

How to Spot an ‘Approved’ False Prophet

Why do people fail? Unfortunate circumstances? Sometimes. Poor training and lack of experience? Sometimes. Lack of sufficient finances? Often.

The famous self-help book *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill lists 30 reasons why people fail. His list includes these four reasons. However, he did not identify one prominent reason for failure: following faulty leaders. We follow faulty leaders? Yes, many times, and more often than we want to admit.

Unqualified leaders have no trouble attracting followers. I know—I fell for them often in my youth, especially professing Christian leaders. So much so that I created a policy to protect me from following the wrong people. I decided to raise a “red flag” whenever I observed a biblically faulty trait in a leader, no matter how seemingly insignificant.

Sometimes it was a non-essential factor that would not exclude that person. But sometimes the red flags revealed a serious biblical fault and/or they accumulated, which resulted in my rejecting that leader. I continue this practice to this day. It has spared me from those who would lead me astray into sin and heresy.

Without a doubt, following faulty “Christian” leaders results in more failures than we want to admit. After all, we fall in love with those whom we follow. Since they give us what we want, we have great difficulty dismissing them. We rationalize their behavior even in extreme circumstances, turning errors into benefits.

How do you decide which Christian leaders you will follow? How many false prophets in the church of Jesus Christ can you identify? None? One? Several? In fact, with few exceptions,

false prophets inhabit every Christian congregation. They fool the unwary and gain leadership positions even as pastors in assemblies of believers by deceit, prestige and promises.

The Bible describes many faulty leaders and the false prophets that accompany and support them. They directed their followers into disaster every time. Examples abound in every biblical era. For instance, the times of the kings provide clear illustrations.

After the death of King David, the Old Testament records disaster after disaster because of faulty, ungodly leaders. King Solomon started well but soon fell into debauchery and idolatry.

After his death, the kingdom split into two separate kingdoms, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, because of the influence of false prophets. The northern kingdom never had a godly king and followed false prophets. This sinful pattern soon resulted in their captivity to their enemies.

The southern kingdom had mixed leadership, but godless kings together with sinful prophets overruled the godly ones. They, too, ended in captivity to their adversaries.

Starting with the warnings from Christ, the New Testament alerts Christians to the presence and danger of false prophets. In that day as well as in our day, false prophets and leaders confuse people and lead their followers into sin.

The body of Jesus Christ faces a crisis in leadership today. Many evidences confirm that false prophets exist today. For example:

- Even a casual observer sees spiritual decline in the church and in the lives of believers.

- Believers evade walking in holiness and conform themselves to the world.

–Preachers concentrate on psychology and the emotional ills of mankind, which turns the Bible into a psychology textbook.

–Preachers disregard theology and doctrine. The importance of biblical doctrine has fallen into disrepute.

–Omitting the challenges and corrections of sound doctrine, pastors instead emphasize a feel-good religion centered on humanity and emotional feelings rather than on God and His righteous demands upon us as His creation.

–Those who attempt to bring correction to the leadership of the church today suffer condemnation for allegedly being out of step, rocking the boat, creating dissension and causing confusion in the church.

False Prophets are Ungodly Leaders

False prophets and their failures play a significant role in the spiritual decline of the congregation of the righteous. These errors grieve the Spirit of God and quench His work among Christ followers. We lack God's glorious presence, and the supernatural authority and ability that only His Spirit can bring to His people.

The Bible provides an account when the children of Israel followed faulty, ungodly leadership. They had fled Egypt by God's strong hand. They saw His glorious presence on Mount Sinai. Then, Moses went to meet with God and stayed there for 40 days. In his place, Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge of the people.

While Moses talked with God on the mountain, the children of Israel down below went into idolatry. They turned aside from God who had displayed Himself on the mount and had revealed Himself to them with His law, and in physical, tangible ways. They turned and demanded an idol.

Exodus 32:1-6 says:

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us gods which will go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

Aaron said to them, "Break off the gold earrings that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people broke off the gold earrings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He received them from their hand, and fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

When Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow will be a feast to the Lord." So they rose up early on the next day, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

Aaron Dreaded Man

Although this circumstance does not describe the totality of Aaron's leadership, it describes how easily one can become an ungodly leader or a false prophet, even for a short time of life. Aaron displayed a dread of man.

Although Moses left both Aaron and Hur in charge when he went up the mount, the text refers only to Aaron. What happened to Hur?

The Scriptures do not describe for us what happened to Hur. However, Jewish historians describe what they believe happened to Hur. When the children of Israel rebelled and wanted to make an idol, they went to Hur first.

But, he stood up for God, refused to make their idol and in

his actions said, "No. We worship God. We will not make an idol contrary to God's law. We will not disobey and rebel against God and form an idol." As a result, the people killed him.

Next, they came to Aaron and gave him the same message: "Make us gods." Aaron gave in to their demands, making the idol they demanded.

Whether this account of Hur occurred or not, Aaron displayed a dread of man. Because of his dread of man, Aaron fell into a snare. Ultimately, he made an idol for the people, the famous golden calf.

Aaron Doubted God

Aaron showed another characteristic of false prophets' faulty, ungodly leadership: He doubted God. Aaron failed to trust Him. In those six verses describing Aaron's plans, he fails to mention God at all. He did refer to the idol as though it was God.

Prior to this occasion, Aaron participated in numerous examples of God's miraculous power alongside Moses. He was Moses' spokesman. But, as far as making any reference whatsoever to the almighty, true and living God on this occasion, Aaron did not refer to Him.

Aaron Depended Upon the World's Methods

To satisfy the crowd, Aaron devised a plan to get gold for the idol. Then, he used his own skills and abilities to make the idol. Finally, he tried to imitate reality by calling the idol God, as if it came into existence by miraculous means.

Throughout the whole experience of Aaron with the golden calf, he relied upon the world's methods and means. He simply followed the world's way of doing things, the manners and practices of the world, perhaps ones he learned in Egypt.

He doubted God. Instead, he looked upon the world's methods that would somehow solve the problem.

Aaron Departed From Truth Into False Doctrine

Aaron exhibited another characteristic of a false prophet's faulty leadership: departure from truth into false doctrine. Toward the end of the text he declared, "Tomorrow is the feast unto the Lord. These gods brought you out of Egypt. We will worship this god."

A few commentators describe the idol as one of the many idols that the children of Israel saw in Egypt. Aaron copied it to comfort them. Others explain the idol as an attempt by Aaron to make an image of the true God.

In either case, like all false prophets, Aaron led the people into false doctrine in their disobedient worship of the idol.

Aaron Displaced the Truth for the Sake of Peace

Aaron wanted peace at any price, even when it required that he sacrifice the truth about God. He wanted unity, not contention and strife. Therefore, Aaron set aside the truth to avoid controversy.

However, neither peace nor unity resulted. Instead, the children of Israel fell into debauchery. They made a mockery of worshipping God, giving glory to a dumb idol.

The peace that Aaron sought turned into chaos and riot.

What Purpose Did These Events Afford for the Children of Israel?

Prior to the people's demand for an idol, God revealed to the children of Israel His demands upon them. Since God redeemed them out of Egypt, He asserted His rightful status above them. Genesis 20:1-17 records the Ten Commandments that God required of them.

God Commanded Israel to Have No Other Gods Except Him (See Gen. 20:1-3.)

In making the golden calf, Aaron and the people denied the exclusivity of God. God who delivered them from Egypt and who revealed Himself to them in miraculous ways now demanded His sole status as their God.

He required the children of Israel to reject all other gods including the ones they saw the Egyptians worship.

They must worship Him and Him alone.

God Commanded Israel Not to Make Any Images of Worship Nor to Bow Down to Them (See Gen. 20:4-6.)

When Aaron made the calf for the children of Israel to worship, he violated not just the first commandment, but also the second commandment. God decreed that they not make an idol in the form of any of God's creatures: neither animals, flying creatures nor creatures in the waters.

In obvious disobedience, Aaron made a likeness of a cow. The fact that he made it of gold did not somehow make it acceptable.

This command included a warning of long-lasting judgment upon Israel's children, the children's children and unto the third and fourth generation. In fact, biblical scholars describe the punishing plague that God sent upon them for their disobedience as lasting for generations.

When Aaron made the golden calf to meet the people's demands, he facilitated their disobedience of the first two commands, which led to God's judgment upon them.

Stay tuned for Part 2! {eo}

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