

Statement on False Teaching

“False teaching” – the term is never used in the New Testament.

“False teachers” – used once in 2 Peter 2:1. In the context, the false teacher “*secretly* introduces destructive heresies”; they deny the Sovereign Lord; they walk in “shameful ways”; they are greedy and exploit their hearers for their advantage.

“False Prophet(s)” is used 11 times in the N.T. and 9 times in the LXX. They are ferocious wolves (Matthew 7:15). They are attempting to deceive (Matt. 24:11). One of their errors is that they do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3).

There are also men who distort the truth, and we are to be on the watch for them. They “draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30).

“Quarreling about words” and engaging in “godless chatter” lead to ungodliness. One example is Hymenaeus and Philetus, who said the resurrection had already taken place.

In the pastoral epistles, Paul uses the term “sound doctrine” three times. Ungodliness, patricide, matricide, murder, adultery, etc. are inconsistent with sound doctrine. (Note again the emphasis on behavior.) Sound doctrine conforms to the gospel (1 Timothy 1:9-11).

People who don’t want sound doctrine seek out teachers who say what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:3).

Sound doctrine is encouraging to others – possibly it encourages them to self-controlled, holy, and upright lives, per the context in Titus 1:8-9.

Based on the New Testament, it seems that moral considerations are of first import in deciding whether someone is a “false teacher” or “false prophet.” A person is not a false teacher because he has taught something that is incomplete or inaccurate (as Apollos did), but because he is deceptive, secretive, greedy, and exploitative. He is trying to separate people from Christ’s church for himself. A teacher who does not acknowledge that Jesus Messiah has come in the flesh in a false prophet/teacher.