



Refuting False Teaching... For God's Glory & Our Protection

Being established in the faith—living a life consistent with sound teaching—is closely linked with maturing in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-15, Colossians 2:6-8). Consequently, Christians are to watch carefully what they believe and teach (1 Timothy 4:16, 2 Timothy 2:15). It is a mark of noble character to examine all teaching to ensure that it is consistent with the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

Ephesians 4:11-15, And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may 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. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Colossians 2:6-8, Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

1 Timothy 4:16, Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

2 Timothy 2:15, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Acts 17:11, Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

As you mature in Christ, you may encounter many teachings that differ from your personal understanding of God's Word. If that situation occurs, you may be tempted to assume that the teacher is wrong and that you are right. But as the above passages indicate, when you encounter those differences, your first response should be to study the Scriptures carefully and prayerfully. This practice will keep you from spiritual folly (Proverbs 18:2, 13, 15).

Proverbs 18:2, A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

Proverbs 18:13, If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

Proverbs 18:15, An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

In many instances, you will find that the teacher had insights into biblical truth that you had not considered previously, and you will be encouraged and built up through your personal study.

You may also find that, on some points, believers can interpret the Bible in different ways. Throughout the history of the church, godly men and women have had differences of opinion regarding how to understand the Scriptures (for example, Calvinism versus Arminianism, Dispensationalism versus Covenantalism, various positions regarding eschatology, etc.). Even when these differences occur, Scripture admonishes believers to maintain unity (1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 2:1-4) and trust God to mature His people and to reveal the fullness of biblical truth in those matters (Philippians 3:15).

1 Corinthians 1:10, 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.

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, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Philippians 2:1-4, So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 3:15, Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

When teaching is contrary to Scripture (such as someone teaching that you must consider your own good above another's good) or misrepresents the person and work of Christ (such as teaching you must forgive yourself to be complete), it is clearly false and requires a definite response (Galatians 1:6-9; 1 John 2:22-24; 4:1-3).

Galatians 1:6-9, 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— ⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But 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. ⁹As 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.

1 John 2:22-24, Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. ²³No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

1 John 4:1-3, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Refer to:

False Teaching Attacks Truth About Jesus & the Bible at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/False%20Teaching%20b.pdf> and ***False Teaching that is Easily Recognized and Exposed*** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/False%20Teaching%20that%20is%20Easily%20Recognized%20and%20Exposed.pdf>

When you deal with those who teach falsely, your goals must be to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31), to win back the person(s) teaching falsely (2 Timothy 2:24; James 5:19-20), and to protect and preserve the unity of the Body of Christ (Romans 16:17).

1 Corinthians 10:31, So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

2 Timothy 2:24-26, And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

James 5:19-20, My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Romans 16:17, 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.

In addition, you must take care that you deal with the teacher in a loving manner (1 Timothy 1:5-7) that demonstrates kindness, patience, and gentleness (2 Timothy 2:24 printed above). Maintaining these attributes can be difficult because a person who holds on to false teaching often has an unhealthy craving for controversy and quarrels about words, producing constant friction among people (1 Timothy 6:3-5). As a result, you must be very careful to deal with your own pride and instead pursue godliness in your own life (1 Timothy 4:7).

1 Timothy 1:5-7, The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

1 Timothy 6:3-5, If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

1 Timothy 4:7, Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;

In light of the above, if you determine you must deal directly with a person teaching contrary to Scripture (whether the person is a friend, author, teacher, or pastor), you will find the following process helpful. Some of it is based on biblical teaching regarding how to deal with a brother who habitually sins.

The process will take a little time to implement and will require even more time for results to appear. However, your faithfulness in this matter is worth it, not only for you and your church but also for the larger Body of Christ. To review the biblical basis underlying this process, refer to the following:

False Teaching in the Church and How to Oppose It at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/False%20Teaching%20in%20the%20Church%20and%20How%20to%20Oppose%20It.pdf> and

Church Discipline and Restoration Process at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Church%20Discipline%20and%20Restoration%20Process.pdf>

Specific steps:

- Examine yourself. Before the Lord, deal with any pride on your own part and, instead, determine to minister out of love.

Matthew 7:1-5, Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

- Pray for the person(s) whom you believe to be teaching falsely.

Philippians 4:6, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

- Faithfully study God's Word regarding the topic under consideration.

2 Timothy 2:15, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

- Prepare a written explanation for the person(s) whom you believe to be teaching falsely. In the explanation, present the specific teaching that you believe is not substantiated by Scripture. Writing your explanation will help you clarify your presentation of biblical truth and, possibly, provide opportunity for you to submit your concerns to others who may also become involved in confronting this erroneous teaching. Writing your explanation can also provide clear feedback as to whether your presentation exalts God's Word and honors Christ.

Ask fellow believers who are mature in Christ to review the material you consider to be false teaching along with your written explanation. As you go forward in this process, ask for their assistance in presenting biblical truth that corrects the error in a Christ-honoring way. The goal at this point is to ensure you understand Biblical truth accurately and are presenting it graciously, not to win an argument or prove your point. *Make copies of all written communication for future reference.*

- If the person or organization promoting false teaching provides no Scripture references, then your correspondence should highlight the specific false teaching statement(s) along with one question which is: **"Where does the Bible say that?"** *Keep in mind, however, that unbelievers who present false teaching do not esteem the Bible as authoritative so citing Scripture will make little, if any, impact on them if they continue to reject Christ.*

On the other hand, if the teachers teach falsely but present specific verse(s) to try to prove that their teaching is biblically accurate, evaluate these verses for accuracy with regard to:

- * Context
- * Word definitions, as used in the original languages of the Bible
- * Grammar, as used by the original authors of Scripture
- * Comparison with other verses on the same subject
- * Cultural and historical information, if applicable

If you do not have a Bible study program, you can download the free E-Sword program at <http://www.e-sword.net/downloads.html>

These initial steps—judging yourself, prayer, study, written communication, and asking other believers for assistance—begin the process of trying to correct false teaching.

- If you do not receive an answer to your initial written communication to the person(s) whom you believe are teaching falsely, write again and request a scriptural defense of the perceived error.

If there is still no answer, submit your correspondence on this matter to your church leaders. Ask them to write the teacher in question or, if you are wrong in your understanding of the subject, ask your church leaders to explain—with specific Scriptures—where you lack understanding.

The following steps take more time and prayer to accomplish, but they are necessary to expose false teaching and subsequently to guide all concerned to a clearly understood conclusion in this process.

- If you receive a reply as a result of your original correspondence and the teacher (author, pastor, Christian celebrity, organizational representative) defends the false teaching, you may be surprised at the lack of biblical insight the person has in trying to defend an unbiblical perspective. Invariably, if Scripture is used to try and defend an unscriptural position, verses will be taken out of context. Compile a concise, courteous scriptural refutation of the teaching in question.

Before sending your reply, it is helpful to ask your church leaders (or their representative) to review past correspondence as well as your current anticipated reply. This review should help church leaders determine the scriptural accuracy of what has been presented thus far. They should also review the manner in which you present your reply and make suggested revisions as needed. Involving church leaders in the defense of biblical truth alerts them that they may have continued responsibility concerning this situation.

If, in communicating with your church leaders, you recognize that you were in error or simply lacked understanding on the subject, write the one whom you originally challenged and ask for forgiveness. Also let him/her know that this situation has given you opportunity to grow in Christ.

On the other hand, if your church leaders affirm that your understanding on a particular issue is biblically correct yet the person or organization continues to teach falsely, then a subsequent step is helpful. Ask your church leaders to communicate in writing to the teacher, publisher, organization, and/or church from which the false teaching is disseminated. The communication from your church leaders must be focused on the error and corresponding scriptural refutation. In love, your church leaders should urge those who are able to stem this particular false teaching to fulfill their responsibility to do so.

Note: your church leaders may recognize the false teaching and affirm the steps you have already taken but not believe they should communicate with the false teacher. If this happens, courteously ask the leaders to explain why they will not write the false teacher and what they plan to do to protect the congregation from the error. You may have to remind the leaders of their responsibility to guard the flock from those who teach falsely. Maintain a humble, teachable, loving, and submissive attitude in dealing with your church leaders (Hebrews 13:17).

Hebrews 13:17, Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

*[For an explanation of what the above verse says about responsibilities of leaders and followers, see **Biblical Insights that are “Out of Sight” (Part 3)** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Insights%20Out%20of%20Sight--Part%203.pdf>]*

- Those who choose to continue in false teaching or help to propagate error should be disregarded [*both turned away from and avoided*] by you and fellow believers.

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. 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.

Titus 3:9-10, But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him.

- In the process of officially disregarding those propagating or disseminating false teaching, church leaders must prayerfully consider how to communicate this decision to the church family as well as to the teacher(s) and organization(s) involved in this particular spread of false teaching. This written communication should note the church's official action of disregarding those who continue to teach falsely and should also list the steps followed in reaching this decision.
- If those spreading unbiblical teaching realize their mistake, encourage them to rectify their error to the same extent as the original propagation of their erroneous viewpoints. For example, if they published their false teaching, then they should be encouraged to publish a retraction. If they taught in the electronic media, then their refutation of earlier statements should be made in that arena as well.

Those disseminating unbiblical perspectives might choose not to refute their previously held views and, correspondingly, fail to ask for understanding and forgiveness from those who received their original communication. If such a situation occurs, church leaders must make a choice. They can choose to limit their communication on this matter to those in the church family or, on the other hand, increase the scope of their communication in an effort to refute specific false teaching that has widespread dissemination.

The reality of false teaching and, sadly, its acceptance by professing believers is a challenge that the Church has always encountered. May Christ-honoring disciples rise to this particular challenge in the battle for Truth . . . out of love for fellow believers and out of a desire to do all for the glory of God.