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## **Polemic against False Teachers in the Pastoral Letters**

All three Pastoral Letters are concerned that false teachers have come into the church, but the letters do not describe or debunk the content of the errant teaching as such. Rather, they attack the teachers themselves. The methods, morals, and motives of those teachers are put on display as examples of what Christians should avoid.

- The problematic teachers are described as “perverted and sinful” (Titus 3:11).
- They are “detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work” (Titus 1:16).
- They are “wicked people . . . [who] will go from bad to worse” (2 Tim. 3:13).
- They understand nothing (1 Tim. 6:4).
- They are “bereft of the truth” (1 Tim. 6:5).
- They are proponents of a “counterfeit faith” that is opposed “to the truth” (2 Tim. 3:8).
- They hold “to the outward form of godliness” while “denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5).

- They are in “the snare of the devil,” held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26).
- Their teaching comes from demons and deceitful spirits (1 Tim. 4:1).

The letters also offer some reflection on how the false teachers came to be the way they are.

- These teachers seem to have lost or ignored the value of conscience (1 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:15), and people who reject conscience often “have suffered shipwreck in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:19).
- They have pretended to be something they are not; thus they are hypocrites and liars (1 Tim. 4:2), impostors who tried to deceive others and, in the process, ended up deceiving themselves (2 Tim. 3:13; cf. Titus 1:11).
- They have sought to minister in the church with impure motives, such as envy (1 Tim. 6:4) and a desire for sordid financial gain (1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11).
- They are divisive, harboring “a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words” (1 Tim. 6:4; cf. 2 Tim. 2:14, 23; Titus 3:9–11).

Such factors have corrupted their minds (1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:15), which is why they do not know the truth (1 Tim. 6:4–5).

Thus the Pastoral Letters do not urge church leaders to debate with such persons or even try to convince them that they are wrong (see Titus 1:11, 14; 3:10–11). The situation is not hopeless, but if these false teachers do come to know the truth, it probably will be because they repented of the sins that corrupted them in the first place rather than because they rethought their position in light of superior arguments.