

# “Keep a Close Watch on Yourself and on the Teaching...”

...About the Danger of False Doctrines

## ***The aim of this article***

*In the following article we discuss why we believe and how we understand that Jesus' teaching is God's truth. Whoever holds to false teachings does not worship God. False doctrines have a “yeast-effect” and lead people astray.*

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## ⚓ **1 Introductory Thoughts About the Importance of the Right Teaching**

**Christianity is defined in the person of Jesus Christ.** What Christians believe and what they hope for hinges on him. Whoever teaches something different to what Jesus taught disregards his authority and thus also authority of God. From this point of view, the arrogance of false teachers becomes obvious and it becomes understandable why the New Testament uses such severe words against them.

Nowadays a lot of theologians hold the opinion that many accounts about Jesus bear the character of a legend and that the main part of the words handed down as his words grew out of the pious fantasy of his adherents. So they have a “good” reason for not taking the New Testament seriously, for not obeying the words of the Holy Scripture and so they make up their own religion.

Despite the fact that the so-called liberal theologians reject self-evidently the Pastoral letters (Pastoral letters: The Pauline letters dealing with the practical life of the Church: 1-2 Timothy, Titus) as non-authentic the truth of Paul's words against false teachers in those very letters will certainly prove right in their case, as well as what he says in **Galatians**:

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. 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. (*Galatians 1:8-9*)

Many people do not regard the teaching as something important, often because they do not want to assess neither themselves nor others and so the argument goes that we should tolerate the other ones thinking

and we cannot recognise the truth altogether. However, Jesus said in the gospel of John:

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (*John 8:31-32*)

How important the right teaching really is will hopefully become understandable through the following thoughts.

## ⚓ 2 Jesus' Teaching Is God's Truth

So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." (*John 7:16-17*)

Here in these words Jesus emphasizes that **God himself is the origin of his teaching**. So what he said is what God says, through Jesus' words we can get to know what God wants and who he is. Yet **the most important prerequisite is the willingness to do the will of God**.

## ⚓ 3 Whoever Holds to False Doctrines Does Not Worship God

Jesus warned his disciples **to be on guard** against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16:6,12) He also declares:

...in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. (*Matthew 15:9*)

He does not only call it a **useless worship**, he even calls them **hypocrites** and says:

You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "*This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*" (*Matthew 15:7-8*)

**Every teaching that departs from the biblical fundament is a human commandment**, thought up and created by people pursuing aims other than serving God. So **false teachings are the result of disobedience and prevent a person from having a relationship with God** or will certainly destroy it.

## ⚓ 4 Teaching and Life Are Closely Connected

We can see this from various examples.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?" Then he will answer them, saying, "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (*Matthew 25:31-46*)

If, for example, someone understands the parable above as referring to Christians, as it is usual nowadays, his concept of being a Christian will be restricted more or less to social activities. But **this parable actually speaks about people who did not know Jesus, who are surprised that the good they did, they did for Jesus.** Christians know that they serve Jesus with everything they do. Here Jesus partially also answers the question of what will happen in eternity to those who do not get to know him here, on earth. The Greek word *ethnoi* (nations) in verse 32 also contributes to this interpretation. The Jews made a distinction when speaking about themselves or their own nation (Greek: *laos*) and about the nations (Greek: *ethnoi*), that is every non-Jew. This can be seen from Acts 26:17 as well.

**As Christians we are ambassadors for Christ** (2 Corinthians 5:20), actively making God known to the people by spreading Jesus' teaching and living a holy life.

The parable of the wheat and the weeds is a further interesting example.

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (*Matthew 13:24-30*)

Nowadays many people refer this parable to the church. They want to use it as an argument that within the church there can be believers and unbelievers together and only at the end of age, it will become clear who really belongs to God. Therefore, they say that we need not keep distance to unbelievers or even should not assess people because only at the very end God will decide. If you read a little further, you can see that this is not what Jesus spoke about.

He explains that **the field is the world** and in the world both good and evil people live side-by-side, although **God** created everybody for a good purpose. However, God does not want to exterminate all those who do not obey him. **He grants everyone a free will to live his life until he dies however he decides.** Moreover, we can see from other passages in the New Testament that **as Christians we cannot have spiritual fellowship with unbelievers:**

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, *I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* Therefore *go out from their midst, and be separate from them,* says the Lord, *and touch no unclean thing;* then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty. *(2 Corinthians 6:14-18)*

#### 4.1 False Doctrines Have a “Yeast-Effect”

That is why the Scripture warns us to...

...watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. *(Romans 16:17)*

In his letter to Titus Paul says:

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. *(Titus 3:10-11)*

#### ⚓ 4.2 False Doctrines Lead People Astray

The truth is adapted to concepts that seem to be more pious, more attractive or more comfortable to people, concepts that grant them more “security” or allow them to make compromises.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. *(2 Timothy 4:3-4)*

**False doctrines spread quickly. The wide road is easy to go, but it leads to destruction.** In the New Testament we find a very strict rejection of false teachers:

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. *(2 John 9-11)*

In New Testament times, to welcome somebody was connected with receiving this person into one's house

and having fellowship by eating and speaking together. This is what John wants to say: **with a false teacher one cannot have fellowship** to show clear limits to all the things he teaches falsely, for what can truth and the distortion of the truth have in common?

So **every Christian will be eager to get to know what the right teaching** is which is an expression that he loves the truth and the basis **for going forward on the narrow way**, that is why Paul admonishes the Christians:

...so 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.  
(Ephesians 4:14)

If someone is not consciously led by God's Word he ought not to be surprised if he is led astray. **A lack of thinking already opens the door for the deception of false teachers.**

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.

**(1 Timothy 4:16)**

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