

Tuesday, February 18, 2014 – Exposing and Rejecting Error

I am not now nor have I ever been a fan of the monthly periodical “The Christian Chronicle.” Those who are responsible for the publication of this monthly “newspaper” which proclaims to be an “An international newspaper for Churches of Christ; Our mission: to inform, inspire and unite” have failed in their responsibility to expose error. Unfortunately they seemingly can’t find a doctrine they disagree with. They have forgotten the clear teaching of the apostle John when he states:

1 John 4:1-6 - Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The scriptures tell us the following:

1. **Hold the pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 2:7-8).** Greatest care should be exercised in stating truth in the language of inspired writers. The teaching of Christ as given by the Holy Spirit must be upheld (**John 16:13-15**). The truth should be positively unmixed with the philosophies of men. Preachers must seek to please God (**Rom. 15:3**), not seek the applause of men (**Matt. 6:1-6**).
2. **Preach the word (2 Tim. 4:1-2).** This is prefaced by a most solemn charge. The preacher must adhere strictly to apostolic teaching (**2 Tim. 2:2**). Take care to teach all the apostles taught and only that delivered through them by the Spirit. The word of God is inexhaustible. Preachers should study and expound the scriptures, give their lives to this -- one of the greatest needs in the church today. Be not content with polishing up sermons of sectarian preachers as too many are now doing. If the preacher devotes himself to unfolding the Scriptures he will never lack for sermon material.
3. **Reprove, rebuke, exhort (2 Tim. 4:1-2).** Too long the trend has been to speak softly and tread lightly. Note the force in the meaning of these words: 1) **Reprove:** “convince, refute, confute, convict, bring to light, expose, find fault with, correct, reprehend severely, chide, admonish, to call to account, show one his fault, chasten, punish” (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon on *elegcho*). 2) **Rebuke:** “To tax with fault, rate, chide, reprove, censure severely, admonish or charge sharply” (Thayer on *epitimao*). 3) **Exhort:** “To incite by words or advice; to advise or warn earnestly” (Webster). “Admonish” (Thayer on *parakaleo*). Two-thirds of this command is negative. In **Jeremiah 1:10** the prophet was similarly ordered: **“to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.”** This is not to be abused, yet when strong measures are demanded the preacher should not hesitate. Let there be strong denunciation of error and sin, and strong entreaty for souls to turn from them.

How are we to respond to false teachers? How are we to react when false teachers are found in our midst aiming deceit at brethren? The apostles show us how to deal with

Satan's servants. The apostle John wrote, ***“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1)***. What does it mean to “try the spirits?” Brother Guy N. Woods states that they were able to test the spirits “either by exercising miraculous power in the discernment of spirits (**1 Cor. 12:4-11**), or by comparing the claims of these men with the known teaching of the Holy Spirit through properly accredited representatives.”

Mark False Teachers - ***“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned; and turn away from them” (Rom. 16:17)***. The word “mark” means to watch carefully, diligently. It has been said that the idea of “branding” a brother (or a group of brethren) is not in the word translated “mark” in this verse. This is true concerning the single word of the text. However, the context of **Romans 16:17** demands the act of taking note of false teachers so that we might be able to avoid them and to warn others of them. This text demands that those who teach things contrary to the doctrine of the Lord be branded or exposed in some way for what they are. Still, some say, “Well, that is unkind, unloving, and un-Christ-like.” But, is it?

Jesus said, ***“Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”*** He also said, ***“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”*** Did not Jesus love them? Was Christ unkind? Yet, he did expose the Pharisees and the Sadducees and warn others of them.

Paul knew of certain men who taught false doctrines and he warned others of them so they might be careful (**2 Tim. 2:17**). So, when one is found to be teaching harmful doctrines, it becomes the duty of him who learns it, to warn others if the false teacher cannot be corrected. But because such public warning may cause some unpleasantness in the church, many refuse to engage in it. These, through pride, have more regard for the good opinion of the community than they have for the purity of the church or the approval of the Lord. Paul says we are to have no fellowship with such, but even reprove them (**Eph. 5:11**). He, who fails to reprove, fails in half his duty to the Lord. Preachers of the gospel and elders of churches cannot escape the responsibility of doing such. Brethren, false doctrines do not flourish without false teachers. Therefore, those that propagate and promote divisive doctrines must be dealt with. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said we are to ***“mark...and avoid”*** them. Therefore, there must be a constant vigilance in everyone who follows Christ to observe, look toward, take aim at, take heed to, mark, the false teacher (**Rom. 16:17; Jude 3**)

We are not left to our own opinions as to whom to mark. We are to mark them who are causing divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to the doctrine of the apostles. Paul says, ***“if any man obey not our word by this epistle.”*** And, again he says we are to “withdraw from all” who do not walk after the traditions received from him (**2 Thess. 3:6,14**).

“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13). Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to teach certain men not to teach a different doctrine, nor to give heed to fables (**1 Tim. 1:3,4**). If man or angel preach anything different from what the apostles preached, he shall be anathema (**Gal. 1:8,9**). Jesus condemned the Jews of His day for departing from the

Law of Moses and doing things not commanded, and commanding others to do likewise (**Matt. 15:1-9**).

We are to be content to preach what is revealed through inspired apostles. Since they were guided into all truth, it follows that anything more or different from what they preached is no part of the truth. That which is not truth is from the devil, for he is the father of lies (**John 8:44**). To preach that which is not true is to serve the devil, and all that serve him here will have to spend eternity with him. Hence, the seriousness of failing to preach the truth.

We are to turn from them. Does this imply concerted church action expressed in withdrawal of fellowship? Or, does it mean for individuals to shun or avoid such characters lest they be contaminated with false teachings? Paul told the Thessalonians to withdraw themselves from all who walk disorderly, and not after the traditions received from him (**2 Thess. 3:6**). This looks like public condemnation and exclusion from the fellowship of the church. But in another verse he says if any one obeys not his word, ***“note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. And yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”*** (**2 Thess. 3:14,15**).

From all we can find on the subject it seems that one who teaches false doctrine should: 1) be corrected, if he will take it; 2) be warned to cease his false teaching; 3) be exposed so as to stop him (**Titus 1:9-11**); 4) be excluded from the fellowship of the church as a last resort to save him and the church. False teaching spreads like cancer (**2 Tim. 2:17**), so it must not be allowed to continue in the body. Elders have the duty of seeing that it is stopped. Church discipline is truly in some places the “forgotten commandment.”