ and rejecting

them. “For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” (Hebrews 6:4–6) I cannot imagine the punishment reserved for those who having been exposed to the truth and learned enough of God’s truth to use it to lead people away from God and find their loyalty in Satan. But the writer of Hebrews 4 chapters later gives us a glimpse “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ (Both *Deuteronomy 32:35* and *Romans 12:19* attribute this saying to the Lord) And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ (*Deuteronomy 32:36*)³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:26–31) This is why preaching the Word of God as He has given it is so important. First, we are to honor God and His truth that He has given to mankind – the Bible. Second, because it is the Word of God, and not the words of men, it has power and brings people to the Lord as Paul explained in his letter to the Romans. Third, it is the Word of God that brings unity.

Plague of Gain

Paul finishes verse 5 stating false teachers, “**imagine that godliness is a means of gain.**” False teachers have a clear and simple motive – gain. They desire to gain notoriety, fame, power and most commonly, and consistently money. For in this

world money buys power, just as Simon the magician tried to buy power from Peter. There is nothing wrong with a preacher, pastor or teacher making a living. However, with the need to share the gospel of Christ throughout the world, with half of the world still suffering from war and poverty, with a great need for clean water and training people with a skill to earn a living – I have to question those among us this day who head “Christian ministries” and make money beyond what most would imagine. My Google search of net worth of Christian leaders shocked, angered and saddened me.

Unlike Paul who said, “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel,” false teachers seek their own gain. (Acts 20:33) Paul served the Lord out of desire to honor Christ and to meet the needs of others and the most important need was knowing Christ as Lord. Paul said false teachers were not “free from the love of money” (1 Timothy 3:3) In our day we can find many “Simon the Magician” using Christianity for their own gain.

Paul has shown us this morning that the pathology of the plague of false teachers is clear. They deny the truth of the Word of God in its completeness. Their teachings do not produce godly and holy living on a long-term basis. False teachers are arrogant by their own self-worth and the things they teach lack spiritual truth. Much of their energy is spent in speculations and finding new meanings in the Scripture because God has given them special revelation. These new insights into God’s Word cause chaos, division and conflict. Because they have moved away from the complete truth of God’s Word they themselves are unregenerate and in truth serving the evil one, and they are destined for eternal destruction. Their ambition is money that brings power and fame, not the glory of God.

We who are the children of God and who are His church must prepare for battle and not retreat. May we fight to slay the plague of false teachers and prophets, with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:17) We must ask

ourselves are we part of the true remnant Church of Christ? If so, let us live as God inspired Paul to write. As I close please stand for the reading of the Word of God.

Reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, "**Finally, my brothers and sisters of Canyon Bible Church be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.** ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:10–18) This week re-read and mediate on Ephesians 6 and use it inoculate yourself against the plague of false teaching.

As Paul instructed let us pray. God give us the strength to stand as Paul stood and let our lives prove to be faithful and bring You honor and glory as we live Your Word, as we live our lives by Your Holy Bible. May we stand against the plague of false teaching invading Your church. Let us take into our hearts "**the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**" Let us use Your sword to surgically remove the sickness of false teaching. Amen!