

How Can We Avoid Fake and False Teachers?

Although disheartening, society's trend away from God's Word and absolute truth is not surprising. The apostle Paul warned of this many years ago: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine (God's Word), but according to their own desires ... they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Searching for spiritual fulfillment isn't wrong, but where we search can be. There is tremendous power and wisdom in the Bible. Many religions and cults recognize its influence, often adding portions of the Bible to their own writings.

In studying various religions, I learned that most originated from someone claiming to have received a "vision from God," a "new revelation," or a "deeper truth" that contradicts the Bible. These self-proclaimed prophets use their visions to begin their religion, and the rest is history. The fact that these groups have greatly altered the truth of God's Word is a startling reality. Who would you rather entrust your soul to: God or man? We don't change God's message—His message changes us.

There are not "many" ways to God. The Bible and the beliefs of other religions cannot all be right. The Bible was not written "in addition to" anything; it stands alone. The apostle John, who walked with Jesus, said to test everything (1 John 4:1), and Jesus said in Matthew 24:24 that false Christs and false prophets will appear and deceive many. A "prophet," as mentioned here, can be anyone in a position of spiritual authority, or claiming to be.

How do we "test every spirit" and avoid false teachers? It's actually very simple: determine if what they are teaching

agrees with the Scriptures. For example, if a cult or religion says that there are many gods, Isaiah 45:22 tells us otherwise: "For I am God, and there is no other." If they claim that a "messenger of light" appeared to one of their prophets as the voice of God, we should point them to 2 Corinthians 11:14 where "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." If someone says that righteousness is only obtained by following rigid codes of financial and moral requirements, the New Testament says otherwise—we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Can you see the unparalleled truth in all of this? Unless a person is anchored in God's Word, knows what the Bible says, and believes it, he or she will be like a child tossed back and forth and carried away by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men (Eph. 4:14).

It's vitally important that we study the Bible. Recall Paul's words that a time will come when people will not be receptive to God's Word. They will look for teachers who will tell them what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear. As a result, many will turn from the truth and begin to follow fables. Galatians 1:8 adds, "Although if we [the writers of the Bible] or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than the one we have preached to you, let him be accursed."

Cults take advantage of the fact that many people are not well educated in fundamental biblical truths. To detect a counterfeit, one must first know what the original looks like. It's impossible to gain a clear picture of absolute truth without going directly to God's Word. Unless one is firmly grounded in God's Word and led by His Spirit, one can easily be led astray.

This reminds me of a person that I once knew who experimented with different religions and read dozens of "spiritual" books. He rejected the Bible as absolute truth. As a result, he was

confused, depressed and uncertain about life; he lacked direction and purpose. I often reminded him that where he was looking was what he was finding. The same holds true with you and me. We wouldn't look for fish in the Mojave Desert, or almonds on a palm tree, but that's exactly what we do when we look for truth outside of God's Word.

The human mind, apart from God's Spirit, will never comprehend or understand spiritual truth. First Corinthians 2:14 validates this: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." This is why many reject the Bible or change its message—their natural mind does not receive the things of God; truth is foolishness to them. What does this mean to you and to me? Everything. Man-made religions are lifeless; there's no spiritual life in them.

In my case, I realized that I had been looking for truth and fulfillment in all the wrong places. While I had focused on things such as money, status, physical appearance, and relationships, I had starved my soul. I found that before meaningful, lasting change can occur on the outside, it first must occur on the inside. We cannot successfully change actions or attitudes unless God changes our heart. We must embrace His absolute truth and avoid counterfeits.

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