

Confronting False Teachers

by Kevin McCarthy

Are we to expect false prophets? Jesus, Himself, has warned us, and given us clear instruction for discerning who the false prophets among us are. Please note that these false prophets appear to be sheep, but are inwardly wolves, and that we must be discerning and examine their fruits:

Matt 7:15-26

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn {bushes,} nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and {yet} it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.'" (NAS)

Jesus, speaking particularly about the End Times, warned that one characteristic of this coming time was the proliferation of false prophets who would mislead many:

Matt 24:3-7

And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what {will be} the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate

one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved." (NAS)

Matt 24:24

"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." (NAS)

Notice that these false prophets will show great power to mislead. We find the same warning in Mark 13:21-23 with the further admonition to take heed; Jesus has warned us in advance:

Mark 13:21-23

"And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, {He is} there'; do not believe {him;} for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance." (NAS)

These false prophets, false teachers, false apostles and/or deceitful workers, will not carry signs proclaiming their deceitfulness, rather they will appear to be diligent Christians working side-by side with the saints, and it will take discernment to find them out:

2 Cor 11:13-15

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds. (NAS)

Over and over again we are warned that there will be false teachers among us; why, then, is it surprising to find them constantly at work in our midst? The attitude often encountered by those who would expose false teachers is akin to, "Didn't you get us all excited about the same kind of teaching two or three years ago? What? Do you think we have a problem, or something?" Notice Peter's warning, and particularly the effect these false teachers have on the gospel, and that the false teaching is introduced secretly, side-by-side with the truth:

2 Pet 2:1-3

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their

judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (NAS)

John admonishes us to test every spirit (even the character of every teaching) to determine it's origin. Why? Because of the many false prophets in the world!

I Jn 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (NAS)

Paul's warning to Timothy shows that even those once considered true believers can actually fall away and by heeding doctrines taught by demons (such as New Age beliefs, psychology, easy-believism, etc?) they come to believe and teach all manner of things. Thus, we must constantly be on guard; just because we once trusted the teaching of a particular person or group, we cannot assume that they are still trustworthy. Not without being on our guard at all times and checking what we read or hear against our one and only measuring rod: the Word of God. Paul says that in pointing out these false teachings one is serving God, yet all too often the messenger himself is rebuked! Note also that these teachings can include "worldly fables" which are things that take your eyes off the truth of the Word and cause us to become lost in foolishness!

1 Tim 4:1-10

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. (NAS)

Further evidence (as if the preceding were not clear enough!) that worldly speculations (such as: "How do you feel about what God did?" or "What circumstances would produce a John the Baptist today?") can profit nothing, but rather lead us away from God, is offered from Romans:

Rom 1:20-23

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been

clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (NAS)

What's most astounding is that the world views such speculations as wisdom! So, what is to be our attitude towards such speculations, including philosophies and so-called scientific expositions? Listen:

2 Cor 10:5

{We are} destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and {we are} taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, (NAS)

2 Tim 2:23

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. (NAS)

How are we to react to these things? Is it loving to remain quiet, or by allowing the leaven of heresy to spread, are we ourselves guilty if we choose to wring our hands on the sidelines as the leaven grows to take over the loaf? Paul is quite specific:

Eph 5:6-17

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (NAS)

We have a mandate from Scripture to expose deeds of darkness, which includes the leaven of heresy! How can we deny this direct command? Listen to how Jesus commends one of the churches of Revelation:

Rev 2:2-3

I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. (NAS)

Can we expect to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant," if we refuse to truly serve the body by testing the teaching which the body is being exposed to, and bringing false teaching to light? Then there is the example of the Bereans who had the seeming audacity to test Paul's own teaching! Was he angry with them for this? Judge his reaction for yourself:

Acts 17:11

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, {to see} whether these things were so. (NAS)

It sounds like he was *proud* of them! If Paul relished the fact that the Bereans tested even his own teaching against the Scriptures, how much more would he advise us to test today's teachers who can lay no claim to verbal, plenary inspiration from God, who cannot even dream of being apostles? Yet some contend that those who check everything, and point out areas where modern teaching contradicts the Bible, are causing divisions in the Church. Is this true? Who is really causing divisions?

Jude 1:19

19 These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. (NAS)

It is the worldly-minded, false teachers who are causing the divisions within the body, not the ones who point out their deceptions! Yet, some will counter that we have no right to judge others, a claim which cannot stand against the commands that we have already seen to use discernment, and to test what we are receiving. Scripture explains further in this area, too. In fact, we are told that we *must* judge those within the body; it is the one who does not claim to be a Christian that we must not judge:

1 Cor 5:12-13

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. (NAS)

When faced with true heresy, the example of the apostles is that they did not mince words. Note how Paul forthrightly exposes Elymas the magician:

Acts 13:6-10

And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word

of God. But Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? (NAS)

How many today, in this psychologized age, would speak like that to someone; no, we'd seek to preserve the false teacher's self-esteem! Look at how Jude describes the false teachers in the following passage, and take note that these people were professing Christians (they had "crept in unnoticed.")

Jude 1:3-4

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (NAS)

We know that we are to truly love the saints, yet loving does not mean that we seek to avoid confrontation at all costs. Instructing Timothy as to the nature of his ministry to the church, Paul encourages what today would be referred to as "in-your-face" management:

2 Tim 4:1-4

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (NAS)

And to Titus he commands:

Titus 2:15

These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. (NAS)

Somewhere along the line (when psychology began to supplant the Word of God with regard to how we view and deal with one another) we have replaced the ministries of rebuke and reproof with a non-confrontational, tolerant approach to Christianity which has left the body in a state of weakness, ripe for the propagation of false doctrines. These teachings have invaded our churches, our seminaries and our literature to the point that they are firmly entrenched, and many Christians cannot tell truth from error anymore. They trust the "experts" to tell them what the truth is rather than studying to become workmen who need not be ashamed! They forget that there is even one Book which deserves their study,

even the Word. Instead they seek someone to interpret the Bible for them, thus receiving the Scriptures only as filtered through someone else's biases and opinions. They forget that Scripture admonishes: "But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion {to books} is wearying to the body. (Eccl 12:12 NAS.) There is a decided lack of discernment in the Church today. Paul could very well pray for us as he prayed for the Philippians: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, (Phil 1:9 NAS.) We, as a whole, are less and less ready for solid food, as the writer of Hebrews notes:

Heb 5:14

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (NAS)

The Bible warns us again and again that, particularly in the End Times, there will be an abundance of false teachers and false doctrines infiltrating the Church. It is, in fact, an evidence of the Last Days. Should it be surprising, as other evidence mounts daily that the Last Days are now, that the Church is infiltrated and under constant attack from within as well as without? Christian, guard the truth! Pray for discernment and take a stand against the spirit of antichrist which is even now at work in the world. Do not let heresy, which is, after all, mixing the foolish wisdom of the world with the Word, thus watering down the truth, have even a foothold among us! We'll close with the words of Paul to Timothy:

1 Tim 6:20-21

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"-- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you. (NAS)