

It Should Be Very Difficult to Deceive Christians

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Scripture Reading: Acts 17:10-15 (NIV)

¹⁰ As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

¹² As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

¹³ But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

¹⁴ The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea.

¹⁵ Those who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.”

Introduction

A few Sundays back, I said, “Practicing Christians should be the most difficult people to deceive because, as I have said, we expected to discern and use our God-given intelligence and other faculties to discover and learn about Him. We should know the truth well enough to identify the lie.”

Many have accused Christians of being sheeple. And maybe, some are. But you and I are called, not to follow the sheep in front of us, but to follow the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. In John 10:11-18, Jesus says that His sheep know Him and listen to His voice. In the same breath, Jesus also says in verse 16, “...there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”

How is it possible then, that there are so many cults, false teachers and false teachings that try and attach to the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ? It might seem as if some of them do

succeed in attaching, but in reality, they cannot attach themselves because the Gospel is Jesus Christ's Gospel.

There is only one Gospel. The Gospel plus anything else is no longer the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. So, let's talk about 2 things, firstly, how to easily identify false teachings and teachers and secondly, how to know the truth.

How to Identify the Falsehood

The obvious sense is to know the truth and study it. In other words, the false does not precisely match the truth. Jesus, in Matthew 12:33, said that a tree is recognized by its fruit.

Here are three questions, that when answered, will help reveal falsehoods:

- Is the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ being preached?

Let's remind ourselves of the Gospel by reading together Romans 10:9-10, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

And this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ: He died in our place for our sins, He was buried and was resurrected.

The message of the Gospel is unchanging, and many will try and distort it by either adding to it or taking away from it.

An example is where some New Testament Christians still try and keep some of the 613 Old Testament commands in addition to *selected* parts of the Gospels and New Testament.

Old Testament Ceremonial Law referred to Israel's worship and pointed forward to Jesus, Old Testament Civil Law applied to daily living in Israel and Old Testament Moral Laws are the direct commands of God. There are some, assuming jurisdiction, who take it upon themselves to decide which of the 613 laws they will keep, and which not.

Let's reason a bit with this mindset. If the Old Testament Ceremonial, Civil and Moral Laws are binding on Christians today, it also means that Old Testament Law has not yet accomplished its purpose. It has not yet been fulfilled.

If Old Testament Law, is still binding on us today, then Jesus was wrong in claiming to fulfil it and His sacrifice on the cross is insufficient. And it is in this light that it is exceptionally perilous for a man to decide for himself, which Old Testament Laws to keep and which not to keep.

The truth is that Jesus Christ came not to destroy the old religious system but to build upon it; He came to finish the Old Covenant and establish the New Covenant, "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments'" (Matthew 22:37-39).

Jesus accomplished what no man could accomplish, and the Old Testament Laws and prophecies are not irrelevant, they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ as it is written in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Jesus is our focus!

Therefore, beware of anyone who:

- Adds salvation through human works to the Gospel.
- Adds to the requirement of salvation what Jesus has already fulfilled, in other words keeping selected Old Testament Laws and parts of the Old Testament sacrificial system.
- Deducts from the requirements of salvation, for example, removing the requirement to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

The pure Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is always by Scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone, through Christ alone to the glory of God alone.

- What is being said or taught about Jesus?

2 John 9 reads, "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

The Bible has every expectation that we who know Jesus and His Gospel, must live out our lives in the teaching (singular) of Jesus. One God, one teaching, one way, one Shepherd and one flock. There is unity, not division.

Jesus Christ and His redemptive work are of extreme importance. Therefore, beware of anyone who:

- Denies that Jesus is equal with God.
- Denies that Jesus is God.
- Denies Jesus' humanity.
- Denies (or downplays) Jesus' sacrificial death.

By means of an example, there are those who claim that Jesus is an imposter, there are even those who won't even use the name "Jesus." The name "Jesus" is apparently blasphemy, even unbiblical. Some say that the letter "J" is a modern letter not found in Hebrew or Greek, so you can't use the name "Jesus!"

In truth, *Iesous* is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name, and its English spelling is "Jesus." Changing the language of a word does not affect the meaning of the word. In any language, His name means "The Lord Is Salvation."

Indeed, attached to the cross (John 19:19-20) in Aramaic, Latin and Greek was the inscription, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Did you notice the absence of Hebrew?

The name "Jesus" attached to the cross would be in Greek, "*Iesous*," in Latin, "*Iesus*," and in Aramaic, "*Yeshu*."

The Bible nowhere commands us to speak or write His name only in Hebrew or Greek or Latin. Think about this, when the message of the Gospel was being proclaimed on the Day of Pentecost, each heard it in their own native language, according to Acts

2:9-10, “ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

You cannot proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ without making direct reference to Jesus Christ, which Peter did.

- Who is the false teacher or teachings glorifying?

One of the pillars of the Reformation is, to God alone be the glory. As Christians, this is our goal in all things. We aim to glorify God, not ourselves.

You will identify many as a false teacher or teaching through the presence of pride.

I once heard a sad story where someone prayed for a sick sister, and she did not heal. A pastor claimed to have the gift of healing and asked to pray for the sick sister. My issue is in claiming the gift of healing and on this basis, the Lord *must*, grant the healing in line with the pastor’s gift of healing.

The truth is that God heard the sick sister’s prayer for her own healing, He heard the first person praying for the sister and He heard the pastor’s prayer. God is sovereign and chose to use that sister’s illness to His glory before healing her.

Therefore, beware of anyone who:

- Boasts of themselves.
- Claims “special power and anointings” that are self-centred.
- Has “new” revelations of God outside of the Bible.

Conclusion: How to Know the Truth

Let’s come back to this morning’s reading about the Bereans and we highlight the following passage, “...they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed...”

- They received the message. The message that they received was the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. How do we know this?
- Because they examined the Scriptures which would include Old Testament Law and prophecy. That is why Jesus consistently referred to the Law *and* the Prophets. The Old Testament points toward Jesus!
- As a result, many of them believed. I highlight the words, “as a result” because is an authentic response to the authentic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through which Jesus calls sinners to Him.

Ephesians 4:4-6 reads, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Know that false teachers are depending on your not knowing the Scriptures. So don't give them the gap that they are looking for. Test everything and be like a Berean!

Practising Christians should be the most difficult people to deceive.

Amen.