

Session 3: Diagnosing False Doctrine



Introduction - Health Clinic Role Play – Select several individuals to act out two scenes at the local clinic. (We need a doctor, nurse, and two different patients). The drama should include the observation of two medical issues, as well as proper testing and treatment of patient. The medical issues include a person with a bad limp and another person with a very bad cough. Role play the medical team’s response in a creative way.

Transition Questions – False teaching causes illness within the church. Read Acts 17:10-11 and identify how the Berean church pursued sound doctrine.

In Acts 17:10-11, Luke writes: *“And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.”*

Who were the Bereans checking or testing? Were those being checked upset that they were being checked? Why must we be like a Berean? Should we mind someone checking our doctrine? What sets the Bereans apart from other people?

(Video Link – Introduction)

Session 2 identified some symptoms of false teaching. What tests are needed to confirm the diagnosis of False Doctrine? (The following tests and summary are taken from Tim Challies’ February 6, 2017 internet article entitled “Five Tests of False Doctrine” found on his website at www.challies.com)

Test 1: The Test of Origin - The first test is the test of origin. Sound doctrine originates with God; false doctrine originates with someone or something created by God. The Apostle Paul went to great lengths to convince the church in Galatia that the gospel he taught was not his own, but God’s. “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12). Even Jesus was clear that he taught only what God had instructed him to teach: “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me” (John 7:16). True doctrine originates with the God who is true (Titus 1:2).

Just as true doctrine is marked by its divine origin, false doctrine is marked by its worldly origin. Paul warned the Colossian church to avoid doctrine that is “according to human precepts and teachings” and told Timothy that some would “depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (Colossians 2:22, 1 Timothy 4:1). It is this simple: Sound teaching originates with God and false teaching originates with men or demons. When it comes to doctrine, if man made it, then we should not hold it. God is the Father of truth and Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44).

The test: Does this doctrine originate with God or has it been developed by someone or something else? This leaves us with an obvious question: How can we know the origin of a doctrine? Sometimes its origin is obvious, but more often it is not. When we are uncertain, we can turn to our second test.

Give an example of how this test can be used in your country?

Test 2: The Test of Authority - The second test is the test of authority. *Sound doctrine grounds its authority within the Bible; false doctrine grounds its authority outside the Bible.* The Bible is God's inerrant, infallible, sufficient, complete, and authoritative revelation of himself to humanity. Doctrines that originate in the mind of God are recorded in the Word of God. There is a clear and necessary correlation between origin and authority, between God and his Word.

We can think here of those noble Bereans who "received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). They knew that all doctrines must be compared to God's Word, his source of truth. Likewise, Paul praised the Thessalonians for their careful assessment and acceptance of his teaching because they understood its divine authority. "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Sound doctrine originates in the mind of God and is recorded in his authoritative self-revelation, the Bible.

The test: Does this doctrine appeal to the Bible for its authority? Or does it appeal to another scripture or another mind? But a concern remains, because two teachers may both claim the authority of the Bible while teaching very different things. How can we know whose interpretation is correct? This is where we turn to the third test.

Give an example of how this test can be used in your country?

Test 3: The Test of Consistency- The third test is the test of consistency. *Sound doctrine is consistent with the whole of Scripture; false doctrine is inconsistent with some parts of Scripture.* There is a sameness or familiarity to true doctrine and a strangeness or unfamiliarity to false doctrine. The man who wrote the letter to the Hebrews warned his congregation about "diverse and strange teachings," while Paul warned Timothy about accepting "different doctrine" (Hebrews 13:9; 1 Timothy 1:3, 6:3). Both meant to emphasize that doctrine must always be compared to the established, accepted body of truth. Those who are *knowledgeable* about that body of truth will be in the best position to immediately identify and refute what is false.

This is tied to a key theological principle, "the analogy of faith," which is often explained with the phrase "Scripture interprets Scripture." If the Bible originates in the infallible mind of God, it must be consistent throughout. Because there can be no contradiction in the mind of God, there can be no contradiction in the revelation of God. What the Bible teaches in one place it cannot refute in another. Therefore, any true doctrine must be consistent with the whole of Scripture. Doctrine must never be treated in isolation, but always in light of a correct

understanding of the entire Bible. Too many false teachers isolate verses or ideas that cannot withstand the scrutiny of the whole Book.

The test: Is this doctrine established or refuted by the entirety of Scripture? Once we have tested doctrine and found it to be true, according to these three criteria, we can also see its soundness by its effects on us and those around us. That requires two more tests.

Give an example of how this test can be used in your country?

Test 4: The Test of Spiritual Growth - The fourth test is the test of spiritual growth. Sound doctrine is beneficial for spiritual health; false doctrine leads to spiritual weakness. After instructing Timothy, Paul told him, “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained [“nourished”] in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed” (1 Timothy 4:6). Timothy had trained himself in the Bible and Christian doctrine. He had nourished himself in the truths he had been exposed to since he was a child. And he had never stopped. Through this continual nourishment, this ongoing dining on the Word of God, he had grown spiritually healthy and strong. *He had accumulated a thorough knowledge of God and his Word.* This is why Paul called him a “man of God” with “sincere faith” (1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy’s constant nourishment in sound doctrine from the Word of God made him the man he was.

The test - Sound doctrine makes spiritually healthy, mature, knowledgeable Christians. False doctrine makes spiritually unhealthy, immature, ignorant Christians who may be no Christians at all.

Give an example of how this test can be used in your country?

Test 5: The Test of Godly Living - The fifth test is the test of godly living. Sound doctrine has value for godly living, false doctrine leads to ungodly living. Truth never stands on its own, but always has implications in life. Doctrine is always meant to lead to doxology, worship, and purposeful living. “All Scripture is breathed out by God,” says Paul, “and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Scripture is to inform not only our minds, but our hearts and hands as well.

Paul charged Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine,” reminding him that such doctrine is “excellent and profitable for people” (3:8, 2:1). Sound doctrine has value and is profitable in teaching us to live as we ought to live. It equips us to do those things that are good for our neighbor and that bring honor and glory to our God. Truth has not been grasped until it has been lived. Sound doctrine profits us by training us to live in a way that pleases God. False doctrine weakens us by training us to live in a way that dishonors God.

At this point we simply take all of the evidence from the tests and make a conclusion about the quality of the doctrine in question. It must pass all of the tests in order to be sound. If it fails one, it fails all of them. This word “sound” refers to health and appears often in the New Testament (2 Timothy 1:13, Titus 2:1).

Give more examples under these identifying marks of false teachers.

How do false preachers and teachers manipulate Scripture?

How do false preachers and teachers manipulate the way people think (their minds)?

How do false preachers and teachers manipulate the use of time for the benefit?

How do false preachers and teachers manipulate by promoting a division between people?

If one or more of these examples are evidence of a person's or group's beliefs, we should pause and examine the Scriptures to see how those beliefs compare to what God has said. We shouldn't be surprised because Jesus warned us that in the last days many false prophets would arise and deceive many (Matt 24:11,24). Of course, this means that to be effective, we must be well grounded in the Word of God.

Session Summary - A doctor's duty is to evaluate a patient to declare him fit or unfit. The patient should be free from disease with their whole body functioning properly. The duty of a Christian, especially a Christian leader or teacher, is to evaluate every doctrine to declare it fit or unfit. Doctrine that passes the above tests is sound doctrine. It is right and true according to God's standard of truth, which is found in the Scriptures. Following sound doctrine will move us to healthy relationships with God, ourselves, and one another.

Application Point – If Jesus, who is the Great Physician, evaluated your teaching, what would his diagnosis be? Jot down your thoughts in space below.