

FALSE TEACHERS

Recently we have been hearing much discussion among brethren as to who should be considered a false teacher. Some are saying that a person should not be considered a false teacher unless he manifests the characteristics listed by Peter in 2 Peter 2:1-3. Here Peter warns, *"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."*

We are being told that if a person is kind, sincere and does not manifest all the characteristics described by Peter then that one should not be considered a false teacher. I am persuaded that this is a very dangerous attitude for anyone to have. A false teacher is one who teaches that which is false. If a person believes false teaching and follows such he is wrong even if both he and the one who taught him the false doctrine are very kind and sincere in their beliefs.

Paul told the Romans to *"mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them"* (Romans 16:17). He goes on to point out that they *"serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple"* (v. 18). Paul here tells us the standard to be used in determining whether one is a false teacher. They cause divisions and offences *"contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned."* The doctrine they had learned is the same doctrine to which they had been obedient and by which they had been made free from sin (Romans 6:17). It is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). When anyone teaches anything contrary to this doctrine he is a false teacher. His teaching will cause divisions and offences with anyone who holds to sound doctrine. He may say he does not want to cause division and he may appear to be (and may be) very sincere, but if he teaches that which is contrary to the teaching of Christ he is wrong.

Jesus spoke of some who would say, *"Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?"* (Matthew 7:22) However, Jesus said, *"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity"* (v. 23). There is nothing in these verses to indicate these did not really believe they were doing right, however Jesus said they were workers of "iniquity." They were acting without law or authority from Him.

It is sad, indeed, when a false teacher, with smooth words and fair speeches, can deceive people and is more readily received than one who will stand firm for the truth of God's word. The teacher of truth is often viewed as a trouble maker or one who simply doesn't have the proper love for others.

The truth is the only thing that will make us free and obedience to truth is the only thing that will purify our souls (John 8:32; 1 Peter 1:22). We need to love the truth and uphold and support those who teach it. When one turns from the truth we must strive to restore that one but if he will not be restored we must mark that one as a false teacher and avoid him (Romans 16:17).

A favorite ploy of the false teacher is to say that those who oppose him simply want everyone to see things their way and try to make it appear that it is simply a matter of two individuals expressing their own personal views. We all agree (or should) that there is no justification for

anyone pressing their personal views to the dividing of the body of Christ, however that is not to say that we can not be certain about anything or that we can not take a stand on anything or that we must be receptive to everyone regardless of what they teach.

I believe that a person must be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). This is not my personal opinion, it is not just what I have chosen to believe; it is what the scriptures teach. If one does not believe and teach this he is a false teacher. Also, for a person to condone that which is not authorized would be the same. There are some things that are not authorized in God's word and to practice such is sin (2 John 9). Instrumental music in worship, church support of human organizations and institutions and many other practices would meet this description. When I oppose these practices, again, it is not just my opinion, it is not just what I have chosen to believe. These things are without Bible authority and are wrong. Men may say we ought to learn to "get along" and not to be fussing over so many things, but we can not compromise the truth or give support to those who do if we would maintain the favor of God (2 John 9-11).

✍ James Hahn