

SOUND DOCTRINE

The way we behave is a consequence of what we believe, If we believe the wrong things, then we behave in wrong ways. The world had many different belief systems and these beliefs result in many different ways of doing things. What we do has consequences. Every action has a reaction. So, what we believe **is** important.

Whether we are talking about governments, economic systems, ways to educate, or religion, those things we consider to be the truths of the system determine the outcomes of life. Probably no area is more greatly affected by our beliefs than that of religion. Certainly nothing has any greater consequences. The question of the authority and infallibility of the Bible is a current issue among many church groups today. Such questions have been around since the Garden of Eden. The seriousness of the consequences of wrong beliefs is so dramatically demonstrated in what happened there that all of us should be really impressed and motivated to *know* the truth and to *live by* the truth.

The early church was confronted with a mixture of truth and error and Paul fought against error and taught others to do the same. One of the major problems in the first century church was a carry over from the Jewish religion that emphasized an adherence to the Law as a means of salvation. Some did not see our salvation being by the grace of God and the ability to do what the Law demands as a consequence of that salvation. Paul wrote to Timothy to instruct him in how to deal with such error.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. I Timothy 1:3-7

This is the first of four times in Paul's first letter to Timothy that warns against false teachers and false doctrines. This was a serious problem in the church at Ephesus and was one of the main reasons Paul left Timothy there when he went on to visit other regions. The first and perhaps most serious error was false doctrine. If our set of beliefs is wrong, then we have little hope of a correct outcome. Examples of false doctrines we can find today might include such an idea that we will be OK (saved) if we live a good, clean, moral life and help others. We might find others who believe that if they make a confession of faith in Christ, then they can live the way of the world and they will be OK (saved).

Other problems involved those who taught Jewish myths or extra-scriptural stories of historical characters. Such stories which have no basis can hurt the credibility of a teacher. I sometimes hear preachers misuse analogies or examples of things they do not understand and I wonder how much damage they do to their credibility. Apparently, another situation was that some in the early church would build up far-fetched stories based on obscure genealogical points from Old Testament scriptures.

Paul's contention was that such practices and teachings do nothing other than stir up strife in a church and keep us from the mission of the church. The church is called to show the world the love of God in Jesus Christ. Many problems came from the misuse of the Old Testament Law.

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for

lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. I Timothy 1:8-11

The problem was not the law itself but was a result of misapplication of the law. The law was not intended to limit the freedom of the righteous but to define the error of the unrighteous. If we are operating from a pure motive of love, then the limitations of the law are not an issue because love fulfills everything required by the law and more.

Paul named those to whom the law applies. These are the people who make having laws necessary. Paul divided these into three groups: lawbreakers and rebels, ungodly and sinful, unholy and irreligious.

The basic cause for breaking rules (laws) is the rebellious nature of man. We can see this even in small children. If you tell a child NOT to do something, then most of the time, he or she will be determined to do it as an act of defiance. Unless this tendency is controlled at an early age, the child grows up to be a defiant adult who has no respect for authority. Our prisons are filled with such people. The ultimate rebellion is man's defiance of God and His authority. This is exactly what SIN is and this causes us to be less than that for which we were created. In the Genesis account, God said, "Let us make man in Our image." Sin made us "ungodly" or not aligned with the image of God. When we are out of alignment with God, then we fail to see that He has made us a special part of His creation and that we are to be different from the rest of the animal world. We are special and should behave as a child of the Most High God.

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. I Timothy 1:18-20

Timothy was the pastor of the church at Ephesus and as such he had responsibilities in the area of false teachers and false doctrine for which he needed to be aware. One purpose of Paul's letter to him was to instruct or teach him about how he should handle these problems. Timothy had been called to the ministry and his special gifts had been identified in a prophetic message from God to the church. If Timothy was going to fulfill his calling, then he needed to take bold action to stand up against false teaching and teachers. Paul called it "fighting the good fight." We sometimes forget that we are in a spiritual war and that we are to be loyal to God and to His word. We may not understand why we are commanded to do certain things, however, we are still to do them. We may not understand all the spiritual dangers of not believing the entire Bible and taking a proper stand against ungodly practices in our communities. Nevertheless, we need to trust God and take that stand anyway.

We can let unbelief creep into our congregations in the form of high sounding philosophies, that make us feel good about ourselves in spite of sin in our lives and many lives will be ruined. Because the church fails to take a stand against pornography, abortion, gambling, sexual perversion, and many other evils, our society is literally going to hell.

We should applaud the action of churches that stand against ungodly practices. Refusing to perform or even recognize homosexual marriages and the ordination of homosexual as ministers may be criticized by the media or other churches. However, God's word is clear on such issues. We are to please God and not be concerned about pleasing the world.

False teaching has no place in the church. It weakens the church and its members in particular. If we want to know the major cause of powerless churches in our modern society, then we have to look no farther than the problem of false teaching that denies the power of God and causes us to look to ourselves and other people for solutions rather than to God.