

False Teachings and How You Can Avoid Falling for Them

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Scripture: 2 Peter 2:1-3 (NIV)

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

² Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.’

Introduction

I am joining ‘false teachers/teachings’ with cults. From our perspective as Christians, broadly speaking, a cult is a group that follows non-traditional or unusual teachings (i.e. false teachings) or extreme ideology. Cults can be obvious or deceptive, depending on which pair of glasses you are wearing.

Typically, there is a charismatic leader (dictator) who demands a high level of commitment from followers. The leader can be very persuasive and controlling, often driven by money, power and sex.

A cult is skilled in knowing who to recruit. Persons searching for belonging and meaning and people with unfulfilled emotional needs are vulnerable and therefore ‘targets.’ To this end, unusual or unique teachings, as well as high levels of influence and control, consequences of leaving, are used to keep everyone obedient and hooked.

Explaining 2 Peter 2:1-3

False Prophets and Teachers

Our simple understanding of ‘false’ is usually along the lines of ‘not true.’ However, ‘false’ also speaks to not genuine, misleading, deception and inconsistent with the facts.

With this in mind, we can appreciate what Paul is describing when he calls a prophet or a teacher 'false.' Effectively Paul is speaking to the motive of the prophet or teacher, not their message. Their message flows forth from the motive of the prophet or the teacher. Consequently, their message is compromised.

Secretly Introduce Destructive Heresies,

The Greek word (*pareisagō*) here translated as 'secretly' is deeply descriptive. It speaks of 'leading in aside.' What is interesting is the roots of *pareisagō*. The one root speaks of 'near' and 'beside.' The other root speaks of 'introduction.' In context then, 'secretly' is presenting a teaching that is close to the truth, but is not exactly the full truth; i.e. the difference between 99% and 100%. Therefore, the attraction and the secrecy.

Heresies are purposeful denials of the truth and deviations from teachings which are known to be true.

Even Denying the Sovereign Lord

To one degree or another, all cults deny the deity of or an aspect of the deity of Jesus Christ.

In plain English, a 'different Jesus' is taught. This can be as radical as denying that Jesus is the Son of God, or denying that He is God. One sect that I know of will not use the name 'Jesus' for some illogical reasons, including that 'Jesus' refers to someone other than the Son of God, the letter 'J' only recently came into existence and more.

Jesus said in John 8:58, 'before Abraham was born, I am!' Jesus is calling Himself God. Altering or denying the true Jesus is altering or denying God and since God cannot be altered or forever denied, anything in contradiction to the truth about God is false.

Furthermore, John 14:7 reads, 'If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'

Depraved Conduct (also: In Their Greed These Teachers Will Exploit You)

I have touched on the money, control and sexual motives found within cults. Some of these deviations are glaringly obvious and others much more subtle. All of them, however, will bring about ruin, loss and destruction. A researcher, Hussan, created the acronym, BITE to describe the control of a destructive cult:

B = Behaviour control, which includes associations, food, clothing, money etc.

I = Information control such as distorted information and access to information.

T = Thought control. This is powerful because it ranges from word choice, language used, us versus them teachings etc.

E = Emotional control, which involves manipulation, fear, guilt and indoctrination.

If the extent of depravity, which never honours God, was very obvious, it stands to reason that the cult will not find too many followers.

Bring the Way of Truth Into Disrepute

Jesus said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). Teaching a different Jesus, another Jesus or no Jesus will result in eternal destruction because there is only one God, one Jesus, one Holy Spirit, one truth and one way to the Father.

Romans 10:9-10 clearly states, 'If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.'

The Bible teaches that faith in Christ, plus nothing else, equals salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 reads, 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.'

The Sect Leader's Condemnation

In both verses 1 and 3, Peter assures us that the sect leaders stand as condemned people who have brought destruction upon themselves. Remember that earlier on I did a bit of a word study and we discovered the motive of a false teacher?

We serve a holy God who does not tolerate sin and He will decisively deal with the wicked. And He will do so quickly. If you choose to follow a false prophet or teacher, you will also follow him/her toward eternal destruction.

Repent before it is too late.

How to Avoid Falling for Cults

Test the Spirits

1 John 4:2-3 tells us how to recognize the Spirit of God, 'This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.'

A falsehood, a different Jesus and depraved conduct are not recognizable as the Spirit of God in action.

Do not hesitate to ask an outright 'yes' or 'no', 'Is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came in the flesh?' The answers and explanations you get may surprise you.

Know the Word of God

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. Study it, know it and interpret it along the lines of traditional (orthodox teaching). Live the Word knowing that there are no 'God-inspired' writings that are in any way, equal to the Bible. The Bible does not have explanatory notes. The Bible is what He has given us and it is all that we need.

Some cults, in their efforts to get the Bible to agree with their teachings, modify or argue some parts of Scripture, such as Paul's writings, do not belong in the Bible. They may even elevate an apocryphal book such as Enoch to 'biblical status.' Do not add or remove from the Bible. We need all of the Bible – 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

If God and His Word cannot change, then the variable is mankind's interpretation of the Word. Traditional theologians hold to tried and tested ways of laying out and interpreting Scripture. In this sense, Scripture speaks for itself, as opposed to a man or woman speaking on behalf of Scripture, i.e. the difference between what God said versus what God meant to say. Be a Berean (Acts 17).

Reason

Think, make rational sense of matters, apply logic and consistency, then exercise Godly wisdom and discretion. God will not and cannot contradict Himself.

Since the Bible and its teachings have never been proven wrong and never will be proven wrong, then the only variable is man's interpretation of the Word to suit his/her own needs.

A prominent professor in theology commented that that theology cannot keep up with society and society can, therefore, influence or 'help' theology catch up. It was reasoned along the lines of a different way of looking at the Bible so that homosexuality etc. can be normalized. Is it not society that is to be guided by the unchanging Word of an unchanging God?

Truth is knowable and not relative to space, time and persons. Relativism is self-defeating.

Stand By the Principles of the Reformation

In conclusion, let us remind ourselves of 5 teachings that undergirded a radical turn from false teaching toward sound biblical teachings. The 5 teaching are still valid. Anything not agreeing with them is an alarm bell ringing really loud:

1. Scripture alone. The Bible is the only source of authority for Christians because it is inspired by (2 Peter 1:20-21) and breathed by (2 Timothy 3:16-17) by God.
2. Faith alone. Salvation is a free gift, meaning no additional works are needed (John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:9).
3. Grace alone. The reason for our salvation, in other words, God has done what we could not do and He has lovingly restored us to Him (Ephesians 2:8-9).
4. Christ alone. Through Christ alone, there is no other way to salvation, definitely not through a human spiritual leader (Hebrews 4:15).
5. To the glory of God alone. This speaks to the ultimate goal of life (1 Corinthians 10:31). Amen.