

The Condition of the Church Today

A Warning About the Enemy Within

The Nature of False Teaching, Teachers, Attendees

March 27, 2011

- I. Review:
 - A. The title of our current study is “The Condition of the Church Today.” The subtitle is “A Warning About the Enemy Within.”
 - B. Last Sunday we began by talking about the power of culture to influence us in almost every area of life. We concluded our study with a look at several New Testament scriptures that God has given us, to warn us about the presence and nature of false teaching, false teachers, and those who prefer the false teaching over the truth of God and His Word.
 - C. Today, my main goal is to go further in showing us the nature of the false teaching, the nature of the false teachers, and the nature of those who want the false teaching over God’s truth. I hope to conclude today’s teaching with a beginning picture of the enemy that lurks within the church.
 - D. Pray

- II. Scriptures Exposing the Nature of False Teaching, the Nature of False Teachers, and the Nature of Those Who Want to Hear It.
 - A. I want to acknowledge that there is a considerable amount of murkiness in the church today concerning the true gospel and the false gospel. And because of this murkiness, it is hard to draw a distinction between the false and the true that is so clear, that the false is obvious in all cases, and the truth is undeniable. I see **two** primary reasons for this murkiness.
 1. **First**, the false teaching is so intertwined with parts of the truth that though it is false, it appears true. Here is how it happens: Within the organized church, many hunger and thirst after happiness rather than righteousness. Now those who hunger and thirst after happiness, love themselves more than God, and want more for themselves than they want for God. Because their priorities are backwards, they find the true gospel unsettling – and some even find it offensive. And yet, they don’t want to abandon God, and they don’t want to lose out on His blessings – in this life or in the next. So they mix in a sufficient amount of falsehood to make the message pleasing to their ears and comforting to their psyche. And in doing this, they muddy the waters and make it all the harder to discern truth from falsehood.

2. **Second**, the false teaching is sought after and acclaimed as true by so many in the organized church that the sheer numbers make it seem right.

B. Now that I have given you two reasons for the murkiness, I want to give you two primary principles that distinguish the false gospel from the true.

1. **The first principle:** In a general way, false teaching elevates “self” above God, just as Lucifer sought to elevate himself above God. Here are two examples.
 - a. **First**, false teaching promises such things as happiness, mental and emotional health, physical health, relationship health, financial blessing, and a pleasant church experience **independent** of any requirements or conditions God places on receiving His blessings (i.e., repentance for salvation, taking communion in an unworthy manner, confessing and putting away known sin to gain a healing). This exalts the desires of our self-life above the will of God for us.
 - b. **Second**, false teaching elevates us and our wants over God and His wants by insinuating that God is here to serve us – as opposed to the true gospel which teaches we are here to serve God.
2. The true gospel, generally speaking, elevates God above all – and not just in word, but also in how we think, what we value, what we desire, what we choose, what we say, and how we live day in and day out. The supreme example of the true gospel is Jesus – who lived to do the will of God, speak the words of God, and do the deeds of God.
 - a. In elevating God above all else, the true gospel continually reminds us of God’s superiority and our inferiority, God’s position of authority and our position as servant, God’s will and the expectation that we submit to His will, **and** God’s holiness, along with the requirement that we pursue becoming holy as He is holy.
 - b. Now without question, the true gospel makes much of the grace of God, the forgiveness of God, the patience of God, the promises of God, the blessings of God, the peace of God, and the joy of the Lord – but never in any way that implies we can have any of these apart from faith in God, repentance of our rebellion against God, putting away all known sin, and seriously pursuing spiritual growth – with the goal of becoming a mature Christian.
3. Let me restate these two primary principles separating false teaching from the truth of God:

- a. False teaching elevates self above God. It makes us the important ones and God the servant whose task it is to please us.
 - b. The true gospel teaches the superiority of God above all else. It makes us God's servants who are to live to please Him.
- C. There are three scripture portions from Jeremiah that give us clear information about the nature of false teaching, the nature of false teachers, and the nature of those who want to hear it.
1. **Jeremiah 5:30-31** . . . An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: [31] The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?
 - a. Nature of the false teaching:
 - (1) It is appalling and horrible to God.
 - (2) The audience – God's people – love it.
 - (3) It conveys a sense of security with God that is non-existent.
 - b. Nature of the false teachers:
 - (1) They use their position of authority to give authenticity to their message.
 - (2) They are self-appointed and self-ruled, rather than God appointed and submissive to God's rule.
 - c. Nature of those who like hearing the false teaching:
 - (1) The truth of God and the way of God no longer appeals to them. They don't love the truth any more.
 - (2) They want a message that is short on requirements for holiness and long on promises of grace, blessings, and security from God's discipline and judgment.
 2. **Jeremiah 14:13-16** . . . But, "Ah, Lord GOD!" I said, "Look, the prophets are telling them, 'You will not see the sword nor will you have famine, but I (God) will give you lasting peace in this place.' " [14] Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination (forecasting), futility and the deception of their own minds. [15] "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them—yet they keep saying, 'There will be no sword or famine in this land'—by sword and famine those prophets shall meet their end! [16] "The people also to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out into

the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and there will be no one to bury them—neither them, nor their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters—for I will pour out their own wickedness on them.

- a. Nature of the false teaching:
 - (1) Promises a good life here on earth.
 - (2) Promises a gracious, generous, protective god who is tolerant toward sin.
 - (3) Makes no mention of repentance and holy living as a requirement for blessing now and for salvation on the day of judgment.
 - (4) Promotes a false confidence for the immediate future and a false sense of security for the judgment day.
- b. Nature of the false teachers:
 - (1) They teach falsehood in God's name, even though they are not sent by God.
 - (2) They teach falsehood out of their self-deceived thinking and unbiblical views of God.
- c. Nature of those who like hearing the false teaching:
 - (1) They prefer the false teaching to the truth, and the false teachers to those chosen by God to speak for Him.
 - (2) They do not see themselves as being led astray or believing a falsehood. Rather, they see themselves as good, godly people who are simply looking to God to give them the good God promised to give them.
 - (3) They hold to the teachings that tell them they can have a confident sense of security in the face of coming judgment without having to meet God's requirements for such security.

3. **Jeremiah 23:16-17** . . . Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD. [17] They keep saying to **those who despise Me**, 'The LORD has said, "You will have peace"; and as for everyone **who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart**, they say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.'

- a. Nature of the false teaching:
 - (1) It promises God's favor and blessings (peace, prosperity, health, happiness, etc.), even to those who despise the Lord – as if the only requirements God has for dispensing His

blessings are believing in His existence and being an attendee or member of the organized church.

(2) It promotes a false confidence in God's grace, mercy, and patience – even to those who walk in the stubbornness of their own heart (knowingly and persistently live contrary to God's will and word), as if willfully doing what we know is wrong has no effect on God's dealings with us.

b. Nature of the false teachers:

(1) They claim to be speaking God's words, God's truth, and even claim to be speaking for God.

(2) However, they are speaking words which come from their own imagination of what God is like, what His expectations are of us, and how He deals with us. **NOTE: Jeremiah 5:12 . . .** They have lied about the LORD and said, “**Not He**; Misfortune will not come on us, and we will not see sword or famine.”

c. Nature of those who like hearing the false teaching:

(1) They prefer to hear the false teaching because it supports their desire to go their own sinful way while feeling as if they are completely safe and secure in God.

4. **Lamentations 2:13-14 . . .** How shall I admonish you? To what shall I compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? To what shall I liken you as I comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is as vast as the sea; who can heal you? [14] Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions; and they have not exposed your iniquity so as to restore you from captivity, but they have seen for you false and misleading oracles.

a. Nature of the false teaching:

(1) It promises life but leads to death, promises happiness but leads to unconsolable sadness, promises safety and security but leads to irreversible ruin, promises God's favor but leads to God's judgment and punishment.

(2) It emphasizes God's love for us and de-emphasizes our sin. In other words, it teaches that God's love is so unconditional that it overrides anything we do, even the ongoing practice of known, unrepented sin.

(3) It proclaims security with God while at the same time leaving us in our sinful condition – which is the very condition that brings God's judgment and punishment. upon us. Of course,

this means it does not expose our sinful condition – which leaves us in an unrepentant condition and therefore outside the favor of God.

- b. Nature of the false teachers:
 - (1) Self-deceived.
 - (2) They follow their own desires and imagination rather than God's word and revealed will.
- c. Nature of those who like hearing the false teaching:
 - (1) Prophets and teachers and preachers who serve God, serve even when they are not being financially supported and cared for by the people. However, those who work for themselves serve only as long as they are being supported and cared for by the people. So why do the people continue to support false teachers? They like their message, and they want to hear that message rather than the message that comes from those who serve God.

D. For want of time, I am going to stop here with scriptures that speak to the nature of false teaching, the nature of false teachers, and the nature of those who want to hear the false teaching.

- 1. For your own edification and further consideration, I want to give you several more passages of this kind that you can examine on your own in the coming week.
- 2. Consider looking at: **Ezekiel 13:8-16; Hosea 9:7; and Micah 3:5.**

III. Summary of the three natures:

- A. **The nature of false teaching:** is to mislead; to be pleasing to the hearers; to exalt self and the will of self over God and the will of God; to build enough of its message on God's word to sound authentic; to promise a better life, now and hereafter, without any demands for holiness; it promotes an all-loving, all-tolerant God who blesses and prospers us regardless of how we live; it fosters a false sense of security in relation to the judgment and punishment of God; and it leaves us in a condition that is certain to bring judgment and punishment from God.
- B. **The nature of false teachers:** they are either self-deceived, carelessly naive, or intentional deceivers using the organized church for personal gain; since they work for hire, they teach what will appeal to the most people; their most common messages include how important we are to God (exalting self over God), God is here to serve and bless us, and God's

grace frees us from God's judgment no matter how we live; they use respected teaching positions, certain Christian behaviors, and parts of God's word to make their message appear as if it has the approval of God and the support of God's word; some even claim their message is the result of God speaking directly to them.

- C. **The nature of those who like hearing the false teaching:** they want the focus to be on them in ways that make them feel important, loved, and cared for; because they feel burdened by the demands of holiness, they press for an easier gospel that allows them to have God and His blessings while continuing to enjoy some of the ways of their flesh and the world; they gladly support the false teachers because the teaching makes them feel better about themselves and safe from God's judgment and punishment in spite of known sin in their lives; they consider themselves to be good Christians, and they feel indignation toward anyone who suggests otherwise.

IV. The enemy that lurks within the church

- A. The devil – who masquerades as an angel of light
- B. The false teachers – who feed falsehood to whomever will listen
- C. You and I – those in the pew who accumulate for themselves false teachers who will teach what they want to hear.