

Sermon: Truth & Error Ephesians 6:10-13

We are continuing our study on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6.

Last week we dealt with the schemes of the devil in general.

This week we are going to deal with one particular scheme of the devil and that is the way in which he attacks the truth.

Jesus said in John 8:44, concerning the devil:

John 8:44 He ... does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The devil's desire is to separate people from God. And because of this, he is hell-bent on destroying the church.

The church's mission is to bring people into a right relationship with God through Christ.

In this mission, proper doctrine is essential.

And so, one of the devil's most persistent strategies is to weaken the church through false teachers and false doctrine.

Therefore, we need to be aware of this scheme of Satan.

Let's read Ephesians 6:10-13 which is printed in your bulletin.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever...because it is true.

Some years ago I had a friend who worked in local government.

And as was required of him, he had to attend a political debate for the upcoming election of the city board of commissioners.

Now this was a small town and the stakes for the city in this particular election were not high.

Therefore, there wasn't much drama to be expected.

Now at the time, my friend decided to bring along a visiting college exchange student who was from Russia.

And at one point in the debate, where one candidate was being accused of not being forthright about some of his dealings, that candidate exclaimed:

"I will not lie to you."

To which the Russian student whispered to my friend:

"That is the first."

Lies sow mistrust.

And mistrust sows destruction.

This is true in personal relationships, institutions and societies.

And when the church buys the lies of Satan, the results are catastrophic.

Because people's souls are impacted for eternity.

You have a sermon outline which is printed in your bulletin.

And the first point there is...

I. Truth Matters

Jesus set up his church to be a city on a hill, and a light of the world.

To be a bastion of truth.

It is God's desire for his church to be the one enduring place on earth where truth can be found- where the truth will be proclaimed unapologetically and boldly.

In **1 Timothy 3:15**, Paul describes the church as: "a pillar and buttress of the truth."

This means that one of the central responsibilities of the church is to hold up, support and proclaim the truth.

This is one of the church's most essential functions. To hold up God's truth.

The truth is vital.

When I was a teenager and was exploring Christianity for myself, I thought that perhaps the best way to learn about Christianity was to just read the bible.

And I remember being struck with the central importance of truth in Christianity.

Because what I wanted to know above all other things was: "Is Christianity true?"

It does not matter if it works.

It is of little consequence that Christianity is useful to making a better person or improving a society.

The most fundamental question remains: "Is Christianity true?"

The apostle Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:16:

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

You see what Peter is saying here?

He's telling us that the truth matters.

He's telling us that he's not making this stuff up.

17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

He was an eye-witness. He heard the very voice borne from heaven concerning the testimony of Jesus Christ. Obviously for Peter, the truth matters.

In 1 Timothy 2:7 Paul talks about his call into ministry.

A call that included him seeing and hearing the risen Christ and being called, AUDIBLY into the ministry. And in telling Timothy about this call, Paul inserts these words:

(I am telling the truth, I am not lying).

The truth was vitally important to Paul.

And I am sure he had to remind himself of this experience from time to time.

Because Paul's life became much harder after he met Jesus Christ.
He was suffered often for the sake of Christ.
Certainly his life would have been much easier if he just gave up preaching the gospel.
And in those moments I am sure that on more than one occasion, he remembered back upon his call.
He saw and heard Jesus Christ.
He knew what was true.
And because of this, he was willing to walk into all manner of trials.

In John's gospel, **Thomas** has a timeless role that I believe all of us can relate to.
He is called doubting Thomas and I think this moniker is probably a bit unfair.
Because all of us can relate to Thomas.
He just wanted to know the truth for a certainty.

After Jesus died and rose again, he made appearances.
He appeared to Mary Magdalene on that resurrection Sunday morning.
Then, in the evening, Jesus appeared to his disciples.
Except Thomas was not there.

In John 20:25, the disciples were saying to Thomas:
25 "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Thomas is emphatic.
No matter how much the other disciples claimed to have seen the risen Jesus, Thomas will never believe until he sees for himself.
"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

He is emphatic.

John 20:26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "**Peace be with you.**" **27** Then he said to Thomas, "**Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.**" **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "**Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**"

Truth matters.
It mattered to Peter. It mattered to Paul. It mattered to Thomas.
And it matters to Jesus.
During the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, he proclaimed that he was telling the truth:
He said in John 8:31:

John 8:31 "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Not only did Jesus proclaim that he was telling the truth. He also claimed to be **the very embodiment of the truth.**
In John 14:6, Jesus said:

John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Not only is Jesus the embodiment of truth, he also taught that the word of God itself is truth.
In John 17:17, Jesus prayed regarding his disciples:
John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

The truth matters.
The most important question we can ask regarding the Christian faith is: is it true?
Not: is it helpful?
Not: does this religion suit me?
Not even, do I like what the Bible is saying.

All of that is quite beside the point.
The most important aspect of the Christian religion is its claim to be true.

So let me ask you:
Is this how you think about the matter? Do you believe the gospel is objectively true?
Perhaps you have been raised in a Christian home and you are wondering what it means to be a Christian.
Let me assure you that being a Christian begins here: in being persuaded that it is true.
That Jesus really is the truth.
That he really is telling the truth.
That he really is God the Son, come to earth, incarnate in flesh.
That he really did die upon the cross to atone for sin.
That he really did rise from the grave and that he really will come again to judge the living and the dead.

The truthfulness of these statements is of first importance.
Do you believe them?
This is where Christianity begins.
It begins with the believing that God's word is true.

Listen to how forcefully Paul speaks about the truthfulness of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:
14 ... if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.
17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.
19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Paul is telling the Corinthians that their faith hinges on the truthfulness of the resurrection.
The truth matters.
It is of first importance.

Do you believe this?

Now, because the truthfulness of Christianity is so important, one of Satan's chief tactics in his assault on the church is to attack our understanding of the truth. And this leads us to our next point...

II. The Attack

Satan wants nothing more than to dismantle the church. It is his chief work to separate people from God and destroy the work of God.

And the best way to dismantle the church and separate people from God is to undermine the church's doctrine.

Undermining is such a vivid image that fits the work of satan perfectly.

Imagine a great structure- for example a large, old church. It has stood for ages and the reason it has stood for so long is because the foundation was well laid. And yet, it really isn't that hard to destroy a church building- even a large one. Sure the foundation may be solid, but what if you dig a mine underneath the foundation? Then the foundation and the structure built on top will just crumble.

This is a good description of the primary way satan attacks the church. His primary focus is on dismantling the church's doctrine. He seeks to undermine the foundation.

In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul writes:

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, **2** through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...

And here we see that there is a demonic element in serious departures from the truth. Jesus warned us of false teachers in Matthew 7:15: **Matthew 7:15** "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

In 1 John 4:1, John links false prophets or false teachers with a spirit that is not of God. He writes:

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many **false prophets** have gone out into the world.

And so we have to be very watchful in the church. The church continually faces the very real threat of **false teaching**. This has been true **since the very beginning** of the church.

Paul knew the dangers of the false teachers and much of his teaching was done in order to combat them. For Paul, this was a pressing need. We see this in Acts 20, where Paul is with believers in Troas. In **Acts 20:6**, we are told that Paul stayed seven days. On the final day, they gathered in an upper room and there Paul prolonged his speech until midnight. Verse 9 tells us that the late hour did not stop Paul, as he talked still longer. So long in fact that one of the believers named Eutychus fell asleep, fell out the window and died. Now if you know this story, the emphasis is often placed on Paul's raising this man back up to life. Certainly that is extraordinary and worthy of attention. But notice the occasion- Paul spent his last hours with these believers not just in fellowship over a meal but rather teaching them. There was a sense of urgency here.

He didn't know if he would ever see them again and he wanted to show them the truth of God's word.

It was so urgent for Paul that he stayed up into the wee hours of the night teaching them. It was the urgency of proper doctrine.

This urgency is felt too in Philippians which is Paul's most upbeat and joyful letter. In chapter 3 verse 17, Paul warns them ever so seriously of the threat of false teachers. He writes:

Philippians 3:17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. **18** For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

Paul is warning them of threats that will come from within the church.

These are false prophets, false teachers and they are enemies of the cross of Christ.

Because satan's desire is to separate people from God, His primary tactic is to separate the church from proper doctrine.

Paul charges Timothy in light of this in 1 Timothy 4:13: **13** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching... **16** Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

The church is always buffeted by the threat of false teachers and false doctrine. False doctrine is any teaching that departs from the word of God and focuses instead:
On the trivial and temporal
Or on the speculative
Or on the emotions

In Acts 20, as Paul was departing from the Ephesians, his final words were these: **27** ...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. **28** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. **29** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; **30** and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. **31** Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

The need for right teaching is just as urgent now as it was then.

Do you feel this urgency?

And have you learned to spot false teachers?

When I was 16 and a new believer, I went to an RC Sproul conference with my youth pastor at a large church in Orlando.

RC Sproul was a solid teacher but what I didn't know was that the church the conference was being held in

was one that held to a theology very different from that of Sproul.

And so I wandered into their gigantic book store, perusing various titles.

After a few minutes, my youth pastor came up to me warned me in a way reminiscent of Boromir in Lord of the Rings:

“One does not simply walk into a ‘Christian bookstore’ and buy books.”

You have to be discerning.

And so, I ask you:

Are you discerning of false teachers and false doctrine?

With false teachers, the emphasis strays from Jesus Christ¹ and dependence upon him for salvation.

Instead the emphasis is often on becoming a better person or on some temporal concern.

False teachers don’t teach the whole counsel of God as contained in his word.

Instead, they leave significant parts out of their teaching.

Normally the parts that are left out are those teachings that would cause the teacher to lose popularity.

And this is because, for false teachers, the highest priority is being highly esteemed.

Often times, false teachers make the message of Jesus Christ about themselves.

Sometimes they are mild mannered.

Sometimes they are narcissists.

But one thing that binds all false teachers together is that their message is not ultimately about the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

So are you discerning?

Can you spot false teaching and false teachers?

This is the primary way that the devil attacks the church which is the pillar and buttress of the truth.

Yet there is a something we can do and this leads us to our third and final point...

III. The Defense

In the battle against false doctrine, our greatest defense is to examine everything in light of God’s word.

In Acts 17, the Bereans were praised for doing just this. They did not simply accept what Paul and Silas preached to them.

Rather, Acts 17:11 tells us:

11 ...they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

The Bereans knew their bibles.

They were able to measure what they heard with what they knew to be true from the Old Testament.

In Acts, Luke praises the Bereans, calling them **noble**, for being a people of God’s word.

And in this, they showed themselves to be like Jesus himself.

Jesus had to deal with the lies of Satan up close and personally.

He was singled out by the devil for temptation.

The devil attempted to deceive him by telling Jesus half-truths.

The devil even quoted scripture!

Yet with every temptation, Jesus responded by quoting scripture in its proper context.

The first temptation is especially instructive for us.

Matthew 4:1 says: **Matthew 4:1** ... Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” **4** But he answered, “**It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”**”

Jesus did not merely refuse to do as the devil commanded.

He relied upon God’s word as his defense (from Deuteronomy 8:3).

And with all three temptations, Jesus responded by quoting scripture.

Jesus isn’t just our savior by doing this.

He is also our example.

Because the only way that we will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil is by relying upon God’s word.

Psalm 119:11 says:

Psalms 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

God’s word is our best defense in dealing with the schemes of Satan.

And so, do you take this seriously?

Do you spend regular time in God’s word?

Do you ever sit down and just read an entire book of the bible straight through or an entire letter in one sitting?

Do you ever read it fast so as to get an overview?

And do you ever read it slow and meticulously?

Perhaps with a commentary or a study Bible, reading the notes?

Finally, do you study the bible with others?

This is especially rewarding.

Reading the bible with you family or friends. (**Ahem, small groups?**)

The bible is for every believer- whether you are a recent convert or you have been a Christian for 40 years.

God’s word is for you.

It is a means of Grace.

And knowing and applying God’s word is our best defense against the schemes of the devil.

I’ll close with the words of the apostle Peter

1 Peter 2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— **3** if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Amen.

¹ 2 Timothy 2:8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel,