

Why Are There Issues That Must Be Faced?

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To say that the church is under attack from those outside the church and from those inside the church is a truth with which we cannot argue. That the church would be in danger in this way was taught to us by Paul when he warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28ff. Here, they were told to be on guard against those who would dress in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they would be ravening wolves.

While we expect those outside the church to speak against us and try to dissuade or stop us, it is sad that our most dangerous problem comes from within. Many unsuspecting Christians will be lead astray by false teachers, and through it all these Christians will believe that the false teachers are really men of God.

God, in his great wisdom, instructed us to be aware of false teachers, guard against them, and stop them. Consider the following passages:

- *Matthew 7:15 – Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*
- *Romans 16:18 – For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*
- *2 Corinthians 11:13 – For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*
- *1 Timothy 4:1 – Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.*
- *2 Timothy 4:4 – And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*
- *2 Peter 2:18 – For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.*

- Titus 1:10,11 – *For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.*
- 1 John 4:1 – *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

It is because of passages such as these that we should not be overtaken by false teachers. We should be set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17).

Yet, with all the warnings, with all the information God has given us, we still face issues that are dividing the Lord's church and diminishing our influence in the world. We seem to spend more time fighting the false teachers among us than we do in spreading the gospel throughout the world. Certainly, the Devil is pleased with such.

Over the years, there have been many issues that have come before us. We have had to deal with those who were opposed to Bible classes, those who were opposed to congregations cooperating one with another (especially financially), and those who teach that miracles still happen. We face the issue of instrumental music in worship, fellowship with denominations, traditional versus contemporary worship, and so forth. To put it simply, there are many who do not adhere to the word of God. They have chosen to follow a path that is more pleasing to them.

When we try to understand why we face these and other issues, there are the usual answers – pride (Proverbs 16:18); Desire for money (1 Timothy 6:10); and worldliness (1 John 2:15-17). And, without hesitation, I would say that all of these contribute to the problem. Pride causes us to place ourselves above God, and then causes us to get to where we think we are right, and we refuse to admit we could ever be or are wrong. The love of money is still the root of all evil. A desire for material gain has caused many to seek that which pleases men and brings material gain to them. This they will obtain even if the Scriptures are compromised or thrown out altogether. And, allowing the world to dictate to us what is right or wrong has placed many a person on the wrong side of God. Friendship with the world is still enmity with God (James 4:4).

Often, when discussing the issues that face us, it is easy to point out all the “big name” false teachers. It sometimes gets to the point that it seems like there are no others who are false teachers. Articles which talk about false teachers all mention the same people over and over again. They are all well-known, very prominent preachers. They usually always have large congregations with whom they work. And, yes, these men and women have done much to cause the problems that we face in our lives today.

I believe that when we discuss why there are issues that we face, we need to be more honest about why we have these problems. It is easy to blame all the usual things that we have already discussed, and fail to see that there are other factors that contribute to the problem. I do not blame the whole problem on the false teacher. Some of the guilt for false doctrine being spread must lie with those who we would call the faithful of God. We must have the courage of heart and the honesty to admit that we may be a part of the problem, and in some cases, maybe even more a cause of the problem than the false teacher.

What do I mean by this? Think about this, false teachers, while proclaiming otherwise, do what they do for three basic reasons.

1. They have a lack of love for the Godhead. They will talk about how much they love Jesus, and how we must devote our lives to God. But, when they teach false doctrine, they are saying that they do not love God. Why? Because to love God is to keep his commandments (1 John 5:3). To love Jesus is to keep his commandments (John 14:15). And, since the work of Spirit was to bring us the word (2 Peter. 1:20,21), to teach the word falsely is to reject the work of the Spirit. One cannot profess to love God and deny the very word that God has given us.
2. They fail to love others as they ought. James taught us that to not love others as we love ourselves is to violate the royal law and we do sin (James 2:8,9). John helps us to understand that we cannot love God if we do not love our brother (1 John 2:9; 4:20,21). When we love others as we ought, we want what is best for them, and we want them to have the opportunity to go to Heaven. To not give them God's plan of salvation is to fail to give them that opportunity. If we teach false doctrine and one obeys false doctrine, they will be lost. While false teachers say they love us, they really do not. If they did, they would teach us the truth so we could go to Heaven.
3. They do not understand the seriousness of disobedience. They scoff at using Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) and others as examples of disobedience. They would have us believe that God will not punish anyone in Hell. They fail to comprehend, for whatever reason, that disobedience of God's word will lead us to Hell (Matthew 7:21-23; Revelation 21:27; 22:14,15).

While the false teacher is doing his or her work, we stand by and talk about how faithful we are. We talk about how strong a preacher we have and how strong a congregation we have. To us, all the problems for the issues we face lie with the false teacher. We fail to recognize, in ourselves, the same qualities that make up a false teacher. We have convinced ourselves that since we do not openly proclaim false doctrine that we are not contributing to the problem.

The Bible teaches us that when we point out error, we must listen to what we are saying and make certain that we are not guilty of that which we are condemning (Romans 2:3,21). We must always remember that sin is sin. It is just as wrong to teach a false doctrine as it is to live a false doctrine. Consider that we are to be examples of the believers (1 Timothy 4:12). As Christians, we must walk in the light (1 John 1:7).

Whenever I think about this problem that we have, I cannot help but see how our own arrogance has caused us to not honestly examine ourselves. We have been called faithful so long that we do not believe we could be anything but faithful. We then will not admit that we are guilty of that which we condemn.

There are two areas that I want to discuss in this section of the lesson. These two areas are encompassing of the reasons we contribute to the spread of false doctrine and why we face issues in the church. They are two areas we talk about a lot, but we do little about.

The first thing I want to discuss is our own ignorance. When I say this, I am not talking about one's educational level. In any congregation, you will have people with various levels of education. Yet, all of us can understand God's word. The worst part of this ignorance is that it is a willful ignorance. That is, we choose to be ignorant. This same situation was what led Israel to its destruction (Hosea 4:6).

The problem with a lack of knowledge of God's word is that we are open to attack from false teachers. We cannot use the sword of the Spirit to defend against the false teacher, because we have not armed ourselves with his word (Ephesians 6:10ff). Because we do not know God's word, we do not recognize when a person is teaching false doctrine. We cannot know false doctrine unless we know the truth. Our lack of knowledge of God's word leaves the door wide open for false teachers to bring in issues that will disrupt and divide us.

We ease our own consciences by making sure we have strong preaching from the pulpit. We desire that our elders be knowledgeable. But, often, we never make the effort to improve our own knowledge. God told all of us to study (2 Timothy 2:15). Not just a few of us.

Our lack of knowledge causes us to enter into discussions using only our emotions and feelings as the tools by which we make decisions. This is why there are so many arguments about things. Everyone is taking about what they think, they feel, and no one is looking to see what God says. Of course, they are not looking to see what God says because they do not know where to look. And then, pride enters in. We do not want to admit that we do not know, therefore we put on a show of righteousness that makes us appear godly. We get puffed up and challenge anyone who would dare to question our faithfulness! Of course, in all of this, we never discuss what God wants. The false teacher seizes the opportunity, quotes a lot of scripture, makes statements that sound good, and leads people astray. He uses the Bible for his own purposes, but we do not have enough knowledge to show where he is wrong. We lose and God loses, because we are ignorant of God's will.

By our lack of knowledge of God's word, we cannot teach others the truth. When we fail to or cannot teach them the truth, we leave them open to false teachers. We also leave ourselves open to false teachers because we do not have the information to keep the Devil out of our hearts. Our ignorance of God's word gives the Devil the advantage in the fight. And, he will crush us because of it!

The second area in which we fail and in which we contribute to the issues that face us is our failure to live according to the Scriptures. We talk a good talk about how we must be faithful to God. We are appalled that a false teacher would dare to come into our area and teach such ungodly things! But, we do not see that we are just as guilty as he.

By our hypocrisy, we open the door for people to not obey the gospel. They cry hypocrite and refuse to listen. The false teacher comes in and uses our hypocrisy against us, presents himself as a faithful child of God who lives what he preaches, and gathers in his followers. We cannot do anything about it, because we are hypocrites.

It has always helped me to remove the emotions from a discussion and analyze the situation from a purely logical standpoint. It is also good to remove the particular situation and analyze what is happening by facing what is really happening. For instance, we tend to categorize sin. We look at lying as being bad, but not necessarily as bad as murder. We then find a way to justify at least some lying, especially when we have been caught lying. But, because we are not a murderer, we fail to recognize that we are just as guilty as the murderer.

Why would I say this? Because lying is sin, and murder is sin. Therefore, both the liar and the murderer are sinners. Since they are both sinners, they are both guilty of violating God's word (1 John 3:4). They stand equally condemned before God (Revelation 21:8). When we try to justify our actions or make light of our sins, we open the door for issues to come in among us. It is difficult to tell someone they are wrong when we are as guilty as they.

What are some of the things that we do that contributes to the issues before us and helps open the door for the false teacher?

- When we exceed the speed limit or break any other law of the land, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (Romans 13:1ff).
- When we tell a dirty joke, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (Ephesians 4:29; 5:4).
- When we go see a dirty movie, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (Philippians 4:8).
- When we fail to defend the truth, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (2 Timothy 4:1ff).
- When we fail to attend all the services of the church, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (Hebrews 10:25).
- When we fail to study, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (2 Tim. 2:15).
- When we fail to teach others, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (Matthew 28:19; 2 Timothy 2:2).
- When we fellowship false teachers by attending their gospel meetings, youth rallies, women's days, and so forth, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (Ephesians 5:11).
- When we fellowship denominations, such as the Salvation Army or the YMCA, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (Ephesians 5:7).
- When we fail to prove all things and hold fast that which is good, we are guilty of sin and are hypocrites (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Certainly, we could continue to add to this list, but these should suffice to help us understand that we often stand guilty of the same things we condemn in others. We face the issues among us today because we have failed to live what the Bible teaches. We have compromised scripture and

present ourselves as faithful. To be honest about it, that last statement is how I would describe a false teacher.

Why are there issues that face us today? While there are many false teachers among us (2 Peter 2:1,2; Jude 3,4), and these false teachers have lead many astray. At least some of the blame must fall upon our shoulders for not defending the word and for not living the word.

We need to do all that we can to stop the mouths of those who would cause issues among us. We need to put down pride, and solve problems on what the Bible says, not on what we think or feel. And, we need to study God's word, apply God's word, and live God's word.