

How Lying Spirits Make Inroads Into Christian Ministry

I was stunned. I had just listened to a well-known Christian leader address the fact that his publisher had just pulled his latest book off the market because they had discovered he had greatly exaggerated his testimony of being a former Satanist high priest. He did not deny the publisher's allegation, but justified himself, saying it is OK to "embellish" one's story to make the Gospel more attractive.

If this were an isolated incident, we might shrug it off and move on. The following selected examples, however, indicate that there may be a real problem today with the handling of truth in our movement.

- Shortly after 9/11, a well-known "prophet" declared on national TV that bin Laden would be found within 35 days. When, months later, he was confronted by the fact that it did not happen, he sought to justify himself saying that he had not stated what point the 35 days was from.
- A TV evangelist, who was discovered using an earpiece to receive "words of knowledge" from his wife about people in the audience, justified his actions saying it built people's faith and helped them receive from God.
- When feathers suddenly appeared floating across the platform at a large charismatic conference, the evangelist announced that they were "Holy Ghost feathers." She was discredited, however, when a local pastor obtained a video of the meeting, slowed it down, and pointed out that she had released the feathers from the sleeve of her blouse.
- An evangelist reported that numerous people had been

raised from the dead in his revival meetings, but when Christian journalists sought to interview some of them, not a single one could be found.

- A well-known pastor and worship leader received both sympathy and money while faking terminal cancer for two years, even appearing in concert with an oxygen tank and a tube in his nose before finally confessing it was all a hoax.

And the list goes on.

A Cavalier Approach to Truth Opens the Door to Deception

Such cavalier handling of truth is all too common in charismatic circles. Such behavior, however, is spiritually dangerous. Both Old and New Testaments reveal that “fudging” or compromising truth opens one to lying and deceptive spirits. In speaking of the rampant deception that will be characteristic of the last days, Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11 (NIV), says that those who are deceived will perish “because they refused to love the truth.” Those who do not love the truth find themselves defenseless against the “father of lies” (Jn. 8:44).

This principle is clearly borne out in the Old Testament account of 400 prophets being deceived by a lying spirit because they were willing to “fudge” the truth for personal gain.

Politicized Prophets

In 1 Kings 22, Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, asks Jehoshaphat, the righteous king of Judah, to go to battle with him against the Syrians. Jehoshaphat agrees but suggests that they first inquire of the Lord through the prophets concerning the matter. Ahab agrees and sends for his 400 court prophets who are probably products of the “school of the prophets,” often referred to in the Old Testament as the “sons of the prophets” or the “company of prophets.”

We are not told how the “school of the prophets” began and Scripture neither affirms nor condemns the school. Some believe it was begun by Samuel to prepare young men for prophetic ministry. Nonetheless, it is clear, that through the “school of the prophets,” prophetic ministry was professionalized and became a vocation by which the prophet made his living. Some were hired by the wealthy and kings kept many in their courts as advisers and to inquire of them concerning the mind of the Lord.

As a result, prophetic ministry became politicized with many of these “prophets” yielding to the pressure to prophesy that which would please those in power, from whom they also received their livelihood. Their willingness to compromise truth opened them to lying spirits.

At Ahab’s command, these 400 school of the prophets graduates came before the two kings. They all declared the same message. The two kings are to go out against the Syrians and God will give them a great victory. There is even a prophetic drama as one of the prophets, Zedekiah, takes horns of iron and declares, “Thus says the LORD with these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed” (1 Kings 22:11b, NKJV).

A Prophet Who Will Not Compromise Truth

Jehoshaphat apparently did not feel settled with what he was hearing, and he asked Ahab if there was not another prophet from whom they could inquire. Ahab sullenly replied that there was one more by the name of Micaiah, “But I hate him because he never prophesies good for me, but always evil” (1 Kings 22:8, MEV). Ah, here is a prophet who is committed to truth and will not compromise even when it offends the king. He is no political prophet. He is not trying to impress anyone. He is committed to truth.

At Jehoshaphat’s insistence, Ahab calls for Micaiah. The messenger who goes for Micaiah informs him that the 400

prophets are all in agreement and exhorts him to let his word agree with theirs, *i.e.*, to get in unity with the other prophets. Micaiah replies that he will speak whatever word the Lord may give him.

Micaiah's response reminds us that our ultimate goal is not unity, but conformity to Christ, who is truth personified. True biblical unity is always built on truth.

A Lying Spirit Is Released into the Mouths of the Prophets

Micaiah arrived and after a brief exchange with Ahab he related an astounding vision he had seen. Micaiah said he saw the Lord sitting on His throne and all the host of heaven standing by. He heard the Lord say, "Who will persuade Ahab so that he will go up and die at Ramoth Gilead?" (1 Kings 22:20).

Different ones offered suggestions, but then a spirit came and stood before the Lord and said, "I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets" (v. 22b). Micaiah then heard the Lord say to the spirit, "You will be successful and persuade him. Go forth, and do so" (v. 22c). Micaiah then declared to Ahab, Now therefore, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all your prophets here, and He has spoken evil concerning you!" (v. 23).

Ahab responded in anger, ordering Micaiah to be imprisoned and fed only bread and water. The other prophets were also offended and one of them, Zedekiah, "walked up and struck Micaiah on the cheek" (v. 24b). Ahab and Jehoshaphat chose to ignore Micaiah's word and proceeded into battle where Ahab was killed, and the armies of Israel and Judah were forced to withdraw, just as Micaiah had predicted.

How did a lying spirit find its way into the mouths of these prophets who prophesied in the name of the God of Israel? There is no question that their willingness to fudge the truth for personal gain and to please those in power had opened the door. It still happens today.

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I remember a Christian leader, whom I respect, tell about attending a meeting where the evangelist was, reportedly, functioning in the gifts of the Spirit in a remarkable way, particularly in prophecy and the word of knowledge. He said the man ministered in an entertaining sort of way, revealing personal things about people in the congregation, even telling one man the brand of cigarettes he had hidden in his pocket.

While observing this, Kenneth E. Hagin said he heard a voice say, "familiar spirit." The voice was so clear that he instinctively looked around to see if someone next to him had spoken. He then realized it was the Holy Spirit speaking in his heart that this was a familiar spirit at work.

Knowing something of the man's background and ministry, he realized that the man had built his ministry, not on the word of God and truth, but on the sensational gifts of the Spirit. When the gift was not operating by the Spirit, (1 Cor. 12:11), this man, to draw the crowds, had sought to operate the gift out of his own soul. This involved being less than honest; and by playing fast and loose with the truth, he had opened himself to a familiar/lying spirit.

Closing the Door on Satan

There has been so much reckless handling of truth and so much gullibility in charismatic circles that I have wondered if some may not be among the first to embrace the Antichrist when he comes on the scene with his counterfeit miracles. Deception gives birth to more deception. Speaking of the great deception of the last days, Paul tells the consequences for those who refuse to love the truth. He says,

"For this reason [not loving truth] God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie, and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (2 Thess. 2:11-12, NIV).

We can close the door on lying and deceptive spirits by loving truth. Satan traffics in lies and deceptions, for this is his only means of power and control. This is why Jesus said in John 8:31-32 (MEV), "If you remain in My word, then you are truly My disciples. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." When we love and walk in truth, there is no place for Satan in our lives.

Hear the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:2-5 (NIV) concerning his commitment to integrity and truth. This statement is a wonderful guide that we should all utilize. What a difference it would make in the body of Christ today. Paul says,

We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God ... For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. {eo}

This article is derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt's latest book, Angels of Light, available from Amazon and his website at .