



# Exposing False Teaching...

## Is it Divisive?

When a believer exposes false teaching, even in a biblically loving way, that person might still be considered unloving, hateful, or arrogant. Such an opinion is sometimes linked to the erroneous belief that exposing unbiblical teaching fosters disunity in the church.

Beyond a doubt, believers in Christ are to maintain unity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1-3).

**Ephesians 4:1-3**, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The context of Ephesians 4:3, however, indicates that the unity believers have is not based on feelings of tranquility or harmony but, rather, on particular objective truth:

**Ephesians 4:4-6**, There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

In addition, when Jesus prayed for the unity of His followers, He prayed first that they be sanctified in God's unchanging truth—His Word—so that they may realize authentic unity (John 17:17-23).

**John 17:17-23**, Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. <sup>20</sup> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

### TRUTH THAT UNIFIES

Christian unity and biblical truth are inseparable. Tolerating false teaching can create a distorted sense of unity that hinders authentic unity because the perceived “unity” comes at the expense of biblical truth. Dr. John Whitcomb notes:

It is evident that leading neo-evangelicals believe our main goal is to eliminate doctrinal distinctives and to emphasize unity among those claiming to be believers . . . *[in other words]* love is more important than doctrine. Ecumenical evangelists say that doctrine divides, whereas love unifies. What does the Bible say? Is it true that in the New Testament love is more important than doctrine, or Truth? In the *Love* chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, we are told: *Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love (agape).*

Some say—*That settles it: love is supreme!* But when we examine that chapter more carefully, we discover that **Truth** is also mentioned in the chapter. In verse 6 we are told that *love rejoices in the truth*. In other words, faith, hope, and love are **virtues** but Truth has an altogether different status. It is the *frame of reference*, the *foundation*, the *atmosphere* without which virtues such as *love* cannot exist at all.

**Love rejoices in the truth.** Why? Because *without Truth to define it, to interpret it, to protect it, to guide it, to channel it—love can become a total disaster.* We dare not place Truth on the same level as virtues. **Virtues would shrivel up and die if it were not for Truth.**

Love, as defined by God, is doing for a person that which is best for him in the light of eternity, no matter what the cost may be. Somehow . . . people have forgotten God's definition and have fallen into sentimentalism. Consider some key Scriptures which illustrate the distinction between love and Truth. *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.—John 8:31-32 [King James Version]*

Ultimate freedom, however, may only be achieved by total submission—unconditional surrender to Truth . . . There is no teaching whatsoever in the New Testament suggesting that love is more important than doctrine or Truth.<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Paul was not tolerant of and did not compromise with those contradicting God's Word. He urged believers to watch out for those causing division through erroneous teaching.

**Romans 16:17-18**, I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. <sup>18</sup> For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

Believers who biblically expose false teaching should be commended for guarding spiritual truth in order to maintain Christ-honoring unity in the church. Dr. Ernest Pickering, former president of Central Baptist Seminary, made the following observation.

Many earnest Christians are very much opposed to religious controversy. To them, disagreement, debate, and division over religious issues is quite deplorable and, in their judgment, contrary to the spirit of Christ and detrimental to His cause. Hence, these people tend to avoid discussions, meetings, literature, or issues which would bring into focus matters likely to cause controversy.

A plea is made for a spirit of tolerance. But one man has put his finger on the error often present here when he writes, *“There are many pleas made these days for ‘tolerance.’ But often ‘tolerance’ is not the right word for that which is demanded. What is meant is ‘compromise.’ Tolerance and compromise are not the same thing. This is tolerance -- to grant to another the same rights which I claim for myself. This is compromise -- to sacrifice heart-felt conviction in order that someone else may be pleased or in order to avoid a breach of peace.”*

To compromise with wrong in the name of tolerance is to dishonor God and His Word.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps because of misunderstanding biblical love, Christians typically identify specific evils in the world but hesitate to identify specific evils that enter the church. In spite of the discomfort that some believers may experience when false teaching in the church is publicly disclosed, biblical error cannot be ignored and should be refuted as widely as the error has been disseminated. In fact, much of the New Testament was written to correct false teaching that had crept into the Church.

## TRUTH TO DEFEND

In addition to warning believers about false teaching, Scripture also demonstrates how to deal with individuals who publicly teach and/or act contrary to Scripture. For example, the Apostle John exposed Diotrephes (3 John, verses 9-11) and promised that he would publicly correct the offender in person when he came to that church. Paul withstood Peter publicly for Peter’s hypocrisy in purposefully separating himself from Gentile believers (Galatians 2:11-14). Paul was also very specific in instructing Titus to “rebuke sharply those of the circumcision” who were teaching falsely (Titus 1:9-14). Paul drew attention to two false teachers (Hymenaeus and Philetus) who strayed from the truth and were upsetting the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

**3 John 9-11**, I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. <sup>10</sup> So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

**Galatians 2:11-14**, But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

**Titus 1:9-14**, He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. <sup>10</sup> For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. <sup>11</sup> They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. <sup>12</sup> One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” <sup>13</sup> This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup> not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

**2 Timothy 2:16-18**, But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, <sup>17</sup> and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, <sup>18</sup> who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

## TRUTH TO EVALUATE

Exposing false teaching does not destroy unity in the body of Christ. Rather, it promotes unity by guarding the doctrinal purity that undergirds unity in the church.

Believers must remember that any public teaching is subject to public discussion and evaluation. Christian leaders cannot claim teaching infallibility on the basis of personal position or popularity. Instead, the un failing test of teaching integrity is whether or not biblical truth is accurately proclaimed. Teachers who meet this standard have nothing to fear, even if they face fierce opposition from those denying scriptural truth. On the other hand, teachers who depart from the truth of God's Word may win acclaim from those who are undiscerning, but these false teachers should consistently face firm opposition from defenders of biblical truth.

The fact that spiritual deception can run rampant among believers is not surprising. The shelves of many Christian bookstores are filled with printed heresy. Our self-obsessed world gravitates toward self-help books based on humanistic psychology, educational perspectives based on secular humanism, and Bible studies based on the unbiblical concept of self-esteem. Many of these perspectives are promoted as if they were the very words of God. Sadly, some Christian publishers have strayed from guarding the truth and are now conduits of worldly philosophies that can lead biblically undiscerning people away from God's truth.

Similarly, the electronic media can rapidly disseminate the world's beliefs that are deceptively cloaked in religious terminology. Some radio teachers, TV personalities, contemporary Christian musicians, and prominent Christian leaders present unbiblical messages that have their roots in secular humanism and other worldly perspectives at the expense of scriptural truth.

With the prevalence of false teaching by professing Christians, believers should reaffirm that it is not divisive to disagree publicly with unbiblical teaching. Indeed, the Bible speaks out against division caused by heresy (Galatians 1:6-10; 2 Peter 2:1-3) as well as division based on believers exalting personalities over the supremacy of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).

**Galatians 1:6-10**, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. <sup>10</sup> For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

**2 Peter 2:1-3**, But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup> And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup> And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

**1 Corinthians 1:10-17**, I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Since false teaching can cause division in the church, biblically exposing false teaching can enhance unity in the church as believers study God's Word together to discover and reaffirm His truth.

## CONCLUSION

Unbiblical teaching is widespread. To counteract this reality, believers can faithfully proclaim the Gospel in the world, encouraging others to believe in Christ. In the church, believers can exhibit biblical love by faithfully warning fellow believers of heresy and its propagators. Believers can also show false teachers how they have contradicted scriptural truth. Remember, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love" (Proverbs 27:5) and "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6).

*For a biblical plan to deal with those who teach falsely, see **Refuting False Teaching—for God's Glory and Our Protection** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Refuting%20False%20Teaching.pdf>.*

Believers are to love one another genuinely and to maintain "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3, printed earlier). Growing in the true unity of the faith, we should "no longer be children, tossed to and fro

by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Pray that God will continue to raise up godly men and women who will stand firm in the face of deception and expose false teaching. May these proponents of biblical truth be ready to welcome any suffering for the cause of Christ as a result of proclaiming and defending the truth of God’s Word.

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<sup>1</sup> *When Love Divorces Doctrine and Unity Rejects Truth* by Dr. John C. Whitcomb, Jr. (<http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Introduction/lovedoc.htm>).

<sup>2</sup> *Is Controversy Christian* by Dr. Ernest Pickering (<http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Introduction/iscontr.htm>)