

12. Dealing With False Teachers (3Q 2026 1 and 2 Corinthians)

Biblical material: 2 Cor. 10:1–17; Jer. 9:24; 2 Cor. 11:1–15, 22–28; 2 Cor. 12:20, 21; 2 Cor. 13:5.

Quotes

- False teachers invite people to come to the Master's table because of what's on it, not because they love the Master. *Hank Hanegraaff*
- Unless those who claim to be God's spokesmen give evidence that their deepest motives and life patterns are to honor, glory, and magnify God, and to grow in humility, holiness, and obedience, we can be sure that God has not called or sent them. If they are orientated to money, prestige, recognition, popularity, power, sexual looseness, and selfishness, they do not belong to Jesus Christ. If they are proud arrogant, resentful, egotistical, and self-indulgent, they clearly are false prophets. The true test: a beatitude attitude of humility. *John MacArthur*
- It is ultimately positive teaching about the Christian faith that will serve as the best protection against heresy, for we can never cover all the possible errors that false teachers might come up with. *Douglas Moo*
- What is the best safe-guard against false teaching? Beyond all doubt the regular study of the word of God, with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Bible was given to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm. 119:105). The man who reads it aright will never be allowed greatly to err. It is neglect of the Bible which makes so many a prey to the first false teacher whom they hear. *J.C. Ryle*
- To turn away from the lifeless preachers and publishers of the day—may involve a real cross. Your motives will be misconstrued, your words perverted, and your actions misinterpreted. The sharp arrows of false report will be directed against you. You will be called proud and self-righteous, because you refuse to fellowship empty professors. You will be termed censorious and bitter—if you condemn in plain speech—the subtle delusions of Satan. You will be dubbed narrow-minded and uncharitable, because you refuse to join in singing the praises of the “great” and “popular” men of the day. More and more, you will be made to painfully realize—that the path which leads unto eternal life is “narrow” and that FEW there are who find it. *Arthur W. Pink*

Questions

Why is it so important to deal with false teachers? Who decides what is true and what is false? How do we best deal with those who call us names and assassinate our characters? What can we learn from Paul's example in the situation he faced in Corinth? How does such conflicts in the church reflect the ongoing issues in the great controversy? What do they tell us?

Bible summary

In 2 Corinthians 10:1–17 Paul takes issue with his critics. The Lord says, “Anyone who wants to boast should boast that they really know and understand me...” Jeremiah 9:24. 2 Corinthians 11:1–15; 22–28 is Paul's summary of the evidence for his claim to being a true apostle. In 2 Corinthians 12:20, 21 Paul worries about what he may find when he visits: arguments, jealousy, anger, rivalry, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder. “Examine yourselves to see if you are trusting God. Put yourselves to the test. Don't you yourselves realize that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless you have failed the test...” 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Comment

Paul spends a considerable amount of time at the end of his letter dealing with critics and divisive teacher who he calls “super-apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5). He seems to have been the subject of some very personal attacks. He's not dealing with some abstract philosophical points

here—he's having to face strong personal criticism from influential members in the church. So it's very helpful to see how Paul deals with this, since such situations are still very much with us today.

First, he calls out his critics. He states very clearly what they have said about him: that he is shy face to face, but bold, tough, and severe when he writes, that he's feeble in person, and he's a useless speaker (2 Corinthians 10:1, 11).

Second, he doesn't get into the name-calling, or reply in kind. He simply points to the evidence of what he has done, without boasting about it.

Thirdly, he rejects the charges of exploitation, pointing to the evidence that he never took any "pay" from the Corinthians. He then lists out his suffering for the gospel, as evidence that he is not benefitting from being an apostle.

Fourthly, he admits his weaknesses, affirming that these make him rely on the Lord even more.

Finally, he concludes with a warning that he won't hesitate to act against those who wrongly accuse him, citing the law that any charge has to be verified by two or three witnesses. He's not looking for a legal trial, but he's putting the false teachers on notice that he will deal with them when he comes.

Why do all this? Because it is spoiling the Christian experience of the Corinthians with all this divisiveness, and the controversies distract from growing in the truth. While we may choose not to get involved in provocative name-calling, when it starts hindering the work of the gospel then it has to be stopped.

In the same way Jesus when he was opposed by the priests and religious leaders of his time had to point out their evil hypocrisy because of the impact on the people, and on the perpetrators themselves. Jesus wasn't being combative just for the sake of it—he was concerned for the salvation of these pretentiously pious men, and for those they influenced. False teachers need to be confronted with the truth, and people need to make their decisions.

Ellen White Comments

I had reason to expect my brethren would act like sensible men, weigh evidence, give credence to evidence, and not turn aside from light and facts of truth and give credence to tidbits of hearsay and suppositions; wonderfully cautious in regard to matters of testimony which they had not any reason to question, and open mind and heart to greedily accept and publish to others the mere words born of prejudice and envy and jealousy. {1888 643}

The church at Corinth was largely made up of Gentiles. Paul had labored earnestly among them, and had brought them to a knowledge of the truth. But after Paul had left them, false teachers had arisen, who had questioned the apostleship and ministry of Paul. They spoke contemptuously of him, and tried to make comparisons between themselves and him that would belittle him in the eyes of the church. Paul did not seek to exalt himself. But when falsehoods threatened to destroy the effects of his ministry, faithfulness to his mission made it necessary for him to honor God by vindicating his character and magnifying his office. {6BC 1082}

The great deceiver has many agents ready to present any and every kind of error to ensnare souls—heresies prepared to suit the varied tastes and capacities of those whom he would ruin. It is his plan to bring into the church insincere, unregenerate elements that will encourage doubt and unbelief, and hinder all who desire to see the work of God advance and to advance with it. Many who have no real faith in God or in His word assent to some principles of truth and pass as Christians, and thus they are enabled to introduce their errors as Scriptural doctrines. The position that it is of no consequence what men believe is one of Satan's most successful deceptions. He knows that the truth, received in the love of it, sanctifies the soul of the receiver; therefore he is constantly seeking to substitute false theories, fables, another gospel. From the beginning the servants of God have contended against false teachers, not merely as vicious men, but as inculcators of falsehoods that were fatal to the soul. Elijah, Jeremiah, Paul, firmly and fearlessly opposed those who were turning men from the word of God. {GC 520}