

Choose What Is Right: A Study in Discernment

Lesson 10-A Word of Warning



Discernment is being able to tell the difference – from rightly handled, in context Scripture – between sound, biblical doctrine and false doctrine.

Today's Scripture passages are embedded in the body of the study. Please click the links in each question.

Questions to Consider

In today's evangelical world, many professing Christians object to rebuking false teachers and warning the church about false teachers. They believe it is unloving, un-Christlike, divisive, or slanderous. But is that true according to Scripture?

1. **Warning and rebuking requires evidence and a posture of due process.** Review lesson 9. As stated at the beginning of lesson 9...

We can't just go around willy nilly calling everyone a false teacher. A false teacher is someone who unrepentantly, despite biblical correction, consistently teaches, either implicitly, explicitly, or via his or her behavior, doctrine that is in direct conflict with clear cut Scripture.

Read these passages. (Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Timothy 5:19-21, Deuteronomy 19:15-20, Exodus 20:16, Exodus 23:1, Deuteronomy 22:13-21) Are the Matthew and 1 Timothy passages instructions about how to deal with public false teaching in the public square or how to deal with sin inside a local church?

([Read #1 here](#) if you can't tell from the passages.) (***)

What we're looking at in these passages is *not* step-by-step instructions about how to warn against or rebuke false teachers. We're looking at the biblical *principles* of evidence and due process found in these passages, which we see reflected even in many of our secular laws and judicial processes today.

Make a list of all of the principles of biblical due process found in these passages. Explain how they reflect God's attributes of justice and fairness.

When, in the judicial process, does “conviction and sentencing” take place? Take the Matthew 18 passage, for example. Would it be right to treat someone “as a Gentile and a tax collector” immediately after going to him one-on-one (15-16a)? Why not?

What do the Deuteronomy 19 and Exodus passages teach us about false witnesses and false accusations? How might this relate to falsely accusing someone of being a false teacher?

In much the same way that a police officer can't arrest you because he doesn't like your haircut, you can't deem someone to be a false teacher because she sometimes wears slacks and you prefer for women to always wear [skirts](#). (***) Why? Because in neither case has the allegedly guilty party actually broken the law. What is the [standard](#) (***) we use for determining whether or not a teacher has “broken the law” and is a false teacher?

Before warning against or rebuking someone you *think* is a false teacher, you **must** extend that fellow image bearer the due process of fairly researching her and providing accurate, current, in context evidence of her ongoing, unrepentant false teaching. According to these passages and [others](#), (Proverbs 19:5, Proverbs 19:9, Proverbs 21:28, Proverbs 24:28, Proverbs 25:18) what biblical principles and commands are you violating if you don't? If you don't fairly research her and provide appropriate evidence that she's a false teacher, aren't you being “unloving, un-Christlike, divisive, or slanderous”?

2. Instructions to warn others / examples of warning others about false teachers/doctrine. [Read these passages.](#) (Romans 16:17-18, 2 John 9-11, Matthew 16:5-12, Matthew 7:15-20, 1 John 2:18-27, Galatians 5:7-10, Ezekiel 33:1-9, Jude 3-4, Ephesians 5:6-11, 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 2 Peter 2:1-3) Determine whether each passage is an *instruction* to Christians to warn others about false teachers/doctrine, or an *example* of someone in Scripture warning his contemporaries about false teachers/doctrine. (Some passages are a mixture of both.) Which warning words and phrases (e.g. “watch out”) does each passage use?

Do any of these passages (or any other Scriptures you're familiar with – [rightly handled and in context](#), 2 Timothy 2:15) exemplify or instruct Christians **not** to warn others away from false teachers? Do any of these passages (or any others you're familiar with) describe warning others as unloving, un-Christlike, divisive, or slanderous? What do these passages tell you about how God views Christians warning others about false teachers?

In each of these passages, who is doing the warning or giving the instruction to warn? (Hint: You may need to look up who the author of each book is or read a little more of the passage to find out.) What does this tell us about the responsibility of those in leadership or with greater discernment to warn others about false teachers?

How would you characterize these warnings or instructions to warn? Timid? Assertive? Wishy washy? Direct? Hateful? Loving? What is the stated or implied reason for warning others in each of these passages? How does warning for these reasons demonstrate love for God, for His Word, for His church as a whole, and for individual brothers and sisters?

3. Is naming names biblical? Is it biblical to warn against specific false teachers or movements by name? [Read these passages.](#) (Matthew 16:5-12, Titus 1:10-11, 2 Corinthians 11:12-15, 1 Timothy 1:19-20, 2 Timothy 1:15, 2 Timothy 2:16-18, 2 Timothy 4:14, 3 John 9-10) Make a three-column chart. For each passage list:

- Who is warning against the false teacher or group
- Which person or group is being warned against by name
- Why the person or group is being warned against (if the passage says or if you know)

Passage	Who is warning?	Who is being warned?	Why are they being warned?

Which *groups* are being warned against in some of these passages? What was the false doctrine each group centered around? (Use your cross references.) What are some groups or movements today that center around false doctrine that we should warn other Christians against? (see lesson 9 for an example) Do any of these passages (or any others you know of) teach that we should always refrain from warning against specific false teachers and groups by name?

Have you ever heard a pastor or any other professing Christian say we shouldn't give the names of specific false teachers or groups? What reasons did he give? Why is it important to warn fellow Christians about specific false teachers and groups by name?

When we plead with people to follow Christ, we tell them exactly who He is and why they should follow Him. Why, when we plead with people not to follow [antichrists](#), (1 John 2:22) would we not tell them exactly who those false teachers and movements are, and why they shouldn't follow them?

4. Warning / rebuking false teachers themselves [Read these passages.](#) (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Deuteronomy 18:20, Jeremiah 14:14-15, Jeremiah 23:25-40, Matthew 7:15-23, Matthew 23, Titus 1:9-16, 2 Timothy 2:24-26, 2 Timothy 4:2-4, Galatians 1:6-9) Determine whether each passage is an *instruction* to Christians to rebuke false teachers, or an *example* of someone in Scripture rebuking false teachers. Do any of these passages (or any others you're aware of) teach that we should **not** rebuke false teachers?

Carefully examine the Deuteronomy and Jeremiah passages. In what ways did God – directly, through His true prophets, and through His people – rebuke false prophets? What does this tell you about God's perspective on false prophets/teachers and false prophecy/doctrine? Does He still rebuke false teachers in any of these same ways today? Does that mean He has “gone soft” on false teachers since the Old Testament? Why does He deal with false teachers differently today?

How would you characterize Jesus' rebuke of false teachers in the Matthew passages? What were the false doctrines He was rebuking them for in chapter 23? How did He inform or set an example for the church's rebuke of false teachers?

Starting with the Titus 1 passage and finishing with the Galatians 1 passage, write a detailed description of the ways and reasons pastors and churches are to rebuke false teachers. How does rebuking false teachers benefit the false teacher, the church at large, and individual Christians?

What is the goal of rebuking false teachers?

5. **What should be our manner of warning and rebuke?** [Read these passages.](#) (Titus 1:13-1:16, 1 Timothy 6:3-6:5, Matthew 23, 1 Timothy 1:3-1:7, 2 Timothy 2:24-2:26, James 4:6, Proverbs 3:34, Ecclesiastes 3:1-3:8) For each passage, answer the following questions:

- How does this passage describe or rebuke false teachers/doctrine? Make a list of the adjectives and descriptive phrases used.

- Does this passage seem mostly positive or negative toward false teachers/doctrine?

- If I saw or heard someone describing or rebuking a false teacher this way today, would I be offended? Would I think that person was being un-Christlike, unloving, etc.?

How do the examples of “sharp” rebuke and negative descriptions of false teachers not contradict the [fruit of the Spirit](#) (Galatians 5:22-23) (love, kindness, gentleness) and the 2 Timothy 2:25 admonition to correct opponents with gentleness?

Re-read Matthew 23: Was Jesus being unkind, unloving, or disobeying His own instruction (2 Timothy 2:25) to correct opponents with gentleness as he addressed the scribes and Pharisees? (Hint: Consider the James, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes passages as you answer.) Are there times when sharp rebuke is required over soft words, and vice versa? Give an example of a situation requiring each.

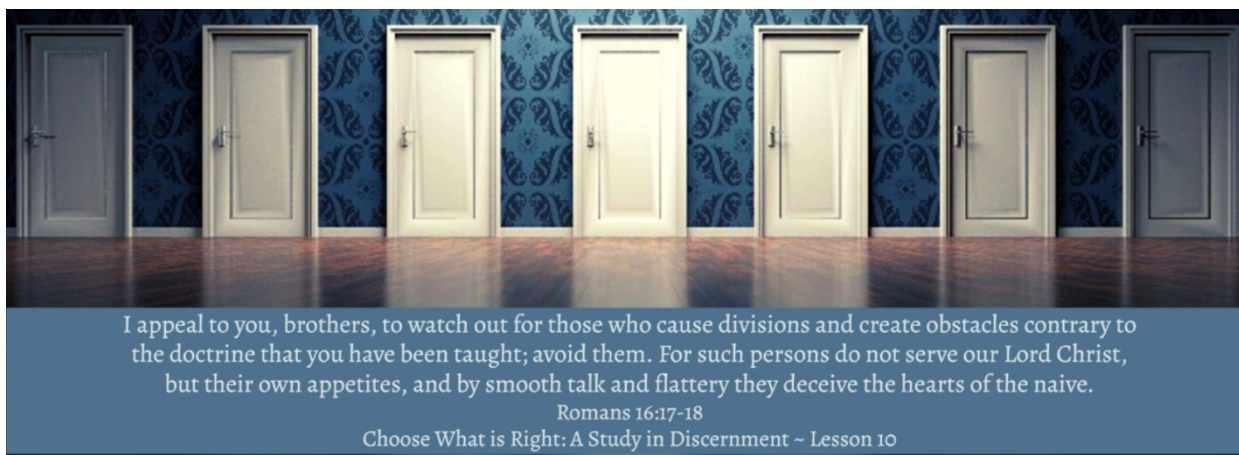
Many professing Christians today would say that sharp rebuke and negative characterizations of false teachers are unloving. How do each of these passages demonstrate love for...

- God—

- God’s Word—
- False teachers—
- The church as a whole—
- Followers of false teachers—

Homework

- Is there someone you think might be a false teacher? Apply the biblical principles of due process you learned today and research her fairly, giving her the benefit of the doubt when possible. You may wish to look at some of my articles at the [Popular False Teachers & Unbiblical Trends](#) tab in the blue menu bar at the top of this page as an example. My article [Is She a False Teacher? 7 Steps to Figuring it Out on Your Own](#) may also be helpful.
- Think it through: Using the Old Testament passages you’ve studied today (and any other applicable OT passages you like), address this issue: Jesus lived His entire earthly life in “Old Testament times” because the new covenant, Christianity, and the church were not established until after His ascension. Under Old Testament law, false prophets – those who “presume to speak a word in [God’s] name that [He had] not commanded him to speak...that same prophet shall die.” (Deuteronomy 18:20) Did the Pharisees’ legalism (equating their man-made rules with God’s Word and declaring those violating them to be in sin) qualify them as false prophets under Old Testament law? If so, why didn’t Jesus demand, or at least teach, that they should be put to death instead of merely rebuking them (see Matthew 23, 7:15-23)?
- Read my article [Discernment: What’s Love Got to Do with It?](#).



Suggested Memory Verse—Romans 16:17-18

<https://michellelesley.com/2016/06/17/answering-the-opposition-responses-to-the-most-frequently-raised-discernment-objections/>

<https://michellelesley.com/2017/04/03/the-mailbag-may-christian-women-wear-pants/>

<https://michellelesley.com/2017/02/17/basic-training-the-bible-is-our-authority/>

<https://michellelesley.com/popular-false-teachers/>

<https://michellelesley.com/2022/03/10/is-she-a-false-teacher-7-steps-to-figuring-it-out-on-your-own-2/>

<https://michellelesley.com/2016/01/22/discernment-whats-love-got-to-do-with-it/>