

USEFUL TO THE MASTER

Part 27 of Foundations 260. 2 Timothy 2:16-23.
Peter Foxwell. Cornerstone Church. August 31, 2025.

WHEN FALSE TEACHING IS LEFT UNCHECKED

What happens when false teaching is left unchallenged in a church or denomination?

- History shows that it breaks the church and destroys faith.
- That's the message of 2 Timothy.

THE CONTEXT & TEXT OF 2 TIMOTHY 2

There was trouble at the church in Ephesus.

- False teachers had infiltrated the congregation.
- So, the apostle Paul sent Timothy to sort things out. Then, he wrote two letters telling him what to do.

2 Timothy 2:16-23 (CSB) Avoid irreverent and empty speech, since those who engage in it will produce even more godlessness, 17 and their teaching will spread like gangrene. Hymenaeus and Philetus are among them. 18 They have departed from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and are ruining the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, bearing this inscription: The Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness.

20 Now, in a large house, there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also those of wood and clay; some for honorable use and some for dishonorable. 21 So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. 22 Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 23 But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, because you know that they breed quarrels.

THE GOAL OF PAUL'S INSTRUCTIONS

I found three objectives:

- Gaining God's approval - verse 15.
- Guarding against godlessness - verse 16.
- Good work - verse 21. Becoming useful to the master of the house.

THE HOUSE METAPHOR

The background of the house metaphor - verses 16-18.

- False teachers had "departed from the truth" - verse 18.
- They denied the physical resurrection, thus undermining a pillar of the gospel and eroding Christian hope (1 Corinthians 15).
- Their teaching was "ruining the faith of some" - verse 18.
- False teaching "spreads like gangrene," so it must be challenged.

The meaning of the house metaphor - verse 20.

- The "large house" is the Christian church, which "stands firm" on the "solid foundation" of Christ and the gospel.
- Every house has pots, pans, and containers-"vessels."
- Some vessels are for "dishonorable" use: for example, we put garbage in them. These represent the false teachers.
- Some vessels are reserved for "honorable" use: for example, we use them to hold perfume. These represent the faithful teachers.
- The metaphor is simple: faithful teachers are used for God's honorable purposes, and false teachers are used for the devil's dishonorable purposes (see 2 Timothy 2:26).

The implications of the house metaphor - verses 21-23.

- Separate - verse 21. Faithful teachers and, by extension, faithful churches must “purify themselves from anything dishonorable. We must establish clear boundaries between ourselves and false teachers.
- Congregate - verse 22. Faithful teachers should partner with “those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” Fellowship helps us to stand firm and carry on.
- Educate - verses 23-26. False teachers love to quarrel, but faithful teachers should not engage in fruitless quarrels. Instead, gently and patiently teach the truth and leave the results to God (verses 25-26).

I’M NOT A TEACHER, SO HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO ME?

Act like a teacher.

- Make sure we are “correctly handling the word of truth” - verse 15.

Be vigilant and active.

- Separate from false teachers and speak up for the truth and against error.

Be wise.

- Be wise about 1) what needs to be challenged, and 2) how to challenge errors.

Pray.

- Ask the Lord to protect and build his church.
- Pray for the Elders’ Team, every teacher in the church, small group leaders, the Free Church, and for Pastor Peter to stand firm in the truth.

RUINING A DENOMINATION ¹

Dismantling the United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church (UMC) has long been one of the largest Protestant denominations in the United States; however, in recent years, it has experienced a painful split. At the heart of this division lies a disagreement over biblical authority, particularly on issues of marriage, sexuality, and the definition of sin. For decades, conservatives within the denomination held to the traditional, scriptural understanding of marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman. At the same time, progressives pushed for full acceptance of same-sex relationships and ordination of LGBTQ clergy.

Though the UMC officially affirmed the traditional view for many years, enforcement of these standards weakened. Some bishops and conferences openly defied the church's teachings, blessing same-sex unions and ordaining those living in ways contrary to Scripture. This led to increasing frustration among evangelicals who felt the denomination was straying from God's Word. After years of tension, the divide became irreconcilable, and beginning in 2019, many traditional congregations started departing to join the Global Methodist Church, a new body committed to historic Methodist doctrine and biblical authority. Since 2019, more than 7,600 congregations have officially left the United Methodist Church (UMC), representing about a quarter of all U.S. Methodist churches. In 2023 alone, it's estimated that the denomination lost as many as 1.2 million members in the U.S.

The Lesson Learned

For conservative believers, the lesson is clear: unity cannot be built on compromise with the culture. When a denomination wavers in its commitment to the authority of Scripture, it loses God's blessing, and traditional believers leave in droves. The UMC split is a sobering reminder that faithfulness to Christ must take precedence over loyalty to an institution. While painful, this division is also an opportunity for renewal—a chance for the establishment of a faithful denomination that stands firm on biblical truth and boldly proclaims Christ in a confused world.

¹ I wrote this brief overview with the assistance of Perplexity AI.