



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

HANDLE IT WELL • Knowing the Word

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

1 Timothy 6:3-11

The Importance of Sound Doctrine

The passage in this study is one of many in the New Testament written to correct errant biblical teaching. This is an important topic because it strikes at the core of Biblical authority. We know that the Old Testament is authoritative because Jesus regarded it as such and we understand that the New Testament is authoritative because it was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ and because the Holy Spirit guided the process.

You can be sure that the members of your group will be exposed to a lot of wrong and destructive biblical teaching in their lifetimes. There is a need to learn to distinguish between the truth of God's word and that which only proposes to be such.

You may want to note that Paul had very little patience for the heretical teachers he refers to in this passage. See also Galatians 1: 6-8, where he says:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel – which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

This is strong language, and does not grant a lot of tolerance for people who pervert the Word of God

In contrast, we can take such attacks and distortions of God's Word rather lightly. Cults and false gospels are to be taken seriously, if not for the sake of their adherents, then for those naïve souls who get tangled up in them.

Sick Teaching

Paul describes the teachers in question as being arrogant, and in the Greek (the original language of the New Testament), he literally says that they are “diseased with” controversies and arguments. The result of their teaching is envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and friction. That is in sharp contrast with the result of accurate, godly teaching, “The goal of which is love from a pure heart, good conscience, and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5b).

The emphasis on the initial sin of arrogance and pride is important. Doctrinal error begins as a heart problem, not an intellectual one: a person feels that they

What's the Big Idea?

We need to flee from the sinful motives and prideful heart that distort the Word of God and rightly handle the Scripture as workmen approved by God.

What's the Problem?

Though the Scripture is the infallible Word of God, our sinful hearts are still able to pervert and distort it.



have wisdom that the rest of Christendom doesn't, finding truth that others are too ignorant to see. It begins with pride, to be sure.

The passage reveals several other symptoms of the diseased soul of a false teacher. They like controversy, perhaps because it feeds their ego and gives them notoriety and recognition. They have a motive of personal gain, as opposed to the motive of knowing and loving God, driving their ambitions.

But such motives can be difficult to spot and easily hidden by a person experienced in deceit, so we also need to be able to recognize their methods for twisting the Scripture; their exegetical slight-of-hand should not confuse the person who "correctly handles the Word of truth" (2Tim. 2:15).

For the sake of this limited study, we focus on how false teaching strips the Scripture of its context and identifying meaning, and then uses it to substantiate non-biblical ideas. As an exercise, you might try thinking up a crazy idea (say, Tom Hanks is the antichrist) and see if you can find some portion of a verse, taken out of context, to support the idea. Or flip it around and begin with a portion of a verse stripped of its context and see what kind of aberrant teaching and doctrine you can construct from it. Things could get violent if you begin with, say, Matthew 18:9, "if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away."

Healthy Teaching

Well that's one way to recognize false teaching. How do we recognize sound teaching and doctrine? In this passage Paul describes it as that which agrees with the sound words of Jesus Christ. The Greek word for "sound" contrasts with the word "diseased" applied to the false teachers, and literally means "healthy." The result of such sound doctrine is a godly lifestyle. We recognize correct doctrinal beliefs because we see that they are in agreement with what the Bible teaches (understood accurately, in its context, taking into account the full council of Scripture on the issue).

The measure of orthodoxy (right belief) is conformity to the entire Word of God. Again, poor doctrine will either pull verses of Scripture out of context and assign new meanings to them or it will amplify certain verses and ignore others to substantiate a point that is out of balance with the rest of Scripture.

Greed

In 1 Timothy 6, Paul clearly shows that the heretical teachers in question think that godliness is a means of financial gain. They do not serve God in truth. They serve their desire to become wealthy (verse 5) and they are willing to distort God's word in order to fulfill that objective. In light of the many Christian books and programs that seem to use the Scripture as a means to financial wealth, this should cause us to pause and reflect.

In the midst of his condemnation of their teaching and their motives, Paul addresses the temptation of materialism and the dangers that accompany it. You will want to point out that Paul does not seem tempted by a desire for wealth because he has a more eternal perspective: living for God's glory and eternal reward, not temporal satisfaction.

What's Our Response?

You want the group to realize that studying and knowing the Scripture is not just an academic pursuit. A sinful heart and sinful motivations can lead to distorting the Word of God. Greed and pride are the seedbed of doctrinal error.

We are to flee from selfish motives and run to Christ, finding our contentment in Him and His provisions for us.

We should also make every effort to present [ourselves] to God as those approved – workmen who do not need to be ashamed and who correctly handle the word of truth.

What Are the Questions?

I Timothy 6:3-11

LAUNCH

What is the appeal and attraction that draws people into cults? Have you ever known anyone who has gotten involved with a group that distorts and perverts the Word of God?

EXPLORE

Read I Timothy 6:3-11.

1. How do you educate yourself on what is sound doctrine and what is false?
2. What are some of the false teachings of a group like the Jehovah's Witnesses? What are some of the doctrinal problems of Mormonism.
3. How do you know which doctrines are okay for Christians to disagree on and what are acceptable differences?
4. What are the distinguishing characteristics of these false teachers?
5. Without knowing the individual, how does Paul know that they are prideful and conceited (v.4)?
6. What might cause a person to have an unhealthy interest in controversy?
7. Apparently they are also motivated by greed, seeing an opportunity to make money from the gospel. Where have you seen examples of this recently?
8. Can people be honestly deceived or is there always some sin that makes someone susceptible to false teaching?
9. Is it possible that there are people involved with such false teaching who have trusted in Christ for their salvation?
10. How have you attempted to explain such false teachers to unbelievers in an attempt to distinguish the truth of the gospel.
11. What is important in ministry is not popularity or financial gain but sincerity and right motivations before God. Read 2 Timothy 2:15. What do you think it means to, "correctly handle the word of truth?"

False teaching often strips the Scripture of its context and meaning and then uses it to substantiate non-biblical ideas.

APPLY

15. How do you see a desire for "personal gain" effecting your relationship with the Lord?
17. What do you think is the best thing you can do to guard against false teaching in your own life?
16. Toward the end of the chapter Paul gives us the secret to living with "contentment" (v.6). What is that secret?
18. In verse 11, we are told to "flee from all this." Flee from what? How are we supposed to flee? What are we supposed to flee to?

What Are the Answers?

1. Obviously going to church would be one place. A resource you could suggest is *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. By Wayne A. Grudem”
2. With these groups and others, often there’s a rejection of the Doctrine of the Trinity, or Christ’s Deity, or elevating some writings to the level of Scripture.
3. Allow the group to discuss. Historic Orthodox Christianity has agreed on a number of core concepts, including the deity of Christ, infallibility of scripture, trinitarian nature of God and salvation by grace through faith.
4. Greed, ignorance, malice, love of controversy.
5. See notes under “Sick Teaching.”
6. Allow the group to discuss.
7. Discuss. There are a lot of examples on TV.
8. Discuss. You’re not searching for a right answer.
9. It seems quite likely that God is at work in the hearts of some individuals even though the belief system of the group is terribly distorted.
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. Reading with a heart humbled before God and understanding the passage in its immediate context and in the larger context of Scripture.
12. Allow group to do the exercise.
13. Allow group to do the exercise.
14. Part of being trained is good discipleship, being involved in a good church with good teaching, and having study resources that are sound and biblical.
15. You want the group to see they are not above influences of personal gain.
16. Finding our satisfaction in God through a relationship with Jesus Christ.
17. One good answer to this question is to accurately interpret and teach the Bible with pure motives, recognizing and submitting to its authority.
18. Timothy is told to confront such teachers It doesn’t mean run away, but flee from greed and flee to Christ allowing Him to provide for our needs.

Memorize

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15