

## Preventing Truth Decay

**“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine” (Acts 2:42).**

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).

“Teach no other doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:3).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the early church was their allegiance to the apostle’s doctrine. They believed and aggressively spread it everywhere. They were steadfast—unwavering, unswerving, unfaltering, and resolute in preaching the truth delivered to them (Jude 3).

The Apostle Paul, early in church history, warned against foreseeable truth decay. “Decay” refers to slowly but surely losing original form, quality, value, or strength.

“And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his blood—for the Holy Spirit is holding you responsible as overseers. I know full well that after I leave you, false teachers, like vicious wolves, will appear among you, not sparing the flock. Some of you yourselves will distort the truth in order to draw a following” (Acts 20:28-30, *TLB*).

Preachers with truth decay have one goal in mind. They distort truth to get a following. Their crooked, distorted preaching eats away like cancer and spreads like gangrene. Preaching in error misses the mark, swerves from truth, and undermines faith (2 Timothy 2:16-18). Gangrene poisons the entire body. Circulation ceases. Life stops. False doctrine is fatal.

“For we are not, like so many, [like hucksters making a trade of] peddling God’s Word [shortchanging and adulterating the divine message]; but like [men] of sincerity and the purest motive, as [commissioned and sent] by God, we speak [His message] in Christ (the Messiah), in the [very] sight and presence of God” (2 Corinthians 2:17, *AMP*).

What is a huckster? They are con artists or tricksters. Huckster-preachers use the Word of God as business. Whatever brings in finances becomes their latest rave of preaching. They look at the Gospel as a way to making a prosperous living. They say exactly what the crowd wants to hear.

Consider the man who mixes water with petrol, or dilutes wine with water, or a market woman who places the best fruit on top of the basket. There you have it—a huckster. Huckster-preachers mix their own ideas with the Word of God. They have corrupt minds and wholesale counterfeit faith. A preacher who deliberately forces the Word of God to say more than is meant, or mingles what is contaminated with what is uncontaminated has become a huckster, a promoter of truth decay. It is dangerous to get someone to believe the Bible teaches something it doesn’t. God’s Word is pure. Keep it pure. Deliver it pure! We are guides, not misguides.

C. H. Spurgeon said, “And, oh, beloved, there is one thing that I dread above all others—lest I should ever handle the Word of God so as to persuade some of you that you are saved when you are not.”

Huckster-preachers are popular today. However, they are wasting their time. Only truth transforms lives and prepares them for heaven. Distorted preaching sounds good but comes up short in eternity.

Steve Lawson provides this quote, “Noah’s message from the steps going up to the Ark

was not, "Something good is going to happen to you!" Amos was not confronted by a high priest of Israel for proclaiming, "Confession is possession!" Jeremiah was not put into the pit for preaching, "I'm O. K., you're O. K." Daniel was not put into the lion's den for telling people, "Possibility thinking will move mountains!" John the Baptist was not forced to preach in the wilderness and eventually beheaded because he preached, "Smile, God loves you!" The two prophets of the tribulation will not be killed for preaching, "God is in heaven and all is right with the world."

What do you do with a huckster-preacher? Tell him, "Shut up!" Refuse to listen to him. Advise him to sell insurance, used cars, or work in the market as a rewarding alternative. Paul said, "They must be silenced. By their wrong teaching, they have already turned whole families away from the truth. Such teachers only want your money. One of their own men, a prophet from Crete, has said about them, "The people of Crete are all liars; they are cruel animals and lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:11-12, *NLT*). "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" (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).

Truth-preaching has never been popular but it has eternal rewards. We have been given a trust—the Word and the saints of God. The phrase "handling deceitfully" originally meant "to catch with bait, to ensnare, to corrupt with error." Never spoil the treasure by corrupting it through distorting the Word of God. Set it forth plainly. Never aim to deceive or make a false impression. Start where the Bible starts. Stop where it stops. Avoid truth decay. It destroys spiritual well-being.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Some, having itching ears, will look for teachers who say what they want to hear, things that will suit their liking. They are looking for a preacher to rub, scratch or tickle their ears. They will turn away from listening to truth.

"A horrible and shocking thing has happened in this land — the prophets give false prophecies, and the priests rule with an iron hand. And worse yet, my people like it that way! But what will you do when the end comes?" (Jeremiah 5:30-31, *NLT*).

"They tell the prophets, "Shut up! We don't want any more of your reports." They say, "Don't tell us the truth. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies. Forget all this gloom. We have heard more than enough about your 'Holy One of Israel.' We are tired of listening to what he has to say. "This is the reply of the Holy One of Israel: "Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in oppression and lies, calamity will come upon you suddenly. It will be like a bulging wall that bursts and falls. In an instant it will collapse and come crashing down. You will be smashed like a piece of pottery — shattered so completely that there won't be a piece left that is big enough to carry coals from a fireplace or a little water from the well" (Isaiah 30:10-14, *NLT*).

The bottom line is, "Truth is fallen in the street" (Isaiah 59:14).

Paul knew there would be truth decay. He looked in the future and saw a day when:

1. Errors enter the church.
2. People turn from truth.
3. They look for false teachers.

4. They substitute God's Word with fables and stories.

The time will come when they will not want to listen to sound doctrine. In such times what should the man of God do? Preach the Word. Preach it when it is convenient and inconvenient. Preach it when it is accepted and when it is rejected. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, and teach doctrine. Do not be tempted to preach the latest ear-tickler. Do it patiently, and keep doing it, whether it's in season or not.

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2).

"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; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Avoid being tossed to and fro driven by the winds of false doctrine. There needs to be a firm route. False teachers cause people to be like a ship on a restless sea thrown about in the wind and waves, not having an anchor.

The "sleight of men" refers to trickery. The word used here refers to the game or gambling of chance. The player throws the dice in such a way that the good numbers appear. Salvation will never come by chance. We examine truth, accept it, and live by it. A bank teller doesn't have to study every counterfeit bill in order to know what is counterfeit. He studies the genuine.

"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house" (Acts 20:20).

Adrian Rogers said (as quoted in *Famine in the Land* by Steven Lawson), "It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It is not love and it is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to be hated for telling truth than to be loved for telling a lie...It's better to stand alone with the truth than to be wrong with a multitude."

Paul said, "I have kept nothing back!" He did not disguise or hide the truth. He declared the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Why would a preacher hold back from declaring the whole counsel of God?

1. Fear of loss of reputation, financial support, or that the preaching will not be accepted.
2. Desire for popularity. Everyone wants to be liked and preach what people like.
3. People don't like doctrine. The Word of God is like medicine. You may not enjoy the taste but it is good for you.
4. Sin in the life of a preacher, or failure to follow truth hinders preaching it. For example: Being in adultery makes it complicated to preach about immorality. Never being baptized in Jesus' name makes it difficult to teach on that subject. A preacher must first be a partaker.
5. A preacher who does not have a love for, and a commitment to, truth will not diligently preach it.

How can truth be kept back from the people? People need a balanced diet, physically and spiritually. Spiritual nutrition can be withheld by not preaching a pertinent doctrine, avoiding it, giving it little importance, or making it difficult to comprehend.

**Historical Drift**

“Speaking of this as he does in all of his letters. There are some things in those [epistles of Paul] that are difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist and misconstrue to their own utter destruction, just as [they distort and misinterpret] the rest of the Scriptures. Let me warn you therefore, beloved, that knowing these things beforehand, you should be on your guard, lest you be carried away by the error of lawless and wicked [persons and] fall from your own [present] firm condition [your own steadfastness of mind]” (2 Peter 3:16-17, AMP).

To avoid misinterpretation we must learn how to provide correct interpretation. Stable principles of interpretation must be employed. The KJV mentions the word “wrest” in this passage which refers to an instrument of torture, the windlass. The windlass caused a victim to be rolled or stretched. It refers to applying parts of Scripture to a purpose it was never intended.

False preachers do this to their destruction. Their error destroys their soul and the souls of others. Never twist or torture the Scripture to make it speak what was never intended.

What do the Scriptures in this lesson teach? They show us the marked difference between crooked and straight preachers.

**Crooked preachers:**

- Miss the mark.
- Swerve from truth.
- Undermine faith.
- Answer useless questions.
- Corrupt God’s Word.
- Make a trade peddling a weakened Word.
- Mix the impure with pure.
- Shortchange the message.
- Promote truth decay.
- Turn families away from the right way.
- Distort the Word.

- Handle God’s Word deceitfully.
- Fly on the winds of every doctrine.

**Straight Preachers:**

- Preach the Word.
- Declare the whole counsel of God.
- Guard the truth.
- Teach doctrine.
- Continue in the apostle’s doctrine.
- Speak truth in love.
- Keep nothing back.
- Charge others to teach no other doctrine.

There is a famine in the land (Amos 8:11). People are looking for truth. Can they count on you? Will you be a crooked preacher or a truth preacher? Reform is needed. The choice is yours; the end results are without comparison.

Steve Lawson in *Famine in the Land* said, “If a reformation is to come to the church, it must be preceded by a reformation of the pulpit. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church...Too many preachers today bear more resemblance to entertainers than expositors, stand-up comics rather than knee-shaking servants. God-fearing, awe-struck men in pulpits remain the need of the hour.”

*Study Questions*

1. What are Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 1:3?

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2. Write out Jude 3.

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3. What was one of the characteristics of the early church mentioned in this lesson?

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4. What is the meaning of "decay"?

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5. What is the goal of preachers suffering from truth decay?

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6. How is false doctrine fatal?

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7. Describe huckster-preachers.

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8. Write out the quotation made by C. H. Spurgeon used in this lesson?

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9. What should a person do with a huckster-preacher?

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10. What is meant by the phrase "handling deceitfully"?

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11. What "trust" or inheritance have we been given as a preacher of the gospel?

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12. What is meant by "itching ears"?

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13. What does Jeremiah 5:30-31 say?

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14. What is the sad statement recorded in Isaiah 59:14?

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15. What did Paul see as he looked at the future of the church at Ephesus?

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16. What is the desire of the people in Isaiah 30:10-14?

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17. How does the phrase "sleight of men" refer to some preachers?

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18. What was Paul's testimony in Acts 20:20?

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