

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

The Bible's teaching presented
for Bible students

Paul Mallison

The Bible UnpackedTM

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The Bible's teaching presented
for Bible students

30. Church Leadership

Paul Mallison

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Contents

A Quick Word	iv
Suggestions for Study Groups	v

I. General

a) Introduction.....	2
b) Required Characteristics	4
c) Managing the Church.....	6
d) Caring for Church Members	8
e) Dealing with Sin in the Church	10
f) Women in Leadership	13
g) Church Members' Duties to Leaders	16

II. Teaching in the Church

a) What to Teach: God's Word	20
b) How to Teach.....	23
c) Traits of False Teachers (I): Their Teaching	26
d) Traits of False Teachers (II): Characteristics	29
e) Guarding against False Teachers	32
Topics in This Series	37
The Seven Editions.....	39
Supporting Persecuted Christians	40

A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net.

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God and/or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. General

Good leadership is one of the most important prerequisites for a healthy church. For a church to function effectively it is critical that leaders know and do what is required of them. It is also important for church members to know what they should expect of leaders – and how they can support their leaders.

Note that a number of verses in this chapter speak of Paul and other NT leaders in their work overseeing a number of churches, or of leaders of the nation of Israel – such as Moses, Joshua, prophets, priests and kings. Such verses are generally readily applicable to leaders of local churches today, and to their relationship with church members.

a) Introduction

Churches have leaders

ACTS 14:23 When they had *appointed elders for them in the various churches*, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed. NET

Ultimately it is God who chooses church leaders . . .

1COR 12:28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ESV

HEB 5:1, 4 For every high priest is taken from among the people and appointed to represent them before God, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ... ⁴And no one assumes this honor on his own initiative, but only when called to it by God, as in fact Aaron was. NET

What is said here of the position of high priest is arguably applicable to church leaders today. Note that it is not obvious whether the selecting and appointing spoken of in v. 1 is that done by God, or the actions taken by leaders in response to God's choice and calling (v. 4).

. . . Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit also play a role in the making of leaders

2COR 10:8 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH MEMBERS:] For if I boast somewhat more about *our authority that the Lord gave us for building you up* and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of doing so. NET

ACTS 20:28 [PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN CHURCH LEADERS:] Watch out for yourselves and for all *the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God* that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. NET

Leaders will be accountable to God for their work

HEB 13:17A [THE WRITER, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for *they keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work*. NET

Leaders will be richly rewarded for good work

MATT 24:45–47 [JESUS:] Who, then, is *the faithful and wise servant whom his master has put in charge of his household to give the others their food at the right time?* ⁴⁶*How blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing this when he comes!* ⁴⁷*I tell you with certainty, he will put him in charge of all his property.* ISV

This speaks of Jesus Christ (the “master”) rewarding the servants whom he has put in charge of the church (“his household”).

What part does God take in the choosing of church leaders?

How should churches take God’s role into account when choosing leaders?

What things should a person bear in mind before seeking a leadership role amongst God’s people? (Do not limit your answer to what is mentioned in this study.)

b) Required Characteristics

Godliness

TITUS 1:7–8 *For the overseer must be blameless as one entrusted with God’s work, not arrogant, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain. ⁸Instead he must be hospitable, devoted to what is good, sensible, upright, devout, and self-controlled.* NET

Wisdom and competence

DEUT 1:13 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Select wise and practical men, those known among your tribes, whom I may appoint as your leaders.* NET

EX 18:21 *But you choose from the people capable men, God-fearing, men of truth, those who hate bribes, and put them over the people as rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.* NET

Strength and courage

JOSH 1:6 [GOD, TO JOSHUA:] *Be strong and courageous, because you’ll be leading this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors.* ISV

Willingness to serve

1PET 5:1B–2 [PETER, TO LEADERS:] *I appeal to you ²to be shepherds of the flock that God gave you and to take care of it willingly, as God wants you to, and not unwillingly. Do your work, not for mere pay, but from a real desire to serve.* GNT

Leaders must be willing to serve God and Jesus Christ – and church members.

Deep love for church members

1THES 2:8 [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the Good News from God but even our own lives. You were so dear to us!* GNT

In choosing a person for a leadership role, how can churches determine if the person has the competence and wisdom for the role?

Is there a required attribute that you think is important but often overlooked in the choosing of church leaders? Why is it important?

Apart from any leadership role, what is one thing that you do or could do that demonstrates both a willingness to serve and a deep love for other church members?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Managing the Church

See also:

■ *Dealing with Sin in the Church*, p. 10

As a leader, provide good leadership

1TIM 5:17 Elders who *provide effective leadership* must be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. NET

Delegate work to capable people

ACTS 6:1–4 Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, “*It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables.* ³*But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task.* ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” NET

Be gentle and sparing in the use of authority, . . .

1THES 2:7B [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *Instead, we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children.* ISV

PHILEM 1:8–9A [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *For this reason, although in the Messiah I have complete freedom to order you to do what is proper, ⁹I prefer to make my appeal on the basis of love.* ISV

. . . but exercise authority where necessary

TITUS 2:15 [PAUL, TO TITUS:] *So communicate these things with the sort of exhortation or rebuke that carries full authority. Don’t let anyone look down on you.* NET

Be an example for church members to imitate

2THES 3:7–9 [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *For you know yourselves how you must imitate us, because we did not behave without discipline*

among you, ⁸and we did not eat anyone's food without paying. Instead, in toil and drudgery we worked night and day in order not to burden any of you. ⁹It was not because we do not have that right, but to give ourselves as an example for you to imitate. NET

Why is it important for a leader to be gentle? How does it make them more effective?

What factors should a leader consider when deciding whether to exercise their authority, i.e. "pull rank"?

State two ways in which a leader can be an example for others to follow.

d) Caring for Church Members

See also:

■ *II. Caring for the Body*, Ch. 26

Be a shepherd taking care of God's flock

ACTS 20:28 [PAUL, TO LEADERS:] *Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.* NET

JOHN 21:16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." *Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."* NCV™

Pray for church members

COL 1:9 [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *We have not stopped praying for you since the first day we heard about you. In fact, we always pray that God will show you everything he wants you to do and that you may have all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives.* CEV

Strengthen members in the faith

2COR 12:19B [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *We are speaking in Christ before God, and everything we do, dear friends, is to build you up.* NET

Follow up and pastor members

ACTS 15:36, 41 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing." ... ⁴¹*He passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.* NET

Work hard at helping church members . . .

COL 4:13 [PAUL, SPEAKING TO COLOSSIAN CHURCH MEMBERS ABOUT EPAPHRAS:] *For I can testify that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.* NET

... and be prepared to suffer hardship for their sake

2TIM 2:10 [PAUL:] *So I endure all things for the sake of those chosen by God, that they too may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus and its eternal glory.* NET

What aspect of care do you yourself value the most in a church leader?

What are some things that a leader should do in order to strengthen church members in the faith?

How hard should church leaders work? What factors should they bear in mind in deciding what boundaries to have in regard to the amount of work they do?

e) Dealing with Sin in the Church

Confrontation and rebuke are needed when a church member sins and does not deal with it themselves. If confrontation and rebuke prove to be ineffective, then disassociation is required.

Confront church members over sin . . .

EZEK 16:2 [GOD, TO EZEKIEL:] *Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her abominable practices ...* NET

MATT 18:15–17 *If your brother sins, go and show him his fault when the two of you are alone. If he listens to you, you have regained your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others with you, so that at the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, treat him like a Gentile or a tax collector.* NET

These instructions are for believers or church members themselves in confronting fellow believers over sin. But the instructions are also applicable to leaders in their approach to confronting church members who have sinned and not repented.

. . . and warn them to stop sinning

GAL 5:21 [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *... envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!* NET

Expel unrepentant sinners . . .

1COR 5:12–13 [PAUL:] ^{12–13}*It is not my business to judge those who are not part of the church. God will judge them. But you must judge the people who are part of the church. The Scripture says, “You must get rid of the evil person among you.”* NCV™

TITUS 3:10 [PAUL, TO TITUS:] *As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ...* ESV

... This is in part for the benefit of the offenders themselves

1COR 5:4–5 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] When you have gathered together, I am with you in spirit. Then, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and with his power, ⁵*hand such a person over to Satan to destroy his corrupt nature so that his spiritual nature may be saved on the day of the Lord.* GW

The clause “hand such a person over to Satan” (v. 5) is commonly understood as meaning that the man was to be cast out of the church (cf. NLT) and so into the world, Satan’s domain, open to affliction by him. The following clause – “to destroy his corrupt nature” probably means that affliction by Satan would act as a purifying process leading to the destruction of the man’s sinful nature. Ultimately expelling such a person is done in the hope that they will be saved (v. 5b).

Have multiple witnesses in disciplinary procedures

DEUT 19:15 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *One witness is not enough to convict a man of a crime; at least two witnesses are necessary to prove that a man is guilty.* GNT

Restoring a person who has sinned

2COR 2:6–8 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] This punishment on such an individual by the majority is enough for him, ⁷so that now instead you should rather forgive and comfort him. This will keep him from being overwhelmed by excessive grief to the point of despair. ⁸*Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.* NET

GAL 6:1 [PAUL:] Brothers and sisters, *if a person is discovered in some sin, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness. Pay close attention to yourselves, so that you are not tempted too.* NET

Note that the above instructions appear to have in view people who have repented of their sin.

Note: Unchecked sin corrupts others

1COR 5:6 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] Your boasting is not good. *Don’t you know that a little yeast affects the whole batch of dough?*

NET

The "yeast" signifies sin, which if not dealt with can spread throughout the whole church body.

In what circumstances should dissociating with a church member be considered?

What factors should be considered before and when restoring a person who has sinned?

How does unchecked sin corrupt others in a church?

Pray for persecuted Christians

f) Women in Leadership

In the OT Israelite nation, some women had roles as leaders

JUDG 4:4 *Now Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time.* NET

MIC 6:4 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] In fact, I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I delivered you from that place of slavery. I sent Moses, Aaron, and *Miriam to lead you.* NET

In the NT church, some women had significant ministerial roles

ROM 16:1–4 [PAUL, TO THE ROMAN CHURCH:] Now I commend to you *our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,* ²so that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and provide her with whatever help she may need from you, for *she has been a great help to many, including me.* ³*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,* ⁴who risked their own necks for my life. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. NET

ROM 16:6–7 [PAUL, TO THE ROMAN CHURCH:] *Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you.* ⁷*Greet Andronicus and Junias, my fellow Jews who are in prison with me and are prominent among the apostles. They were in the Messiah before I was.* ISV

“Junias” (v. 7a) is a female name, often translated as “Junia”; some manuscripts even have “Julia”. Being “prominent among the apostles” (v. 7b) may mean that Andronicus and Junias were considered outstanding by the apostles (cf. CEV) or that they were outstanding apostles (cf. NCV). If the latter is the case, then Paul would be using the term “apostle” in a broad sense, but it would still imply that Junias – a woman – had quite a significant leadership role within the church.

Controversial passages on women not speaking in church

1COR 14:33b–35, 37 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] *As in all the churches of the saints,* ³⁴*the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak. Rather, let them be in submission, as in fact the law says.* ³⁵*If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home, because it is disgraceful for a*

woman to speak in church. ...³⁷If anyone considers himself a prophet or spiritual person, he should acknowledge that *what I write to you is the Lord's command.* NET

1TIM 2:11–14 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.* ESV

Some take the above teaching on face value, understanding it to mean that women should remain silent in church and not be in positions of teaching or authority, as they are to be “in submission” (1Cor 14:34b) to their husbands. Others believe that in saying that women should remain silent in church, Paul has in view social norms of the day, where apparently it was considered disgraceful for a woman to speak in public. Another view is that these instructions were aimed at curbing noisy and disorderly church meetings – in particular disorderly expression of some spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church (cf. 1Cor 14:26–33a). A further viewpoint is that these instructions were regarding married women, and so not necessarily applicable to all women.

Note: The oneness and interdependence of women and men “in” Jesus Christ

GAL 3:28 [PAUL, TO THE GALATIAN BELIEVERS:] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* NET

1COR 11:11–12 In any case, *in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹²For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman.* But all things come from God. NET

Paul sees women and men – and by association presumably also their roles – as being interdependent (v. 11), in accordance with their interdependence in nature (v. 12).

It does not appear that Paul's reasoning in 1 Timothy 2:11–14 can be attributed to social norms of his day. What is your view of his instruction that a woman "is to remain quiet"? Should it be taken on face value or is there some other explanation?

What differences, if any, should there be in the roles of women and men in the church?

What are some of the implications for church life of women and men all being one in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal 3:28) and being interdependent (cf. 1Cor 11:11–12)?

Pray for persecuted Christians

g) Church Members' Duties to Leaders

See also:

- *Pray for Each Other (I): General*, Ch. 26
- *Pray for Each Other (II): What to Ask*, Ch. 26
- *Encourage Each Other*, Ch. 26

Love your leaders

2COR 8:7A [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] You are so rich in all you have: in faith, speech, and knowledge, in your eagerness to help and in *your love for us*. GNT

Respect your leaders

1THES 5:12–13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] We ask you, brothers, *to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you*, ¹³*and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work*. Be at peace among yourselves. ESV

Listen to your leaders and their teaching . . .

ACTS 10:33B [CORNELIUS, TO PETER:] So now we are all here in the presence of God to *listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us*. NET

. . . and obey your leaders

HEB 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls*, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. ESV

Give your leaders material support . . .

GAL 6:6 Now *the one who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with the one who teaches it*. NET

. . . Leaders deserve material support

1COR 9:4, 7 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] *Do we not have the right to financial support? ...⁷Who ever serves in the army at his own*

expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not consume its milk? NET

How can we express love to our church leaders?

If a leader gave an instruction that you were very reluctant to obey for what you considered to be good reason, how would you respond bearing in mind the Bible's teaching to obey and submit to your leaders (cf. Heb 13:17)?

How do you support your leader/s? Is there anything else you could do?

II. Teaching in the Church

Teaching is one of the main roles of most church leaders. Good teaching is based on God's word, and should be delivered in accordance with the directions and sound examples found in Scripture. On the topic of teaching, one must also be aware of the characteristics of "false" teachers who are so often present in the church, so as to recognize them and deal with them.

a) What to Teach: God's Word

Teach and preach God's word

2TIM 3:16–17 *Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*¹⁷*that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.* NET

2TIM 4:2A [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Preach the word!* NKJV

As such, teach God's commands and ways . . .

EX 18:20 [JETHRO, TO MOSES:] *You should teach them God's commands and explain to them how they should live and what they should do.* GNT

. . . and teach the truths of the faith

1TIM 4:6 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *By pointing out such things to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, having nourished yourself on the words of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.* NET

In v. 6a Paul exhorts Timothy to instruct the believers in the things that he had been writing about. These things were composed of or in line with the "words" or truths of the faith and the good teaching that Timothy himself had followed (v. 6b).

Read God's word in church assemblies

1TIM 4:13 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Until I get there, concentrate on reading Scripture in worship, giving encouraging messages, and teaching people.* GW

JOSH 8:35 *Joshua read aloud every commandment Moses had given before the whole assembly of Israel, including the women, children, and resident foreigners who lived among them.* NET

Also, use God’s word as the authoritative standard in determining what is true . . .

ACTS 17:11B The Bereans were eager to hear what Paul and Silas said and *studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true.* NCV™

. . . and use God’s word in determining what actions are legitimate

MATT 19:3–6 Then some Pharisees came to him [Jesus] in order to test him. *They asked, “Is it lawful to divorce a wife for any cause?”* ⁴*He answered, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female, ⁵and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’* ⁶*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”* NET

LUKE 4:5–8 Then the devil led him [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in a flash all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And he said to him, “To you I will grant this whole realm – and the glory that goes along with it, for it has been relinquished to me, and I can give it to anyone I wish. ⁷*So then, if you will worship me, all this will be yours.*” ⁸*Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’”* NET

Note: Do not add to or subtract from God’s word – nor distort it

DEUT 4:2 [MOSES:] *Do not add a thing to what I command you nor subtract from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I am delivering to you.* NET

2COR 4:2A [PAUL:] *Instead, we have refused to use secret and shameful ways. We don’t use tricks, and we don’t distort God’s word. As God watches, we clearly reveal the truth to everyone.* GW

Why is the Bible critical for Christian teaching?

Apart from teaching, what else can the Bible be used for in church life?

How have you used the Bible as the authoritative standard in determining if something is true or if some action is legitimate? Is there anything else that you need to compare with the Bible's teaching?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) How to Teach

Explain God's word and truths

NEH 8:7–8 Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah – all of whom were Levites – *were teaching the people the law, as the people remained standing.* ⁸*They read from the book of God's law, explaining it and imparting insight.* Thus the people gained understanding from what was read. NET

ACTS 28:23B From morning until evening *he [Paul] continued to explain the kingdom of God to them, trying to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the Prophets.* ISV

Where applicable, use illustrations in teaching

1COR 9:24–25 [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *You know that many runners enter a race, and only one of them wins the prize. So run to win!* ²⁵*Athletes work hard to win a crown that cannot last, but we do it for a crown that will last forever.* CEV

Here Paul likens the Christian life and the reward of the afterlife to a race and its prize – to emphasize the focus, determination and discipline required.

Do not teach beyond what the hearers can understand

2COR 1:13A [PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *For we do not write you anything other than what you can read and also understand.* NET

MARK 4:33 Jesus used many other stories when he spoke to the people, and *he taught them as much as they could understand.* CEV

The manner in which to teach

TITUS 2:7B–8 [PAUL, TO THE CHURCH LEADER TITUS:] *Be sincere and serious in your teaching.* ⁸*Use sound words that cannot be criticized, so that your enemies may be put to shame by not having anything bad to say about us.* GNT

2TIM 4:2B [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Be very patient when you teach.* GW

The teaching needs to be correct . . .

TITUS 2:1 [PAUL, TO TITUS:] *But you must teach what agrees with sound doctrine.* GNT

. . . and the teaching needs to be complete

ACTS 20:27 [PAUL:] *I have told you everything God wants you to know.* CEV

Keep reminding church members of teachings

2PET 1:12–15 [PETER:] *Therefore, I intend to keep on reminding you about these things, even though you already know them and are firmly established in the truth that you now have.* ¹³*Yet I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I am living in this bodily tent,* ¹⁴*because I know that the removal of my bodily tent will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, has shown me.* ¹⁵*And I will make every effort to see that you will always remember these things after I am gone.* ISV

Note: Church members can themselves instruct one another

ROM 15:14 [PAUL, TO THE ROMAN BELIEVERS:] *But I myself am fully convinced about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.* NET

The phrase “filled with all knowledge” suggests that the Roman believers were amply filled with spiritual knowledge (cf. AMP). Thus, such believers are competent to instruct each other.

What is one aspect of the way good preachers teach that you find helpful, as a listener?

In the light of the Bible's direction to not teach beyond what the hearers can understand, how can leaders cater for congregations with different levels of understanding?

How can church members be confident that what their leaders teach is both correct and complete?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Traits of False Teachers (I): Their Teaching

See also:

- *False teachers are deceitful*, p. 29
- *False teachers lack understanding*, p. 30

Note that also included in this and the following sections on false teachers are verses regarding false prophets, ungodly priests and other ungodly religious leaders, including Pharisees. For similar to false teachers in the church, all these were in positions of spiritual authority amongst God's people and taught misleading things.

False teachers speak lies and delusions of their own, in God's name

JER 14:14 [JEREMIAH:] Then the LORD said to me, "*Those [false] prophets are prophesying lies while claiming my authority! I did not send them. I did not commission them. I did not speak to them. They are prophesying to these people false visions, worthless predictions, and the delusions of their own mind.*" NET

Their teaching is hollow – of worldly, human origin

COL 2:8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an *empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.* NET

The phrase "the elemental spirits of the world" likely refers either to evil spirits who have great influence on the thinking of the world or to "the basic principles of the world" (ISV).

False teachers say what their listeners like to hear – appealing and pleasant things . . .

2PET 2:18–19 For *by speaking high-sounding but empty words they are able to entice, with fleshly desires and with debauchery*, people who have just escaped from those who reside in error. ¹⁹Although *these false teachers promise such people freedom*, they themselves are enslaved to immorality. For whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved. NET

JER 23:16B–17 [JEREMIAH, WARNING HIS PEOPLE ABOUT FALSE PROPHETS:] *They are filling you with false hopes.* They are reporting visions of their own imaginations, not something the LORD has given them to say. ¹⁷*They continually say to those who reject what the LORD has said, ‘Things will go well for you!’ They say to all those who follow the stubborn inclinations of their own hearts, ‘Nothing bad will happen to you!’* NET

. . . They do not confront their listeners with their sin

LAM 2:14A [JEREMIAH, TO JERUSALEM AND HER PEOPLE:] Your prophets saw visions for you that were worthless lies. *They failed to expose your sin so as to restore your fortunes.* NET

False teachers teach different doctrine to what is correct

1TIM 1:3 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may *charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ...* ESV

In doing so, they distort the truth . . .

2PET 3:16B [PETER, REFERRING TO PAUL’S LETTERS:] Some things in these letters are hard to understand, *things the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they also do to the rest of the scriptures.* NET

. . . and they typically deny Jesus Christ

1JN 2:22 *Who, then, is the liar? It is those who say that Jesus is not the Messiah. Such people are the Enemies of Christ—they reject both the Father and the Son.* GNT

False teachers (in view here) typically deny or dilute key aspects of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Other notes about their teaching

COL 2:18B *That person goes on at great lengths about what he has supposedly seen,* but he is puffed up with empty notions by his fleshly mind. NET

JUDE 1:10A *But these people attack with insults anything they do not understand ...* GNT

Note: False teachers and their teaching are savage and destructive

Acts 20:29–30 [PAUL, TO PEOPLE FROM THE EPHESIAN CHURCH:] I know that when I'm gone *savage wolves will come among you and not spare the flock.* ³⁰*Indeed, some of your own men will come forward and distort the truth in order to lure the disciples into following them.* ISV

What are some indications that teaching is of a human or worldly origin?

How do false teachers make their teaching sound attractive?

Choose a characteristic of false teaching and give an example of how it can be seen in false teaching in the church today.

d) Traits of False Teachers (II): Characteristics

The consciences and minds of false teachers are corrupted . . .

1TIM 4:2A They [unfaithful people] will also be fooled by the false claims of *liars whose consciences have lost all feeling*. CEV

1TIM 6:4–5 This gives rise to envy, dissension, slanders, evil suspicions, ⁵and constant bickering by *people corrupted in their minds and deprived of the truth*, who suppose that godliness is a way of making a profit. NET

Here “people” appears to primarily refer to false teachers (cf. v. 3), “people corrupted in their minds”.

. . . and false teachers typically follow their sinful desires

JUDE 1:18–19 They [the apostles] said to you [believers], “When the last days come, *people will appear who will mock you, people who follow their own godless desires.*”¹⁹*These are the people who cause divisions, who are controlled by their natural desires*, who do not have the Spirit. GNT

False teachers are primarily in view here.

False teachers are generally greedy for personal gain

2PET 2:3A [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *In their greed these false teachers will make a profit out of telling you made-up stories.* GNT

False teachers are deceitful

2COR 11:13–15 For *such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.* ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore *it is not surprising his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness*, whose end will correspond to their actions. NET

False teachers are often arrogant and contemptuous

2PET 2:10B *These false teachers are bold and arrogant, and show no respect for the glorious beings above; instead, they insult them.* GNT

False teachers lack understanding

1TIM 1:7 They [false teachers] want to be teachers of the law, but *they do not understand what they are saying or the things they insist on so confidently.* NET

MATT 15:14 Leave them! *They are blind guides.* If someone who is blind leads another who is blind, both will fall into a pit. NET

The Pharisees were spiritually blind. As such they lacked insight and mislead others.

Note: False teachers stand condemned

MATT 23:13, 33 [JESUS:] *But woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven! For you neither enter nor permit those trying to enter to go in. ... ³³You snakes, you offspring of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?* NET

How do people with corrupt minds and consciences get into positions of leadership and teaching in the church in the first place?

How do false teachers make a profit from their teaching?

What do you think motivates false teachers?

Pray for persecuted Christians

e) Guarding against False Teachers

Watch out for false teachers and their teaching . . .

MATT 7:15 *Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves.* NET

. . . Do not be deceived by false teachers

EPH 5:6 *Let nobody deceive you with empty words, for because of these things God's wrath comes on the sons of disobedience.* NET

Test teachers by comparing their teaching with the Scriptures

ACTS 17:11 The people of Berea were more open-minded than the people of Thessalonica. They were very willing to receive God's message, and *every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true.* GW

False teachers can also be recognized by their "fruit" and actions

MATT 7:16–18 *You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit.* NET

1JN 3:7–8A, 10 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Little children, *let no one deceive you: The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous. ⁸The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. ... ¹⁰By this the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: Everyone who does not practice righteousness – the one who does not love his fellow Christian – is not of God.* NET

John appears to primarily have in view recognizing false teachers (cf. 2:18–26).

Do not tolerate false teachers and their teaching . . .

REV 2:2 [JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS:] I know what you do, how you work hard and never give up. *I know you do not put up with*

the false teachings of evil people. You have tested those who say they are apostles but really are not, and you found they are liars. NCV™

... Have nothing to do with false teachers

2TIM 3:5 Even though they will make a show of being religious, their religion won't be real. *Don't have anything to do with such people.*

CEV

Note: False teachers often succeed in leading people astray

2PET 2:2 *And many will follow their debauched lifestyles.* Because of these false teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. NET

If you were concerned that some teaching may be false, how would you go about finding the appropriate Scripture passages to compare it with?

How can we recognize false teachers by their "fruit"?

If you were aware of false teaching in your church or fellowship, what action could you take?

Topics in This Series

Section I: What to Know

Part A. God and Spiritual Powers

- 1. God's Being**
 - I. Basics
 - II. God's Pre-Eminence
- 2. God's Character**
 - I. Holy Characteristics
 - II. Loving Characteristics
- 3. Jesus Christ**
 - I. General
 - II. Jesus Christ and God
- 4. The Holy Spirit**
 - I. General
 - II. God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit
- 5. Angels, Satan and Demons**
 - I. Angels
 - II. Satan and Demons

Part B. God and the World: Basics

- 6. God's Creation**
 - I. General
 - II. God's Creation of People
- 7. God's Sovereignty**
 - I. God's Supreme Authority
 - II. God's Control over the World
- 8. God's Word**
 - I. General
 - II. Key Old Testament Covenants
- 9. The Problem of Sin**
 - I. General
 - II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin
- 10. God's Judgment**
 - I. Basics
 - II. The Manifestation of God's Judgment

Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ

- 11. God's Promised Messiah**
 - I. The Messiah's Identity
 - II. The Messiah's Purpose and Person
- 12. Jesus Christ's Mission**
 - I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ
 - II. Jesus Christ's Ministry, Death and Resurrection
- 13. Salvation through Jesus Christ**
 - I. Salvation from Sin
 - II. Salvation for the World
- 14. The New Order**
 - I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role
 - II. Key Elements of the New Order
- 15. 'The Last Things'**
 - I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment
 - II. The Afterlife

Part D. God and His Own People

- 16. The Standing of God's People**
 - I. Basics
 - II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ
- 17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People**
 - I. Basics
 - II. God's Holy Spirit in His People
- 18. God's Transformation of His People**
 - I. General
 - II. Spiritual Attributes
- 19. God's Care of His People**
 - I. God's Saving of His People
 - II. God's Preservation of His People
- 20. God's Plans for His People**
 - I. General
 - II. God's Plans for Israel

Section II. What to Do

Part E. Relating to God

21. **Being Right with God**
 - I. Getting Right with God
 - II. Staying Right with God
22. **Having Faith in God**
 - I. Faith and Hope
 - II. What Not to Do
23. **Loving, Fearing and Obeying God**
 - I. Loving and Fearing God
 - II. Obeying God
24. **Connecting with God**
 - I. Being Close to God
 - II. Praying to God
25. **Exalting God**
 - I. Instructions
 - II. Reasons to Exalt God

Part F. Church Life

26. **Being One Body**
 - I. General
 - II. Caring for the Body
27. **Worshipping God**
 - I. General
 - II. Offerings
28. **Serving God**
 - I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights
 - II. Doing God's Work
29. **Significant Practices**
 - I. Symbolic Rites
 - II. Other Significant Practices
30. **Church Leadership**
 - I. General
 - II. Teaching in the Church

Part G. Relating to People

31. **Love**
 - I. Loving Qualities
 - II. Antitheses of Love
32. **Justice**
 - I. Justice in Action
 - II. Being True
33. **Wisdom**
 - I. Being Wise
 - II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge
34. **Common Relationships**
 - I. Family Relationships
 - II. Civil Relationships
35. **Spreading the Gospel**
 - I. Instructions
 - II. Insights

Part H. Persevering

36. **Standing Firm**
 - I. General
 - II. Spiritual Warfare
37. **Rejecting Sin**
 - I. Encountering Sin
 - II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy
38. **Major Pitfalls**
 - I. Pride
 - II. Riches and Sex
39. **Hard Times**
 - I. General
 - II. Praying in Hard Times
40. **Persecution**
 - I. The Persecution of God's People
 - II. What to Do in Persecution

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Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It equips believers for persecution and maintaining a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com.au

It provides weekly bulletins. Send a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

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Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

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