

PLAIN SPEECH

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“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12)

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IS IT WRONG TO CALL A “GREAT GUY” A FALSE TEACHER?

Ask any able 4th grader what constitutes a false teacher and he/she can tell you. There is nothing difficult about it. A false teacher is just that: one who teaches something that is false. Pretty simple to understand!

However, there are some in the church who try to justify fellowship with those who teach error in that they classify as false teachers only those who teach error and have impure motives. For instance, back in 2001 Jessie Jenkins was quoted as saying, **“I will not call one a false teacher unless I am convinced that he has both a character problem and a doctrine problem.”**

Listen, sometimes false teachers do have evil motives (cf. **2 Peter 2:1-19**). However, whether or not one has evil motives, if he teaches error, he is a false teacher. Motive has nothing to do with the equation.

To suggest that one is a false teacher only if he has evil motives brings simply silly conclusions. For instance, if it is, indeed, true that only those with impure motives may be classified as false teachers, then:

- Prior to His conversion Saul of Tarsus was not a false teacher in that he had only the purest of motives (**Acts 23:1**). Yet, we know that Saul was a false teacher – an antichrist in fact – in that he denied that Christ had come in the flesh (**2 John 7**). An antichrist, but not a false teacher? C’mon!
- Apollos was not a false teacher even though he was teaching the Word of God inaccurately – not even understanding baptism aright (**Acts 18:24-26**). If this is true, then we must repent and make confession of sin against the Graham Family, Joel Osteen, and many others in the denominational world; asking their forgiveness, for calling them false teachers all these years. After all, when Joel Osteen invites folks to say “The Sinners Prayer” and “get saved,” I am sure he is being sincere.
- Jesus was wrong in that He called Peter “Satan” for deviating from God’s will (**Matthew 16:21-23**). Those who hold to the mindset captured in the quote above must accept one of at least two things to keep their position: (1) The Lord didn’t know Peter was sincere {robbing Christ of divinity – **John 21:17**}, or (2) Peter was a hypocrite. I suggest they will accept neither. Yet, I also suggest they will not surrender their position.
- The elders in the church at Jerusalem were wrong in issuing letters about those who were subverting souls by binding parts of the Old Testament (**Acts 15:1, 23-24**). Surely those who blended law and grace were sincere in trying to uphold the Law of Moses. Yet, if one wants to argue that the Judaizers were insincere, **Acts 15:24** still plainly shows that the one who subverts souls is the same one who teaches something not authorized. The passage says nothing about sincerity. Why? Because one’s level of sincerity has nothing to do with whether or not he is a false teacher.
- Paul was wasting his time disputing with idolaters in Athens – after all, the Holy Ghost said those folks were “devout” (**Acts 17:16-17**).
- Men know more than God. You see, the Holy Ghost disagrees with the idea that wickedness is determined only by wicked motives. Notice: “The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?” (**Proverbs 21:27**).

Many other examples could be given, but let’s conclude. Is it wrong to call a “great guy” who teaches error a false teacher? The answer is no! False teachers are those who teach things which are false, regardless of motive. It is just that simple, folks. Let’s not let emotion or the desire to tow “party lines” cloud the issue.