



The Reflector

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The Progression From Sound Doctrine to False Teaching

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Paul gave the young evangelist Timothy this charge: “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). Why was it so important for Timothy to do this? Paul goes on: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Apostasy was coming. At some point, those who were once receptive to the pure, unadulterated gospel would want something different. How does such a change happen? It certainly does not happen overnight. There is a progression that takes place, leading Christians away from sound doctrine and into false teaching.

What Is Sound Doctrine?

We must first understand what we are discussing. These terms may be defined differently by different people. But we are interested in how the Bible defines them. In the passage quoted above, sound doctrine is used synonymously with the word and the truth. Earlier, Paul spoke of several things that were “contrary to sound teaching,” adding that this sound teaching was “according to the glorious gospel” (1 Timothy 1:10-11). “Sound words” are “those of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Timothy 6:3). This included the words of Paul and the other apostles (2 Timothy 1:13; 1 Corinthians 14:37).

How much of the gospel is to be categorized as sound doctrine? When Paul preached, he “did not shrink from

declaring... the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). Peter said, “Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God” (1 Peter 4:11). Paul warned the Galatians that one who would “distort the gospel” is in fact teaching “a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6-7). Sound doctrine is the word of God without and additions, subtractions, or changes.

What Is False Teaching?

This is another term that causes some difficulty for people. False teaching is simply a message that is contrary to the truth of the gospel. As Paul told the Galatians, it is a perverted form of the gospel (Galatians 1:6-7). He told the brethren in Thessalonica that one can either “believe what is false” or “believe the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). There are those who claim that one can only be called a false teacher if his motives are corrupt. But it is God's place, not ours, to judge the hearts and minds of men (Hebrews 4:12; John 12:48). Our responsibility is to judge their fruits (Matthew 7:15-16). The basis for determining whether one is a truth teacher or a false teacher is their message.

How Does the Progression Occur?

So how do we move from sound doctrine to false teaching? First, we must understand that this shift really does occur. The Bible tells us so. The Ephesian elders were told, “from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). Peter said, “there will also be false teachers among you” (2 Peter 2:1). Paul wrote, “The Spirit explicitly says” that some will depart from the

truth (1 Timothy 4:1). He told Timothy of two of these men – Hymenaeus and Philetus. These men had “gone astray from the truth” (2 Timothy 2:17-18). In order to go astray from the truth, they first had to be in the truth. Yet they departed from it. How does this happen?

We first begin with sound doctrine. Without this, one does not need to fall into apostasy, he is already in error. So in this article, we are talking about those who begin in the truth and move away from it into error. Our responsibility is to “retain the standard of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13) and to “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3). If this is what we are currently doing, we need to continue on this path. But sadly, many depart and eventually end up in total apostasy.

The first step into apostasy is for one to teach the right message, but without the proper appeal to Scripture. At this stage, their points and conclusions may be valid, but they are abandoning the book, chapter and verse style of preaching. They no longer preach as Paul did, where he “reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence...” (Acts 17:2-3). They may still agree with sound doctrine, but they are no longer backing up their points with Scripture.

As one removes Scripture from his teaching, he must fill his lessons with something else. What will he use then to back up his points?

Stories – It may be that there is nothing wrong with the occasional story to illustrate a point. But when a sermon is built around and filled with stories, then there is a problem. Paul said that those who “turn away their ears from the truth... will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:4). We need to focus on the word of God. If it’s necessary to use a story to illustrate a point, there are lots of events in the Bible itself we could use. Relying too much upon non-Biblical stories and analogies is dangerous. I’ll explain why later in this article.

Human wisdom – The Bible warns against following after human wisdom. The proverb says, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). Yet many preachers use human wisdom to support their preaching. This comes in many

different forms, such as famous quotes, song lyrics, scientific theories, psychology, etc.

Misused Scriptures – One can make a passage say almost anything if they ignore the context. A preacher may sometimes be tempted to take shortcuts in his studies, and rather than find the right passage that supports his point, he finds one he can twist into making his point, even if the context indicates that the passage is not making the same point he wants it to make. Want to teach about brotherly love? Great. Just don’t use a passage about the Lord’s rebuke of the Ephesians departure from Christ to do it (Revelation 2:4 – “you have left your first love”). Use passages that actually talk about brotherly love.

Remember, at this first stage, the message is still basically the same. The only difference is the way in which it is presented. This new way appeals to many people. For many in the audience, this style of preaching will hold their attention better. For the preacher, he may have an easier time writing lessons since he doesn’t have to spend as much time in careful study of the word of God. But when this style of preaching is adopted, there are several things that begin to happen:

People begin to trust in what they’ve heard before and what they already think, rather than God’s word. If the appeal is no longer made to Scripture, then another standard must be adopted in order to determine the truth. Naturally, that standard becomes that which is familiar and agreeable.

They believe something because it makes sense. Human wisdom prevails when it comes to subjects with which they are unfamiliar or if they lack maturity in them. Failing to approach new and/or difficult topics with careful and targeted Bible study leaves us to follow whatever seems reasonable to us.

They also begin to put their trust in man, particularly the preacher. God’s word is a “lamp to [our] feet” (Psalm 119:105). But if we no longer rely upon the light of His word to show us the way, we have to find direction from some other source. For many, this source becomes the preacher. If he is teaching myths and fables, instead of

the word of God, the dependency of the brethren upon him grows.

When Christians become accustomed to this kind of preaching, error can take hold and do severe damage to the brethren, both individually and to a congregation as a whole. Eventually, false teaching will be introduced. If we have not been trained sufficiently with “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17), or are out of practice with it, we will not be able to fight off the error that is creeping in. We’ll notice why in a moment.

But first, think of how a false teacher must introduce his error. We know he cannot do so through a reasonable explanation of the Scriptures as Paul did (Acts 17:2-3). So what style of preaching will the false teacher use to advance his doctrine?

He will use stories to back up his points. People enjoy stories. A good story-teller can keep an audience captivated. But further, you can teach anything, make any point, through a story. This is perfectly suited to a false teacher (and is also why it is dangerous to rely too heavily on non-Biblical stories and analogies).

He will use human wisdom to validate his claims. False teaching is based upon human wisdom. Society, in general, is conditioned to follow after human wisdom. If one uses human wisdom to promote a message, rather than contrasting the wisdom from above (the word of God) from earthly wisdom (James 3:15-17), he can teach almost anything because he is using the standard that society generally accepts.

He will misuse Scripture to state his case. This is a common tactic – ignore the context, change definitions, explain away certain passages. This is how there are so many different denominations teaching differing doctrines, yet all claiming to follow the Bible. They twist the Scriptures and convince many people that their message is actually from God.

Notice that this style of preaching is the same as it was under the first step towards apostasy – stories, human wisdom, misused Scriptures. As a result, it is often hard for people to see the difference between truth and error. Why? They have become accustomed to this style of preaching. It makes sense. It sounds familiar.

And they have forgotten how to accurately handle the word of God to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1), and, upon finding one who is teaching error, to destroy “speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:5). As a result, they eventually go along with the error, oblivious to the fact that they have departed from “the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

How Is This Stopped?

How can we stop this progression from occurring? The solution is simple: We must use the style of preaching commended to us in the Bible. We must “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11), just as Paul who “reasoned... from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence” (Acts 17:2-3). We must not be afraid to talk about all that God has revealed to us, lest we “shrink from declaring the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27).

Preachers must use this style of preaching. Elders, along with the rest of the brethren, must not only tolerate this type of preaching, but demand it. This may not be popular, but it is God’s way. We ought to trust Him, knowing that His way is best. andysochor@gmail.com

Via *The Auburn Beacon*, Auburn, Alabama

The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

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Edward Gibbon authored a six-volume series of books between 1776 and 1788. In this series he covers the deteriorating conditions of the Roman Empire from 180 A.D. to 1590 A.D. He points to five major factors in which he attributed to the fall of the Empire. Let’s list the five reasons for Rome’s fall, and then make some comments and observations as applied to America today:

1. The rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society.

Right now in America, one out of every two marriages (50%) are ending in divorce. It is becoming more and more common to talk to individuals who have been divorced three or four times. Then we have a large number of our population who do not bother to get

married, they just live together—in the sin of fornication. (Col. 3:5-7) And if that is not bad enough, the sin of homosexuality is gaining acceptance, and “same-sex marriages” are becoming legal in some states. (See Rom. 1:26-28) But just because some sin or vice is legally right, that does not mean that it is morally or biblically right! “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isa. 5:20).

Concerning the undermining of the sanctity of the home, we live in a time when husbands and wives are ignoring and giving up their God-given roles in the family. Many homes today are run by children, which is appalling!

2. Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public monies for free bread and circuses for the populace.

Consider all the debates that are now being considered over tax issues. Christians are to pay their taxes (Rom. 13:6-7). But there is so much controversy over tax hikes and where Americans’ tax dollars are to be spent. Part of the discussions over the new health-care bill involved tax payers’ money being used to fund abortions. In fact, it was included in the Senate bill until the president signed an executive order to stop it. If funding abortions with tax payers’ money ever starts (and many want to see that happen), it will be the first time in American history. While abortion (the murder of the unborn) has been legal in this country since 1973, that still doesn’t make it right in view of such passages as Psalm 139:13-16. How tragic for a nation to even allow abortion in the first place! And, of course, “the right to choose” (or “choice”) sounds so much better than killing or murdering unborn babies.

3. The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal.

We live in a pleasure-crazed culture. That is all some live for, especially their partying, dancing, beer-drinking weekends. (Lk. 8:14; Gal. 5:19; 2 Tim. 3:4; 1 Pet. 4:3-4) The obsession with sports has just about gotten out of hand. I must say that I enjoy sports, but in recent years, my enthusiasm has waned. The last time I attended a

college football game, I asked myself, “What am I doing here?” — many who were seated around me were acting totally out of their minds; appeared totally drunk; and talked like they would fight you “at the drop of a hat.” The mad craze for sports reflects a warped value system in America today. It is truly amazing to think that athletes and coaches are paid multi-millions each year to play or coach a game.

4. The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within, the decadence of the people.

Over and over, the Old Testament prophets warned the people of God to place their faith and trust in Him, not in horses, chariots, or weapons. Some years back, a world leader stated that America would fall without a shot being fired. Think of how far we have fallen into decadence within one or two generations. Young children are growing up without any training on morals or teaching concerning respect for the authority of God or their fellowman.

5. The decay of religion—faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to warn and guide the people.

Paul spoke of those in the “last days” who would be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:4-5). Many denominations have become nothing more than glorified “social clubs”. Even some of our own brethren have lost sight of the spiritual mission of the church. All they think of is fun, food, and frolic. There is no authority in the New Testament for churches to build gymnasiums, have ball teams, dining halls, day-care centers, etc., etc.

I fear that America is rapidly forgetting God. Some of our own leaders resent this nation being referred to as founded upon biblical principles – “under God” or “in God we trust.” The Psalmist stated, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, And all the nations that forget God” (Psa. 9:17). We all need to be praying for America and its’ leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2). May we always remember: “Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34).