

False Teachers

By Cornelius R. Stam

This is a duplication of the Bible Study Booklet written by Cornelius R. Stam titled “False Teachers”. The duplication was done with permission from Berean Bible Society N112 W17761 Mequon Road, Germantown, WI 53022.

Dear Pastor,

Please read this booklet prayerfully, in the light of the Word.

What the Bible says about false teachers should bring sobering thoughts to the heart of every true man of God.

“...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.”

—II Peter 2:1, 2

What *is* a false teacher? Can one become a false teacher without knowing it or helping it? Can true believers ever become false teachers? Is there any sure protection against slipping into this category?

First, a false teacher is *not* one who teaches error through ignorance. Luther taught many errors which he carried over with him from the Roman Church, but he was not a false teacher. He took a noble stand for the light he was given and, with the watchwords “*grace alone*” and “*the just shall live by faith*,” shook all Europe and recovered much lost truth for the people of God. Later Darby and Scofield, though still not completely out of the Roman woods, recovered still more lost truth for the Church as they expounded the great doctrines of the One Body and the imminent return of Christ. The errors these men taught on certain subjects did not by any means constitute them false teachers, for who of us has *all* the truth?

Sad to say, there are many sincere men of God today who are teaching error with regard to the Messianic kingdom, the “Great Commission,” Pentecost and baptism, yet this does not make them false teachers. They are merely in error on these subjects. It is true that they *should not* be in error. They have the Scriptures, which, diligently studied and rightly divided, teach beyond doubt what is God’s message and program for the present day. But still they are not false teachers. They may be careless, unfaithful teachers, who themselves need to be taught, but they are not *false* teachers.

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The term “false teacher” denotes deceit and faithlessness in the teacher *himself*—in his character and conduct. A comparison with similar terms in the New Testament Scriptures will bear this out.

Matt. 7:15 refers to “FALSE PROPHETS” as “*wolves*” parading “*in sheep’s clothing*.”

Matt. 24:24 predicts that “FALSE CHRISTS” will seek to “*deceive*” even “*the very elect*.”

II Cor. 11:13 speaks of “FALSE APOSTLES” as “*deceitful workers*.”

Gal. 2:4 tells of “FALSE BRETHREN” who were “*unawares brought in*”; who “*came in privily to spy out*” the Gentile believers’ liberty in Christ and bring them into bondage.

Similarly II Pet. 2:1,2 warns that “FALSE TEACHERS” will “*privily ... bring in damnable heresies*” and that “*many shall follow their pernicious ways*.”

All this indicates that false teachers are deceitful, dishonest men who knowingly, willfully, deliberately teach what is untrue. Indeed, the word “false” in each of the five terms cited above is really a prefix in the Greek, meaning *lie* or *liar*.

Many sincere but uninstructed believers fail to realize that there are ungodly, unscrupulous men abroad, who parade as ambassadors for Christ in order to lead others astray. They suppose that all who teach from the Scriptures must at least be sincere and honest men, but the Spirit, who wrote the Scriptures, specifically warns us that through the Apostle Paul,

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, BY THE SLEIGHT OF MEN, AND CUNNING CRAFTINESS, WHEREBY THEY LIE IN WAIT TO DECEIVE” (Eph. 4:14).

Let us not be so naive, then, as to suppose that in a world where Satan holds sway a mere profession of sanctity is a guarantee of integrity.

We must not conclude, however, that *all* false teachers are necessarily unregenerate, ungodly men. There are “*false brethren*” too (Gal. 2:4) and there are *degrees* of falseness. A sincere man of God may yet be tempted, by the prospect of popularity or the threat of persecution, the hope of gain or the fear of loss, to teach what he knows to be untrue, and *in that measure* he becomes a *false* teacher, untrue to his Lord, his calling and his conscience—and in that measure he will suffer spiritually.

A case in point is Peter, who, great man of God that he was, yet had to be rebuked publicly because of his “*dissimulation*,” his hypocrisy, in going back on truths he knew (See Gal. 2:11, 12, 14). Another case is that of Barnabas, also an outstanding man of God, who when the others joined Peter, “*was carried away with their dissimulation*” (Ver. 13).

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It is just because men of God—even *great* men of God—can thus fail Him and us, that we must follow the example of the noble Bereans, who, after hearing Paul, “*searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11).

But let us turn again from hearer to teacher. None of us who occupy any place of leadership in the Church can boast that he has *all* the light. Yet, if we but stand true to the light we *have* received and sincerely seek for more, God will bless our ministry as surely as He blessed the ministries of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Darby and Scofield.

Thus, many today who *sincerely* suppose that the Lord’s commission to the eleven is *our* commission and that the Body of Christ began with Peter at Pentecost, are nevertheless being blessed and used of God. But the number of these is steadily decreasing. This issue has been so widely and thoroughly debated and it has been so conclusively proved that the Body began with *Paul*, that *other* apostle, and that *his* commission is ours, that there is seldom excuse for holding the traditional—and unscriptural—position.

For example, it is possible and, indeed, was once common, that a pastor, never having had cause to question that the “great commission” and water baptism belonged to the present dispensation, should seek to explain Mark 16:16 so as to make it conform to the teachings of Paul’s epistles. The phrase, “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,*” he would sincerely argue, cannot mean just that, for Paul’s epistles make it crystal clear that salvation is the gift of God, entirely apart from works; that “*To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness*” (Rom. 4:5).

But once the *dispensational* aspect of this passage has been explained to such a man and it has been pointed out to him that Mark 16:16 *does* mean what it says, because it belongs to a different dispensation; and that it thus harmonizes perfectly with its context, his position is vastly altered. He would now be false to God and man to resist the plain truth and twist these passages to conform them to his former view.

Often there are loyalties, ministries, personal gain or pride involved in such cases, but let the man of God take care that he does not, through self-will, start down the path of false teaching.

The terms of salvation under the so-called “great commission” are clear: “*He that believeth AND IS BAPTIZED shall be saved.*” The unbeliever, of course, would not be eligible for baptism, thus: “he that believeth not [whether baptized or not] shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

Those who would use the discredited argument that the closing verses of Mark are not in the inspired original should reflect that Peter, working under the “great commission” and “filled with the Holy Ghost,” commanded his hearers:

“REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOSTS” (Acts 2:38).

This is how Spirit-filled Peter interpreted his commission.
And the place of water baptism here is not one whit different from the place it held in the ministry of John the Baptist, for of him too we read:

“JOHN DID BAPTIZE IN THE WILDERNESS, AND PREACH THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS” (Mark 1:4).

When a man of God who has been confronted and troubled by these facts twists Mark 16:16 to teach that “he that believeth and is saved should *then* be baptized” and goes on to pervert Acts 2:38 and other Scriptures which stand in his way, he is already *in that measure* a false teacher, untrue to God, the Word and his own conscience. His hearers will do well to ask what *other* plain passages he will next corrupt and *he* will do well to take care lest he go farther down this dark path to become a “castaway”* and stand before the judgment seat of Christ rebuked and ashamed.

How important, then, are the words of Paul to Timothy, and of the Holy Spirit to us:

“...WAR A GOOD WARFARE; HOLDING FAITH AND A GOOD CONSCIENCE; WHICH SOME HAVING PUT AWAY CONCERNING [THE] FAITH HAVE MADE SHIPWRECK” (I Tim 1:18, 19)

There are many, alas, to whom this passage applies! When further light put them to a moral test, instead of warring a good warfare and holding on to faith and a good conscience, they put these aside and made shipwreck of the faith.**

If it is true that the spiritual leaders of our Lord’s day took the key of knowledge away from the common people and hindered them from entering into greater blessings by their resistance to truth (Luke 11:52) it is equally true that many of *our* spiritual leaders, yes Fundamentalist leaders, are taking away the key of knowledge from thousands who, unhindered, would soon be rejoicing in the fullness of grace, their oneness in Christ and “the riches of the glory of this mystery.”

* The word in I Cor. 9:27 is the exact opposite of “approved” in II Tim 2:15.

** In the first instance the word “faith” in this passage has the idea of *integrity, worthiness to be trusted*; in the second, with the definite article before it, it denotes *what is to be believed*.

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May they awaken before it is too late, so that, with Paul, they may truthfully utter those words which, morally, tell the secret of his power:

“I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 9:1).

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (II Cor. 2:17).

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

“But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God” (II Cor. 4:1, 2).

—C.R.S.