

False Teachers and False Teachings

I write out instructions for you to turn right off 173rd Avenue on to 170th Drive in order to get to my house. You get to 170th Drive and learn that it does not go right, but only left. Do you mutter contemptuously, “That guy deceived me by giving me false instructions; he is a false guide; he does not want me to visit him”? More likely, perhaps with some disparagement of my age, you will say, “Cecil’s senility is showing! In his confusion he gave me incorrect directions.”

In my earlier days, I taught that it was wrong for a woman to cut her hair. I based that on Paul’s writings in 1 Corinthians 11. Later, I recognized my error in forcing such an interpretation. Paul was not making a universal rule about hair styles. In retrospect, was I giving a false teaching? Was I a false teacher? Absolutely not!

The primary meaning of the word *false* is “not genuine, intentionally untrue, adjusted or made so as to deceive.” There is whale of a difference between an incorrect teaching and a false teaching, and between a mistaken teacher and a false teacher!

However, too often we have ignored that whale – mainly because we have been evil in our attitude. Sometimes we have been so eager to castigate others who differ that we have judged their motives contemptuously, accusing them of being deceitful teachers whose intentions are to mislead. But when we ourselves are mistaken on a teaching, that is a horse of a different color. A incorrect teaching done by a Baptist or Presbyterian is so much more damning than one taught by a teacher in the Church of Christ! ☹

Every one of you who has spent thirty minutes teaching the Bible has taught something incorrectly! That is a bold assertion that I cannot prove, but I think that few of you will disagree. Were you a deceitful teacher? Or a mistaken teacher?

If I brand others who teach misconceptions as being false teachers, then I am implying that I do not teach any misconceptions. How nice a little conceit can make me feel!

Many times I have heard preachers quote a series of prooftexts to support an erroneous point. I might have to admit to that myself. If the preacher did such a thing, knowing that his argument was invalid, he was intentionally manipulating the Scriptures to deceive. He would be a false teacher.

In earlier years in my simplicity and ignorance (not outgrown yet!), I repeated arguments that I had inherited in our tradition. I taught that such things as midweek participation in the communion or taking a midweek collection or the singing of solos in our assembly were failures to “abide in the doctrine of Christ” that John warned against (2 John v. 7-11) and also made one accursed for preaching “another gospel” about which Paul warned us (Gal. 1:6-9). Later, I realized that the doctrine John warned about was the denial that Jesus had come in the flesh (v. 7), and Paul was condemning those who were claiming justification by keeping the Law of Moses (5:4). My pet issues had not been invented when John and Paul wrote; so they were addressed neither by command or principle.

After having learned of my ignorance in perverting those passages, if I had continued to use them in that manner, I would have been dishonest. I would have been using those texts deliberately to deceive others in “proving” my points. I would have become a false (deceiving) teacher turning passages of Scripture into false teaching

(adjusted or made so as to deceive). The principle involved here is wide in its application.

By the frequency of our use of “false teachers,” one might get the idea that it is a favorite term of inspired writers. However, it is used only one time (2 Peter 2:1). And all those “false teachings” – well, my concordance lists not one reference to that term which we have thrown about so loosely. Talk about speaking where the Bible speaks!

The Scriptures offer numerous cautions about those who would intentionally teach error in order to build their cases, but those persons were people of evil intention, not some fellows from the cotton patch like me, or from the university like you, who were earnestly trying to teach God’s word.

The Scriptures speak of false prophets, false brethren, false Christs, and false apostles. They were not false necessarily because of what they were teaching but because of the role or capacity they were claiming or usurping. These were false men! Their intentions were to deceive. Evidently, fellows like that have not all vanished from the earth. Let’s be sure we do not perpetuate their tribe by our misleading use of those terms which reflect our misconceptions and poor attitudes..

(More on this subject is in my first book, *Free In Christ*, Chapter 10.) []