

Answering the Opposition- Responses to the Most Frequently Raised Discernment Objections

-Michelle Leslie

Discernment- it's a dirty job, but somebody's gotta do it. While I'm a women's discipleship blogger rather than a discernment blogger, discernment is part of discipleship. And it's sorely lacking among Christian women today, which is why it's regularly featured in my writing.

I've been very encouraged by the hundreds of e-mails, messages, and comments I've received from women who have turned away from false teachers or helped their loved ones and churches to forsake false doctrine because of something I have written. (I claim absolutely no credit for that. God and His word get all the glory. He is the one who changes hearts, not me.) It's such a blessing to hear from so many women who are actively pursuing Christ and the truth of His word.

Unfortunately, there are also occasional comments and messages from women who are disciples of the false teachers I warn against, who take me to task for doing so. The same unscriptural accusations are raised again and again against me and against others who take a biblical stand against false teachers and false doctrine.

Here, in no particular order, are the most frequently raised objections to my discernment work and my answers to them. Many readers have told me that these same objections have been raised to them when they warn others of false teachers. Please feel free to use this article as a resource if these objections are raised with you.

1. Did you contact Ms. Twisted Sister in obedience to Matthew 18:15-20 before publishing this article about her?

No, I have not confronted Ms. Twisted Sister about her false teaching. Here's why:

a. The Matthew 18 passage does not apply to public false teaching. It is about sin in the local congregation where you actually know the

offender personally and have access to him/her. It has to do with correcting sin in the local church and removing the offender from the local church if she refuses to repent. Jesus, Paul, and others refuted public false teaching publicly without following the (again, inapplicable) steps in Matthew 18 many times. D.A. Carson, Josh Buice, and Randy Alcorn have each written excellent articles further explaining the inapplicability of this passage to public false teaching. The real question is, why hasn't her own pastor placed her under church discipline for teaching men and/or teaching false doctrine?

b. I have no doubt that others have confronted her about these things. Plus, she has a Bible and supposedly knows it well enough to teach it. If so, then she is well aware of what the Bible says about these issues. If not, she does not know the Bible well enough to be teaching (James 3:1).

c. I have attempted plenty of times to contact people like Ms. Twisted Sister. One of two things happens: either I'm ignored altogether, or one of her underlings gets back in touch with me to defend her. It's a complete waste of time.

d. What if I had contacted Ms. Twisted Sister and she flatly refused to repent of the false doctrine she's teaching? Would you then be in full support of my article which warns against her? No? Then whether or not I attempted to contact her is not the issue you have with this article, so why bring it up?

2. You say that Ms. Twisted Sister is in disobedience to Scripture because she preaches to men. You're just as guilty because you have a blog and social media pages that men can read.

All this accusation does is to demonstrate the accuser's lack of understanding of Scripture and how to correctly study it in context, which are fruits of sitting under the "instruction" of false teachers who don't train people in proper hermeneutics.

Having a blog in the public square for women that men trespass on is not the same thing as intentionally and unrepentantly preaching to men in the church setting as I've explained in further detail in this article.

Furthermore, when trespassing takes place, who is at fault- the person trespassed upon or the trespasser himself? If a man is improperly receiving biblical instruction from a blog for women the man is the one at fault, not the woman blogger who has no intention of instructing him.

3. But look how many people Ms. Twisted Sister is helping! I've grown so much in my relationship with the Lord because of her!

No you haven't. It is impossible to grow to biblical, Christian maturity by following someone who teaches false doctrine, just like it's impossible to grow physically healthy by eating a diet of poison. The only kind of growing you can do by following a false teacher is growing away from the Lord, despite what you may think or feel.

False teachers are not "helping" anyone but themselves. Just like the false teachers Paul spoke out against, they are "teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach."

The size or apparent success of a false teacher's ministry also does not prove that she is helping people or teaching God's word correctly. Jesus always taught biblical truth, and yet we read in John 6 that after one of His teaching sessions, "many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him". The size of a ministry is not an indicator of whether or not it is biblical.

Finally, the "help" a ministry provides is not an indication that the false teacher is doing what is right in God's eyes. Did you know that several medical procedures that have helped many people were discovered in World War II concentration camps during torturous experiments on inmates? Does the fact that those medical procedures have helped so many people justify the torture the Nazis inflicted on their victims? The ends do not justify the means, especially in Christianity.

4. You're creating division and disunity by speaking out against Ms. Twisted Sister.

No, again, this demonstrates a lack of knowledge about what the Bible actually teaches. Scripture is abundantly clear that it is the false

teachers, not those speaking out against them, who are creating division and disunity. See Jude 18-19 and Romans 16:17-18.

The solution to this division and disunity is for false teachers to repent of their false doctrine, learn how to rightly handle and teach God's word, and begin to teach sound doctrine, not for discerning Christians to keep quiet.

5. You're slandering Ms. Twisted Sister by warning against her.

The dictionary definition of slander is: "to make a false spoken statement that causes people to have a bad opinion of someone." (So, technically the correct word would be libel when we're talking about writing, because slander has to do with verbal speech.)

The key word in the definition of slander is "false." When I demonstrate that someone is a false teacher, I do so by providing ample truthful video, audio, or text evidence of what the person says or does and compare it with what the Bible says. This is not slander. This is similar to what a lawyer does in court when examining someone accused of a crime. The lawyer provides evidence of the accused's words and behavior and compares it to the law so a judge or jury can decide whether or not the accused is guilty of breaking the law. The fact that you don't like the verdict doesn't mean the lawyer is slandering the accused by exposing her own words and behavior.

6. You're being unkind, unloving, ungodly, divisive, hateful, self-righteous, mean, critical, etc. for calling out false teachers.

Every single book of the New Testament except Philemon warns against false teachers or false doctrine. Jesus called out false teachers. So did Peter, Paul, John, Jude, and other New Testament figures. And they usually did so much more harshly than I do. Are you ready to say that Jesus Himself and the apostles writing under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit were being unloving, ungodly, hateful, etc., for speaking against false teachers? That's a very serious allegation to make against the Jesus you claim to follow.

Discernment work, done properly (and I'm not denying that sometimes it's done improperly) is done out of love— love for the victims of false teachers. It's the same love that sees an oblivious child in the street with a truck bearing down on him and snatches the child out of harm's way. It is not loving to let people continue to believe false doctrine that may lead them to an eternity in hell without at least trying to rescue them.

7. Ms. Twisted Sister may not always be right but that doesn't mean she's a false teacher. We all get things wrong.

Following that logic, I would be accusing every pastor in the history of the New Testament church of being a false teacher, including Paul and the apostles, because they have all made mistakes in their preaching at some point. And I'm certainly not doing that.

In the same way that a driver, despite taking every precaution, could one day accidentally hit and kill a pedestrian is different from a person who decides to go out and become a serial killer, there is a big difference between a pastor who generally preaches sound doctrine, makes an innocent mistake, repents of it, corrects it, and goes on to continue to preach sound doctrine, and a person who unrepentantly, and despite continued rebuke, wallows in false doctrine and rebelliously keeps teaching it. Let's not pretend that the two are the same. These are not innocent mistakes these false teachers are making and repenting of. This is the continuous, rebellious, proclamation of false doctrine.

8. Maybe Ms. Twisted sister says some things that are wrong, biblically, but she says some good things, too. I just "chew up the meat and spit out the bones".

Please show me the Scripture, chapter and verse, in context that says that this is the way we are to deal with false teachers. Hint- it doesn't. It says exactly the opposite. It says we are to have nothing to do with false teachers, and that if we embrace them, we are taking part in their wicked works. See Romans 16:17-18, 2 John 9-11, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Ephesians 5:11, and Titus 1:9-16.

9. You're judging Ms. Twisted Sister! The Bible says not to judge.

No, the Bible says not to judge improperly or unbiblically. The same Jesus who said not to judge improperly in Mathew 7 also said we are to “judge with right judgment” in John 7.

Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 are clear that it is the duty of Christians to make scriptural judgments about sin in the church and excommunicate so called Christians who unrepentantly persist in sin.

The Bible does not say not to judge at all, it says to do it biblically.

10. You shouldn't be writing against Ms. Twisted Sister, you should just be praying for her.

First of all, I do pray regularly for false teachers. But to say we should only pray for them and not warn others of them is to say that Jesus and all the other New Testament figures who warned against false teachers and false doctrine – under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – were wrong to do so and should simply have prayed for them. Are you willing to level that kind of accusation against Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

It's disappointing for people who idolize a certain teacher – someone they're so sure is helping them grow closer to the Lord – to hear hard truths about this person they've come to love and admire. I get that. I've stood in their shoes. It's like ripping off a Band-Aid or being doused with a bucket of cold water. But, as I said, it is not loving to see people believing false doctrine without at least making an attempt to rescue them, even if it hurts at first. Let us pull them back from the brink in love and patience.

Second Timothy 2:24-26 says it best:

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.