

THE PULPIT

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

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THE BELT OF TRUTH

HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH (EPHESIANS 6:14). THE FIRST PIECE OF ARMOR FOR THE CHRISTIAN WARRIOR IS THE BELT OF TRUTH. JESUS SAID, *"I AM . . . THE TRUTH"* (JOHN 14:6). AND BECAUSE CHRIST IS IN YOU, THE TRUTH IS IN YOU.

HOWEVER, CONTINUING TO CHOOSE TRUTH IS NOT ALWAYS EASY. SINCE SATAN'S PRIMARY WEAPON IS THE LIE, YOUR BELT OF TRUTH (WHICH HOLDS THE OTHER PIECES OF BODY ARMOR IN PLACE) IS CONTINUALLY BEING ATTACKED. IF HE CAN DISABLE YOU IN THE AREA OF TRUTH, YOU BECOME AS EASY TARGET FOR HIS OTHER ATTACKS.

YOU STAND FIRM IN THE TRUTH BY RELATING EVERYTHING YOU DO TO THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD. BECAUSE YOU HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE. YOU NEVER HAVE TO COVER UP TO GOD OR ANYONE ELSE; EVERYTHING YOU DO IS IN THE LIGHT.

FURTHERMORE, WHEN YOU LIVE IN THE TRUTH YOU DISLodge THE LIES OF SATAN, THE FATHER OF LIES (JOHN 8:44). REMEMBER THAT IF SATAN CAN DECEIVE YOU INTO BELIEVING A LIE, HE CAN CONTROL YOUR LIFE. JESUS PRAYED, *"I DO NOT ASK THEE TO TAKE THEM OUT OF THE WORLD, BUT TO KEEP THEM FROM THE EVIL ONE"* (JOHN 17:15). HOW? *"SANCTIFY THEM IN THE TRUTH; THY WORD IS TRUTH"* (VERSE 17).

YOU WILL ONLY DISLodge SATAN'S LIES IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S REVELATION, AND NOT BY HUMAN REASONING OR ANY FORM OF RESEARCH. THE ONLY THING A CHRISTIAN EVER HAS TO ADMIT TO IS THE TRUTH. WALKING IN THE LIGHT AND SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE MAY SEEM THREATENING TO SOME. BUT IN REALITY TRUTH IS A LIBERATING FRIEND AND THE ONLY PATH TO FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.

BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS . . . (EPHESIANS 6:14). THE SECOND PIECE OF ARMOR GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR US IS THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. WHEN YOU PUT ON CHRIST AT SALVATION, YOU ARE JUSTIFIED BEFORE OUR HOLY GOD. IT'S NOT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS BUT CHRIST'S (1 CORINTHIANS 1:30; PHILIPPIANS 3:8, 9).

SO WHEN SATAN AIMS AN ARROW AT YOU BY SAYING, *"YOU'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO BE A CHRISTIAN,"* YOU CAN RESPOND WITH PAUL, *"WHO WILL BRING A CHARGE AGAINST GOD'S ELECT? GOD IS THE ONE WHO JUSTIFIES"* (ROMANS 8:33).

YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IN CHRIST IS YOUR PROTECTION AGAINST SATAN'S ACCUSATIONS. EVEN THOUGH WE REJOICE IN OUR POSITION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN CHRIST, WE ARE WELL AWARE OF OUR DEEDS OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS WHEN WE THINK, SAY, OR DO SOMETHING APART FROM GOD.

STANDING FIRM IN OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS REQUIRES US TO LIVE IN CONTINUOUS AGREEMENT WITH GOD ACCORDING TO 1 JOHN 1:9: *"IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND RIGHTEOUS TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS."*

CONFESSION IS DIFFERENT FROM SAYING "I'M SORRY" OR ASKING FORGIVENESS. TO CONFESS (HOMOLOGEO) MEANS TO ACKNOWLEDGE OR TO AGREE. YOU CONFESS YOUR SIN WHEN YOU SAY WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT IT: *"I ENTERTAINED A LUSTFUL THOUGHT AND THAT'S A SIN"; "I TREATED MY LEADER UNKINDLY AND THAT WAS WRONG"; "PRIDE MOTIVATED ME TO SEEK THAT BOARD POSITION AND PRIDE DOESN'T BELONG IN MY LIFE."*

SATAN WILL MAKE CONFESSION AS DIFFICULT FOR AS HE CAN. HE WILL TRY TO CONVINCE YOU THAT IT'S TOO LATE FOR CONFESSION, THAT GOD HAS ALREADY ERASED YOUR NAME OUT OF THE BOOK OF LIFE. THAT'S ANOTHER ONE OF HIS LIES. YOU'RE IN CHRIST; YOU'RE ALREADY FORGIVEN. YOU ARE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN CHRIST (2 CORINTHIANS 5:21), AND HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU.

YOUR CONFESSION OF SIN CLEARS THE WAY FOR THE FRUITFUL EXPRESSION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN YOUR DAILY LIFE. WE SHOULD BE LIKE PAUL, WHO SAID, *"I ALSO DO MY BEST TO MAINTAIN ALWAYS A BLAMELESS CONSCIENCE BOTH BEFORE GOD AND BEFORE MEN"* (ACTS 24:16).

THE WILL OF GOD

KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD IS A COMMON PROBLEM. PEOPLE WERE STRUGGLING AT THE TIME OF CHRIST. SOME PEOPLE WERE SAYING OF HIM, *"HE'S A GOOD MAN."* OTHERS WERE SAYING, *"HE LEADS THE MULTITUDE ASTRAY"* (JOHN 7:12). HOW COULD THESE PEOPLE KNOW WHETHER HE WAS LEADING THEM INTO TRUTH? SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY, JESUS SET FORTH STANDARDS OF DIVINE GUIDANCE. HIS FIRST ADMONITION WAS, *"MY TEACHING IS NOT MINE, BUT HIS WHO SENT ME. IF ANY MAN IS WILLING TO DO HIS WILL, HE SHALL KNOW OF THE TEACHING, WHETHER IT IS OF GOD, OR WHETHER I SPEAK FROM MYSELF"* (JOHN 7:16, 17).

THE ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITE TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD, ACCORDING TO JESUS, IS A WILLINGNESS TO DO IT (OBEDIENCE TO HIS WORD). WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD? GOD'S WILL FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM IS TO BE ALIVE IN CHRIST FOR THE PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING HIS KINGDOM BY OVERCOMING THE EVIL ONE AND BECOMING FULLY THE PEOPLE HE HAS CALLED US TO BE. NOTICE THE OPENING WORDS OF THE LORD'S PRAYER: *"OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"* (MATT. 6:9, 10). WHEN PRAYING THIS PRAYER, WE ARE ASKING FOR GOD'S WILL TO BE ACCOMPLISHED ON EARTH AS IT PRESENTLY IS IN HEAVEN.

DO YOU HOLD ANY RESERVATIONS ABOUT TURNING YOUR WILL OVER TO GOD AND TO HIS AUTHORITY? DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT GOD'S WILL FOR YOU AND FOR HIS CHURCH IS GOOD, ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT (ROMANS 12:2)? IF GOD IS GOD AND YOU CALL HIM LORD, DOESN'T HE HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXERCISE HIS WILL IN YOUR LIFE?

LET US SUBMIT OUR WILL TO GOD AND TO HIS AUTHORITY, AND PRAY FOR OURSELVES SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH US (1 PETER 2:18-21); 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4).

THE GENUINE PROPHET

"IF THEY [THE PROPHETS] HAD STOOD IN MY COUNCIL, THEN THEY WOULD HAVE ANNOUNCED MY WORDS TO MY PEOPLE, AND WOULD HAVE TURNED THEM BACK FROM THEIR EVIL WAY AND FROM THE EVIL OF THEIR DEEDS" (JEREMIAH 23:22). EVERY TRUE PROPHET OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS AN EVANGELIST. HIS MINISTRY DREW PEOPLE BACK TO GOD AND HIS WORD. THE CALL TO RIGHTEOUSNESS WAS THE STANDARD WHICH SEPARATED THE GENUINE PROPHET FROM THE IMITATION, AS THE PROPHET JEREMIAH WROTE. IF YOU COME ACROSS SOMEONE WHO CLAIMS TO BE A PROPHET, BUT WHO IS NOT INVOLVED IN CALLING PEOPLE TO A RIGHTEOUS WALK WITH GOD, YOU MAY BE DEALING WITH A COUNTERFEIT.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE GIFT OF PROPHECY HAS ONE PRIMARY PURPOSE: TO REVEAL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS AND BRING CONVICTION. PAUL WROTE THAT, AS A RESULT OF PROPHECY, *"THE SECRETS OF HIS HEART ARE DISCLOSED; AND SO HE WILL FALL ON HIS FACE AND WORSHIP GOD, DECLARING THAT GOD IS CERTAINLY AMONG YOU"* (1 CORINTHIANS 14:25). THE LORD REVEALED THROUGH JEREMIAH ANOTHER CRITERION FOR DISTINGUISHING A TRUE PROPHET FROM A FALSE PROPHET: *"I HAVE HEARD WHAT THE PROPHETS HAVE SAID WHO PROPHECY FALSELY IN MY NAME, SAYING, 'I HAD A DREAM, I HAD A DREAM!' . . . THE PROPHET WHO HAS A DREAM MAY RELATE HIS DREAM, BUT LET HIM WHO HAS MY WORD SPEAK MY WORD IN TRUTH. WHAT DOES STRAW HAVE IN COMMON WITH GRAIN?"* (23:25, 28).

GOD IS WARNING HIS PEOPLE AGAINST PROPHETS WHO VALUE THEIR DREAMS ABOVE HIS WORD. GOD IS NOT SAYING THAT DREAMS ARE UNIMPORTANT. INDEED, HE OFTEN SPOKE TO PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE THROUGH DREAMS BEFORE THE FULL REVELATION OF SCRIPTURE WAS COMPLETE, BUT IN COMPARISON TO THE NUTRITIOUS GRAIN OF HIS WORD, DREAMS ARE MERE STRAW. IF YOU FEED STRAW TO CATTLE, THEY'LL DIE. THEY WILL SLEEP ON IT, BUT THEY WON'T EAT IT BECAUSE IT HAS NO NUTRIENTS. SIMILARLY, DREAMS MAY BE OF SOME VALUE, BUT THEY ARE NEVER TO BE EQUATED WITH GOD'S WORD AS THE BASIS FOR OUR FAITH OR OUR WALK.

CONSULT YOUR GOD

FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS WILL ARISE, AND WILL SHOW SIGNS AND WONDERS, IN ORDER, IF POSSIBLE, TO LEAD THE ELECT ASTRAY (MARK 13:22). YOU CAN IDENTIFY A FALSE PROPHET BY THE FACT THAT NOT ALL HIS PROPHECIES COME TRUE. DEUTERONOMY 18:22 INSTRUCTS US NOT TO BELIEVE THE PROPHET WHOSE PROPHECIES FAIL.

BUT DEUTERONOMY 13:1-3 ALSO WARNS US ABOUT THE FALSE PROPHET WHOSE SIGNS AND WONDERS DO COME TRUE: *"IF A PROPHET OR A DREAMER OF DREAMS ARISES AMONG YOU AND GIVES YOU A SIGN OR A WONDER, AND THE SIGN OR WONDER COMES TRUE, CONCERNING WHICH HE SPOKE TO YOU, SAYING, 'LET US GO AFTER OTHER GODS (WHOM YOU HAVE NOT KNOWN) AND LET US SERVE THEM,' YOU SHALL NOT LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF THAT PROPHET OR THAT DREAMER OF DREAMS; FOR THE LORD YOUR GOD IS TESTING YOU TO FIND OUT IF YOU LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL."* (SEE ALSO MATT. 24:4-11, 23:25; REV. 13:11-14).

MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE BECOME CONDITIONED TO THINK THAT ANYTHING RELATING TO THE MIRACULOUS AUTOMATICALLY VERIFIES THAT GOD IS INVOLVED. GOD CAN STILL USE SIGNS AND WONDERS TO CONFIRM THE WORD, BUT THE BIBLE ALSO WARNS THAT FALSE CHRISTS AND PROPHETS WILL ARISE SEEKING TO LEAD BELIEVERS ASTRAY WITH THEIR "SIGNS AND WONDERS." SATAN CAN ALSO PERFORM SIGNS AND WONDERS, BUT HE ONLY DOES SO TO DIRECT OUR WORSHIP AWAY FROM GOD.

DEUTERONOMY 13:5-11 REVEALS THE SERIOUSNESS OF ATTRIBUTING TO GOD THE ACTIVITY OF SATAN. PERSONS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN IT WERE TO BE EXECUTED EVEN IF THEY WERE RELATIVES. WE ARE TO LOVE GOD, OBEY HIS WORD, AND TEST ALL SIGNS, WONDERS AND DREAMS. ISAIAH WROTE, *"WHEN THEY SAY TO YOU, 'CONSULT THE MEDIUMS AND THE WIZARDS WHO WHISPER AND MUTTER,' SHOULD NOT A PEOPLE CONSULT THEIR GOD? SHOULD THEY CONSULT THE DEAD ON BEHALF OF THE LIVING? TO THE LAW AND TO THE TESTIMONY! IF THEY DO NOT SPEAK ACCORDING TO THIS WORD, IT IS BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO DAWN"* (8:19,20).

PROPHETIC MESSAGES

"IS NOT MY WORD LIKE FIRE?" DECLARES THE LORD, AND LIKE A HAMMER WHICH SHATTERS A ROCK?" (JEREMIAH 23:29). IF YOU ATTEND A CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP WHERE PROPHECIES ARE PART OF PUBLIC WORSHIP, I WONDER IF WE SHOULD EXPECT FROM GOD GENERIC MESSAGES LIKE, *"I LOVE YOU, MY CHILDREN"* OR *"I'M COMING SOON."* THESE STATEMENTS ARE CERTAINLY TRUE, BUT WHY WOULD THEY NEED TO BE PROPHESED, SINCE THE BIBLE ALREADY CLEARLY ASSERTS GOD'S LOVE AND CHRIST'S IMMINENT RETURN?

I HAVE HEARD "PROPHECIES" LIKE THESE GIVEN IN CHURCHES WHERE MANY PEOPLE WERE LIVING IN SIN, LULLING THEM INTO AN UNRIGHTEOUS COMPLACENCY. THE VOICE OF A PROPHET IS A CONSUMING FIRE AND A SHATTERING HAMMER. A PROPHETIC MESSAGE SHOULD MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, NOT PLACATE THEM IN THEIR SIN (1 PETER 4:17). GOD IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT CHURCH PURITY THAN ABOUT CHURCH GROWTH. COMFORT ONLY COMES TO THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE BY ALLOWING GOD'S WORD TO PURGE THEIR SIN AND SHATTER THEIR SELF-CENTEREDNESS.

JEREMIAH RELATES TWO OTHER EVIDENCES OF FALSE PROPHETS: *"BEHOLD, I AM AGAINST THE PROPHETS," DECLARES THE LORD, 'WHO STEAL MY WORDS FROM EACH OTHER' (23:30).* THAT'S PLAGIARISM: TAKING WHAT GOD GAVE SOMEONE ELSE AND USING IT AS IF IT WERE YOUR OWN. *"I AM AGAINST THE PROPHETS," DECLARES THE LORD, 'WHO USE THEIR TONGUES AND DECLARE, 'THE LORD DECLARES'"" (VERSE 31).* DECLARING THAT WHAT YOU ARE SAYING IS DIRECTLY FROM THE LORD WHEN IT ISN'T IS AN INCREDIBLE OFFENSE TO GOD.

IF GOD WANTS ME TO KNOW SOMETHING HE WILL TELL ME DIRECTLY. I BELIEVE IN THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS; HOWEVER, GOD CAN AND WILL ENCOURAGE US AND CONFIRM HIS WORD TO US THROUGH OTHERS. *"THERE IS ONE GOD, AND ONE MEDIATOR ALSO BETWEEN GOD AND MEN, THE MAN CHRIST JESUS"* (1 TIMOTHY 2:5). IF SOMEONE SAYS TO YOU *"GOD TOLD ME TO TELL YOU."* . . . THAT PERSON MAY BE FUNCTIONING AS A MEDIUM. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY SHOULD REVEAL THE SECRETS OF THE HEART SO PEOPLE WILL FALL ON THEIR FACES AND WORSHIP GOD (1 COR. 4:25). THEN GOD WILL GUIDE THEM BY HIS HOLY SPIRIT.

IDENTIFYING A CHRISTIAN LEADER

"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" (2 PETER 2:1).

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE TERMS FALSE PROPHETS AND FALSE TEACHERS? MANY PEOPLE TEND TO THINK OF EASTERN MYSTICS AND GURUS, THE SPOKESPERSONS FOR NON-BIBLICAL RELIGIONS OR DYNAMIC CULT LEADERS—PEOPLE WHO ARE RECOGNIZABLY OUTSIDE THE BOUNDARIES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. BUT THE APOSTLE PETER DEVOTED AN ENTIRE CHAPTER IN ONE OF HIS LETTERS (2 PETER 2) TO FALSE PROPHETS AND TEACHERS WHO OPERATE WITHIN THE CHURCH.

FALSE TEACHERS MAY OPERATE IN OUR CHURCHES DISGUISED AS WORKERS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. NOTICE THAT THE LURE OF FALSE TEACHERS IS NOT PRIMARILY THEIR DOCTRINE: *"AND MANY WILL FOLLOW THEIR SENSUALITY, AND BECAUSE OF THEM THE WAY OF THE TRUTH WILL BE MALIGNED"* (VERSE 2). WHAT DOES PETER MEAN BY *"FOLLOW THEIR SENSUALITY"*? HE IS TALKING ABOUT CHRISTIANS WHO EVALUATE A MINISTRY BASED ON THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE AND CHARM OF ITS LEADERS. WE SAY, *"HE'S SUCH A NICE GUY"; "HE'S A VERY CHARISMATIC PERSON"; "HE'S A REAL DYNAMIC SPEAKER"; "HE'S SO SWEET AND SOUNDS SO SINCERE."*

BUT IS THE SIZE OF THE MINISTRY OR A SYRUPY PERSONALITY A BIBLICAL CRITERION FOR VALIDATING A MINISTRY OR A TEACHER? OF COURSE NOT! THE ISSUE IS ALWAYS TRUTH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. A CHRISTIAN LEADER SHOULD BE IDENTIFIED BY HIS COMMITMENT TO THE TRUTH, HIS RIGHTEOUS LIFE AND HIS SERVANT'S HEART.

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