

Proposition: 1 Timothy 6:3-5 shows us that a church that honors God is a church that grasps the importance of sound teaching.

- I. Here's the kind of teaching that pleases God (3).
 - A. It is Scriptural.
 - B. It reveals Christ.
 - C. It is doctrinal.
 - 1. The goal isn't merely to dispense information.
 - 2. The goal is godliness.
- II. Here's the kind of teaching that displeases God (4-5).

The Red Flag: It emphasizes "other" things.

 - A. Know this about the teacher (4a).
 - 1. He is conceited.
 - 2. He doesn't know as much as he thinks he knows.
 - 3. His teaching lacks biblical authority.
 - B. Know this about the effect of his teaching (4b-5a).
 - C. Know this about people who support such teaching (5b).
 - 1. Their minds are corrupt.
 - 2. They've lost the truth.
 - 3. They think godliness is a way to get rich.

Application: Let's reaffirm the importance of sound teaching.

- 1. Thank God for His Word.
- 2. Resolve to know it better and make it better known.

Do you know what *kudzu* is? Kudzu is a leafy, fast growing vine that's found in the southeast. Fast growing is perhaps an understatement. Kudzu has been called "Mile-a-Minute-Vine," "Foot-a-Night-Vine," and "The Vine That Ate the South." Here's why.¹

Kudzu entered the United States in 1876. It was a gift from the Japanese government as part of the celebration of America's 100th birthday. American gardeners were fascinated by the plant's sweet smell and large leaves, and began planting it for decoration. The nation had no idea it was latching onto a plant that would one day latch onto it.

Here's what happened: "In the 1920's, nursery operators in Florida discovered the food value of kudzu and began selling it to farmers through the mail. During the 1930's, kudzu spread even more. Concerned about soil erosion, the U.S. government began paying men to plant kudzu in vulnerable areas. Eventually, farmers were paid to sow it in their fields. One man even toured the nation preaching the virtues of 'the miracle vine.'

But what soon became clear was that kudzu was not as helpful or harmless as everyone thought. The charming plant that had once decorated gardens was taking over.

Kudzu can grow a foot a day and swallow power poles, buildings, gardens, roads, abandoned vehicles, and anything else in its path that isn't moving. It grows so dense in trees that it can kill a forest simply by choking off sunlight.

And as for killing kudzu, conventional ways didn't work. Chopping, digging, and burning were a waste of effort. Most poisons had little or no effect. One chemical designed to kill the plant actually made it grow faster.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹Story told by John MacArthur, "Grace to You" letter, September 22, 1997.

In 1972, kudzu was officially declared a weed by the Department of Agriculture. What some a century ago had thought was a lovely decorative plant today covers nearly seven million acres of twelve states."

There's a huge lesson in this story. When you misunderstand a basic truth--like the fact that although kudzu is attractive, it spreads rapidly--you're in for big problems. The truth is, as John MacArthur has rightly observed, *what you don't know, or don't know well, can hurt you.*

And what's true in botany holds true as well regarding the Bible. What you don't know, or don't know well, can hurt you. When you don't know God's Word, or don't know it well, you're in danger.

Which is why sound teaching is so important. For you as an individual. For us as a church. A healthy church is one that is committed to the importance of sound teaching--*because what you don't know, or don't know well, can hurt you.*

1 Timothy 6:3-5 is a text that underscores the importance of sound teaching. It's a warning text. It raises a red flag on those who would undermine sound teaching.

Notice 1 Timothy 6:3-5, "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain."

I nearly entitled this message, "A Sure Way to Kill a Church," but thought the title a bit negative! But if you want a sure way to kill a church, ignore this text. Ignore the importance of sound teaching in a church.

But just what is "sound teaching" anyway? And what does it mean to be committed to sound teaching as a church or as a person? And what's true of someone who's *not*? How can you spot such a person?

1 Timothy 6:3-5 will show us. First, from the positive perspective...

I. Here's the kind of teaching that pleases God (3).

Verse 3 begins with "If." What follows is a first class conditional statement which assumes reality. That is, what Paul presents as an *if* was already happening. The church in Ephesus was already plagued by false teachers who *weren't* committed to sound teaching.

In fact, in verse 3 Paul is returning to the theme with which he began this letter to his friend Timothy. Remember 1:3? "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus." Why? "So that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer." The phrase "teach false doctrines" comes from the same Greek word in 6:3, *heterodidaskalei*.

"If anyone teaches false doctrines," was no hypothetical problem for the Ephesian church. It was happening. And if it continued to happen, it would kill the church.

When I played High School basketball, I loved defense. Getting on the floor for a loose ball, taking a charge, preventing our opponent from scoring--now that's defense! I had a coach who operated by the philosophy that *the best offense is a good defense.*

The Bible has a lot to say about *defending the faith.*

Jude 3: "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to *contend for the faith* that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

2 Peter 3:17-18: "Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

We're called to defend the faith. But to defend the faith, you must *know* the faith. And to know the faith, you must *learn* the faith. You must *be taught*.

What kind of teaching pleases God? We find the answer in verse 3. Granted, this is a warning against false teaching, but tucked away in the midst of the warning Paul identifies three marks of sound teaching.

A. It is Scriptural. The context goes back to the last phrase of verse 2. After finishing his counsel to slaves in verses 1-2, Paul states, "These are the things you are to teach and urge on them." The present tense verbs indicate this was to be Timothy's continual practice. He was to teach God's inspired truth.

In his second letter Paul elaborated (3:16), "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching." "In the presence of God...I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction (4:1-2)." "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (2:15)." Sound teaching is scriptural teaching.

Which is the opposite of what the false teachers were doing, as verse 3 indicates. The KJV gives the literal sense, "If any man teach otherwise." Otherwise, that is, other than the scriptural truth that Paul exhorted Timothy to teach. Sound teaching is, first, scriptural.

B. It reveals Christ. As verse 3 explains, "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Teaching is supposed to be Christ-centered. If all we do is give moral platitudes and suggestions for better living, we're not offering sound teaching. Sound teaching reveals Christ.

Does that limit us to "red letter" teaching? Verse 3 specifies "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (KJV)." If Paul saying sound teaching is limited only to the actual words Jesus spoke, the "red letter" portions of the New Testament. No.

The truth is, all of God's Word is Christo-centric. All sixty-six books. The thirty-nine OT books look ahead to Him. The twenty-seven books look back. Indeed, the whole book is *His* Word. Colossians 3:16 speaks of "the word of Christ." 1 Thessalonians 1:8 refers to "the Lord's message." Sound teaching, then, faithfully presents Christ.

C. It is doctrinal. "And to godly teaching," is how the NIV translates the final phrase. "The doctrine which is according to godliness," is the KJV rendering. The Greek term, *didaskalia*, in its most basic sense means "to teach." It appears fifteen times in the pastoral epistles, at times referring to *the act of teaching* and at other times to *what is taught*.

Paul used the same term in verse 1. Slaves are to respect their masters, but why? So that "God's name and our *teaching* may not be slandered." It's also in 1:10, "the sound *doctrine* that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God." (and in 4:1, 6)

I hope you love doctrine! Good teaching, sound teaching is doctrinal teaching. That is, it is the careful presentation of the truths of the Christian faith. If all a "preacher" does is shout and stomp and tell stories, he may be entertaining. And he may get a crowd. And he may be popular. But his ministry is not one of *sound teaching*.

Don't misunderstand. I'm not talking about turning the church into a seminary classroom. When it comes to doctrinal teaching...

1. *The goal isn't merely to dispense information.* What is the goal? Verse 3 says:
2. *The goal is godliness.* The NIV says, "godly teaching." The NKJV offers a more literal rendering, "the doctrine which is according to godliness." The ultimate test of any teaching is what it produces. Sound teaching produces godliness (*eusebeia*), which means "piety," "reverence," or "likeness to God."

That's the kind of teaching that pleases God. Teaching that's scriptural, Christ-centered, and doctrinal. Teaching that sends people home, not merely with full notebooks, but changed lives.

If you have a teaching ministry, may I offer you this challenge? Don't settle for anything less than *sound teaching*. Whether your teaching takes place in Awana or Sunday School or children's church or with your children at home, commit yourself to teaching that is scriptural, that reveals Christ, and that expounds doctrine. Yes, that takes work, but it's well worth it. That kind of teaching ministry pleases God!

It's possible to have a teaching ministry that doesn't as we'll see next.

II. Here's the kind of teaching that displeases God (4-5).

The Red Flag indicator is this: It emphasizes "other" things.

A story appeared in *USA Weekend*, January 8-10, 1999, entitled, "The Bible according to Barney Fife." Many of you know that I'm an Andy Griffith fan. Growing up we had a dog named Barney and one named Andy. But I was shocked to read what a church in Alabama is doing.

They've started "Finding the Way Back to Mayberry" sessions. Each week as many as 200 parishioners get together to watch an episode of *The Andy Griffith Show* projected life size on a wall. The proponents suggest that the episodes communicate valuable moral lessons. And others seem to agree. The man who came up with the idea started a website "www.barneyfife.com." More than two dozen church leaders from Georgia to New Mexico have contacted him about starting similar discussion groups.

Now, I like Barney and Andy. And I'm all for innovative ways to present God's Word. But we must never lose sight of our goal. The goal is to engage in the kind of teaching that pleases God--*sound teaching*.

My friend, we have a Book that came from Someone who knows *everything* about *everything* there is to know. And in that Book He's told us *everything* He wants us to know about *everything* we need to know in order to please Him!

Now, how could you improve on that? Indeed, it's the height of pride to assert, "I can do better than that! I don't need to teach the Bible. I've got better things to say." That's the kind of teaching that displeases God, the kind that emphasizes "other" things.

Notice verse 3 again, "If any man teach *otherwise* (KJV)." The Greek term *heterodidaskaleo* sheds light on the problem. It's a compound word from *heteros* (meaning "other") and *didaskaleo* (meaning "to teach"). It describes any teaching that contradicts God's revelation in Scripture. It's *heterodoxy* rather than *orthodoxy* (MacArthur, 238).

Who in the world would abandon the Scriptures in favor of "other things?" And what happens when he or she does? We need to know, and verses 4-5 enable us to know three insights about the kind of teaching that displeases God.

A. Know this about the teacher (4a). Three things are true of him.

1. *He is conceited.* He's proud. You have to have a tremendous ego to judge the Bible, find it lacking, and promote your own ideas instead. The goal of the false teacher is not to display Christ, but himself.

The word "conceited" comes from the Greek term *tuphoo* which means "to puff up like a cloud of smoke." We'd say of such a person, "He's blowing smoke," or "He's got his head in the clouds."

Warren Wiersbe is right, "A believer who understands the Word will have a burning heart, not a big head." But a teacher who forsakes sound teaching is conceited.

2. *He doesn't know as much as he thinks he knows.* The text states, "He understands nothing." Oh, he thinks he does. He comes across like he's got all the answers--and he's probably got fancy flow charts and Power Point programs to make you agree with his assessment.

But the bottom line is this. He knows nothing of eternal value. MacArthur hits the nail on the head, "Those who know and believe the Word of God have far more insight into spiritual reality than the most educated heretic."

The false teacher doesn't know as much as he thinks he knows. Quite often, he's more concerned with argument than life. His approach to teaching is one of cold, irreverent intellectualism.

Be careful of pointing fingers. We who love the Bible can easily become technicians.

In his book, *Christian Doctrine*, J. S. Whale describes this danger: "Instead of putting off our shoes from our feet because the place whereon we stand is holy ground, we are taking nice photographs of the Burning Bush from suitable angles: we are chatting about theories of the Atonement with our feet on the mantelpiece, instead of kneeling down before the wounds of Christ."

Martin Luther similarly observed: "He who merely studies the commandments of God is not greatly moved. But he who listens to God commanding, how can he fail to be terrified by majesty so great?" (Barclay, 127) A third trait of the false teacher...

3. *His teaching lacks biblical authority.* "He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words." The KJV says he's one who is "doting about questions and disputes of words."

That says it well. Rather than teaching he dotes. He makes mountains out of molehills. He dotes about Bible controversies. It's a game to him, an opportunity to show off. The Talmud gives an example of how such a person gets "all excited" about profitless questions, like this one (Hendriksen, 196):

"'Is it permissible on the Sabbath to throw away the pits of dates?' One person might answer, 'The pits of dates to which some of the meat adheres may be thrown away. Other pits must not be thrown away.' Another person would disagree and express his contrary

opinion in no uncertain terms. Again, the question might be asked, 'If it be permissible to throw them away, *where* and *how* should they be thrown?' And the answer might be, 'They should be thrown outside.' To which another might reply, 'No, indeed, they should be thrown under the bed.' Or he might say, 'The person confronted on the Sabbath with the problem of what to do with date pits should turn his face toward the back of the bed and throw out the pits with his tongue.'

Now there's a profitable discussion! And that's what's true of the kind of teacher that displeases God. His teaching lacks biblical authority.

Which leads to a question. What kind of results will you see from the ministry of a person who abandons sound teaching? We need not wonder. Here's insight #2...

B. Know this about the effect of his teaching (4b-5a). Paul identifies five results in verses 4-5, "He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words *that result in* envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind."

Here's the effect of teaching that is *not* scriptural, Christ-centered, and doctrinal. Here's what results from man-centered speculations:

Envy. The false teacher has to be in the limelight. That leads to...

Strife. He's instinctively competitive. And rather than building up the saints, his teaching tears down. It produces chaos. A by-product is...

Malicious talk. Railings. The false teacher employs abusive language. It comes from a heart that's full of...

Evil suspicions. A false teacher is suspicious of all who differ from him. Barclay describes him well, "When he cannot win an argument he hurls insults at his opponent's theological position, and even at his character; in any argument the accent of his voice is bitterness and not love. He has never learned to speak the truth in love." So in the end the fruit of his ministry is...

Constant friction between men. Perverse disputings of men. False teaching can never produce true unity.

Why not? Think about it. When you abandon the Scriptures as your authority, then your ideas and opinions are as valid as the next person's. And if your opinion differs from the next person's you have no ultimate basis for solving the basis, do you? And the inevitable result is envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction.

And God's way is so much better, isn't it? When a church is full of people who submit to the authority of God's Word, the result is *unity*. It's not that they don't differ at times. They will. But when they differ, they have a compass to guide them. Insight #3...

C. Know this about people who support such teaching (5b). Three things...

1. *Their minds are corrupt.* Verse 5 indicates they are "men of corrupt mind." Ultimately, false teaching comes from a demonic source (4:1). But humanly speaking, what kind of person would abandon the Word of God in favor of teaching the chaff of human speculation? And what kind of person would want to listen to that kind of teaching? The answer is people whose minds are *corrupt* (see 1 Cor. 2:14).

2. *They've lost the truth.* The verb "robbed" ("destitute" in the KJV) is from *apostereo* and means "to steal" or "deprive." It's a passive participle indicating the person had contact with the truth at one time.

Don't miss this. Here's a person who was exposed to the truth, but rejected it. He knew better. He's like Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Timothy 2:18. They "wandered

away from the truth." It's a tragic thing when people abandon the living fountain of God's Word for broken cisterns which hold no water.

It saddens my heart to think of the people with whom I've shared the Word of God who've listened politely, perhaps nodded in agreement, but then turned away in favor of something else. They heard the truth. They heard the amazing message of the Bible. They learned that according to the Bible they are sinners under the wrath of God--hopeless and helpless sinners. And they heard that God provided a way of escape. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die and conquer death as a substitute for all who would believe on Him. They heard the truth, but foolishly walked away from it.

But there's something even worse than walking away from God's truth. Do you know what it is? It's teaching other people to walk away from God's truth.

What would motivate someone to do that? One word--money.

3. *They think godliness is a way to get rich.* As verse 5 concludes, "Who think that godliness is a means to financial gain." False teachers commercialize religion.

Remember Simon the sorcerer? He's an example of a greedy false teacher. Acts 8:18-19 tells what he did, "When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he *offered them money* and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'" To which Peter bluntly told him, "May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money (20)!"

There are plenty of Simon's still around, aren't there? They're not committed to giving sound teaching. They're committed to getting rich.

Eugene Peterson offers this graphic description of such teachers in his paraphrase of the New Testament called *The Message*: "These are the things I want you to teach and preach. If you have leaders there who teach otherwise, who refuse the solid words of our Master Jesus and this godly instruction, tag them for what they are: ignorant windbags who infect the air with germs of envy, controversy, bad-mouthing, suspicious rumors. Eventually there's an epidemic of backstabbing, and truth is but a distant memory. They think religion is a way to make a fast buck."

Beloved, it's true. What you don't know, or don't know well, can hurt you. Kudzu is a nuisance. But false teaching is a killer, an eternal killer. So we need to do something right now. I want to ask you to make a reaffirmation...

Application: Let's reaffirm the importance of sound teaching.

How? By making two responses. Here's the first.

1. *Thank God for His Word.* Are you thankful for the Scriptures? If so, tell the Lord.

Once in a while I'll hear, "Pastor Brad, why doesn't our church do this or that like such and such a church does?" Often, it boils down to this. We are committed to teaching God's Word. We want the church to be *a place to grow*.

We are concerned about sound teaching. And if we're going to give priority to sound teaching, there are other things--not even bad things, but potentially legitimate things--but things we will choose *not* to do because it would distract from our commitment to sound teaching.

So I invite you to make this response. Thank God for His Word. Response #2...

2. *Resolve to know it better and make it better known.* Being committed to sound teaching means we're committed to making the effort to know God's Word better, and then making it better known to others.