

Dealing with Error

Welcome to Harvest Community Church

Series: Discernment for the End Times

Text: 1 Timothy 4:1

A spiritual battle between truth and error was already fully engaged when Paul wrote to Timothy. Through the Holy Spirit, Paul **prophesied** that an even more shocking proliferation of error would emerge during the last days. Our opening verse could be interpreted this way:

~ Let me tell you unequivocally what is going to happen at the end of the age. There will be an invasion of seducing spirits with doctrines of demons that will attempt to lead the world into widespread, wide-scale deception and delusion. I am telling you up front and in language so clear that you cannot misunderstand - unprecedented delusion will enter the world in that hour.

We were **forewarned** and we can clearly see today that seducing spirits are trying to lead our society into depravity, produce modifications to God's holy Word and Truth, water down the Gospel and bring back old pagan ideas that are restyled forms of **mysticism** to present to an ignorant generation as new religious concepts. In each generation Satan tries the same old schemes only he repackages them to look different and seem different than the ones he used in times past. **Ecclesiastes 1:9**

Because we are living in the age when a departing from the faith was prophesied to occur, we must **predetermine** our immovable stance even if times drastically change and most of society turns in the wrong direction.

In the early church one of the first assaults from false teachers came from Jewish **legalists**. They wanted to alter the message of grace by attaching Old Testament rules and regulations to it. Paul dealt with these people throughout his ministry. This error filled group believed that all converts to Christ had to become **Jewish** in their lifestyle and practices. The Apostles dealt with this early on with great wisdom. **2 Corinthians 11:3, Acts 15:24-29**

There was another group that the devil was using to mesmerize newly converted believers with far-fetched revelations that would seem bizarre to us today but would have been very effective to people who came out of paganism where strange beliefs and ideas were common. In the New Testament times both the Greeks and Romans worshiped and were devoted to many gods. Today we regard this as **mythology**. These gods were worshiped, venerated and **incorporated** into all of life. People still marvel at the temples that were built.

This type of pagan worship was not limited to the Greeks and Romans. All over the world the Incans, Mayans, Japanese, Chinese, Aztecs, Hindus, American Indians, the Celts, Nordics and the Aborigines from Australia and New Zealand worshipped gods that represented all aspects of **nature**. This type of worship was so common that many people had shrines in their **homes**.

It was into this culture that false teachers who came to be known as **Gnostics** began to appear on the scene to appeal to the pagan instincts of people in the church who had been raised as pagans but had converted to Christ.

Gnosticism was a mix of pagan philosophies, religions and mysteries with Christianity that was considered more compatible with the pagan world at the time. Most new gentile Christians were of Greek or Roman heritage and were easily influenced by the ideas and philosophical concepts of paganism. The term gnostic comes from the Greek word gnosis, which means knowledge. Gnostics claimed to possess superior knowledge and special insight. They claimed to possess knowledge that surpassed scripture and did not need to be supported by good doctrine. These false prophets claimed to see into other realms and spiritual dimensions that others could not see and no one had explored. This kind of thing still attracts people today.

For those of us who hold fast to the Word of God, we believe in the supernatural (things beyond the natural) and in supernatural experiences. These include – visions, dreams and revelations that are in agreement with scripture.

In the non-Christian world at the time were wandering lecturers called Sophists. Basically, a Sophist is word that means wisdom. These Sophists boasted of having a special wisdom and were the pagan counterpart to the Gnostics. Some were legitimate educators who educated the “elite” of society. Others were more flamboyant about their claims of intellectual legitimacy. These people became famous and were known for their sensationalism and controversy to attract listeners. (I think we all can name so called experts, educators and influencers in our day)

Some Sophists were employed to educate the rich and upper class, there were also opportunists who tailored their lectures to the whims of each crowd and would say nearly anything to please an audience. These were the original ear ticklers. When the Gnostics appeared later in the church, they patterned themselves after the Sophists. They told fantastic tales with a spiritual twist that would entertain their listeners. They would talk about angels, mystical happenings and visits with unknown celestial beings with no validation of scripture.

Gnostic Errors – the following errors were prevalent in New Testament times. Each were refuted in the New Testament epistles. As you will see each of these is attempting to reemerge in these last days. It is healthy to know the past so we are able to recognize them in the present. The saying that those who do not know history are bound to repeat it is true in many ways.

- The Gnostics claimed that the Old Testament Scriptures were inferior and based on old, outdated, and antiquated ideas. They said that Christians needed to disconnect themselves from the teachings of the Old Testament.

Today some church leaders are also claiming that the Old Testament has no relevance for New Testament believers. The truth is that there is no real understanding of the New Testament and the New Covenant without the Old. **Matthew 5:17-19**

- According to the Gnostics, the God of the Old Testament was an entirely different God from the New Testament God. They claimed that the New Testament God was superior. How God **worked** and judged under the Old Covenant – all of this was viewed as archaic, defective, and inferior. The God of the Old was judgmental and wrathful – the God of the New was all about **love**, kindness and peace. **Matthew 10:34-36**

This was a way for the Gnostics to shape a god in their image. It made the gospel more appealing to a pagan world. Christ was not the only way but one of **many** ways to God. It removed the concept of one God and one way.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (AMP), John 14:6, Mark 12:28-34

Today there is the emergence of many ways. It is symbolized by those who promote the idea that these philosophies can **co-exist** side by side. It is a gospel of love and so all “forms” of love are acceptable.

- Gnostics proposed the idea that the **wrath** of the Old Testament God wasn't to be taken seriously by New Testament believers. They believed that all forms of present or future judgement were to be dismissed. The Gnostics claimed that the concept of the wrath of God was an imaginary doctrine based on religious thinking that is unfitting for a loving God.

Many today teach that the judgement of God and His wrath is outdated. They declare that God's wrath was poured out on Christ and declare that there is no more wrath to release in judgement. Anyone educated in theology can plainly see that this is not true.

Romans 1:18-22

- Gnostics held to a doctrine that the flesh and all physical matter was evil and fading. Only the spirit held significance so it really didn't matter whether one sinned with the flesh.

They held to the notion that all sin was **inconsequential** and had no effect on anyone who had already come to faith in Christ. It gave the impression that there was no need for continued **repentance** or a life of holiness. Today we see this rising up as people misappropriate the true meaning of grace. **Romans 5:20-6:7**

This doctrine was held by the Antinomian Gnostics. Antinomian means – against law. They had an aversion to the **moral** law of God, which they said was an inferior Old Testament concept. Today this is gaining hold again. False teachers declaring that the Ten Commandments have no relevance for modern-day believers. All moral law has its foundations in the original 10 Laws of God.

Matthew 24:11-14, 1 John 3:4, Matthew 23:27-28, 1 Timothy 1:9, Romans 4:7

- The Gnostics believed that a new religion was needed that could **blend** varying religious beliefs. They created a message that was more open-minded, less based on the test of scripture and more **inclusive** of other theological beliefs, philosophical ideas and alternative lifestyles. It was a fashioned belief system that pagans would find unobjectionable and be able to participate in.

Those false teachers did then what is being done today as they attempt to remove anything **objectionable** in scripture in order to create a church environment that makes all accepted regardless of what they embrace or endorse. Instead of confronting sin and the power of Christ to overcome it, they make everyone feel good about themselves without confronting the need for inward transformation. These false teachers claim that most people are actually good people. This is not what the gospel preaches.

Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:10-12, Romans 3:23, Romans 7:18

- Gnostics sought to penetrate the spirit world, claiming to explore realms where no man has ever been. They professed to know names of angels not mentioned in the Bible. And even developed entire angelic lineages.

There is a renewed fascination in our day with the angelic and the demonic and the supernatural. We find many of these unbiblical teachings in the Catholic church, in charismatic churches and among those who refuse to be a part of what they call **organized** religion. These are people who dwell on **experiences** that are unsubstantiated by scripture. While we affirm that there are supernatural experiences and genuine encounters with God, we cannot base our beliefs on experiences that are not corroborated by scripture.

Gnostics depart from the absolute **authority** of Scripture. They refuse to base their beliefs on textual truth. The Bible is our spiritual anchor that keeps us from drifting off courses. Paul, Peter, John and Jude all addressed the Gnostic departures in their epistles. What the Gnostics did throughout the vast Roman Empire is to try to incorporate the **familiarity** of their past influences into their new life in Christ. As a result, an influx of pagan beliefs were gradually integrated into the Church through new converts. Even the Catholic church did this. Notice that many of the statues that were of God were actually repurposed statues of Zeus and Jupiter. Many of the minor gods became statues of Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles.

Today many people are trending towards a more pluralistic and inclusive position that is actually Gnostic in nature. Today the majority of younger Christians, even those who are attending church regularly, are wavering on the most **basic** of the Christian tenants of faith. Many modern church leaders have a strong ability to communicate masterfully. Many either lack a basic education in fundamental Bible principles or they have made the deliberate choice to avoid teaching sound doctrine and have been duped into taking a politically correct position on moral absolutes. Many refuse to deal with cultural issues head on for fear of **offending** some. Instead, churches are being run by dynamic business ideas and motivational messages instead of the life transforming message of the undiluted Gospel. **Only** God's Word has the power to permanently transform a life. The good news is that it is not too late for the body of Christ to recover.

- ❖ Another group of those who lead people in error were the Nicolaitans. **Revelation 2:6 & 15** Essentially the Nicolaitans were encouraging believers to compromise their faith in order to coexist peacefully with the world. In effect they said... ‘we are living too separately, too strictly, Pagans don’t understand us.’

Today people are saying the same thing... Just tone it down. Don’t be so strict. Sometimes you have to go along to get along.

The Word Nicolaitan means – Those who conquer the people or those who have victory over the people. This was developed because of persecution. After the church in Pergamos over came persecution this evil more deadly was coming at them from the inside.

Whenever God’s people compromise their faith, they lose. They lose power. They lose holiness. They lose victory. When God’s people compromise it always results in their defeat. We need to take a strong stand against compromise. We must walk in love towards those around us, but we must also walk in holiness.

To walk and live in power we must live by a higher standard and that standard is the Word of God. There is no getting around the fact that spiritual compromise is fatal to the individual Christians and to the local church. We are not called to compromise in order to think and act like the world. We are called to be different so that people see a difference. That difference is Jesus.

Again, Paul speaks of a time when people would have a form of godliness but would have none of the power. On the outside it would look good, lifelike. Everything would indicate on the outside that there was life inside. In the last days people will have a form of godliness but deny the power or authentic godliness. To deny means to denounce or reject. The last days will be marked by people who seem religious, will dress themselves in the guise of Christian faith but will no longer embrace the life that comes from being a Christian or living Christ - like.

Just because you talk like Christian, dress like a Christian and hang out in churches does not mean that you are a Christian. This departure from the faith has accelerated in recent years. To be a Christian means that we have been forgiven of our sins through repentance, that we have been washed in the blood of Christ and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

While it is true that God loves all people, His salvation is not inclusive of all people. Only those who have turned from their sin and chosen to live for Christ. **John 3:16-17**
John 3:16 is the heart of the Gospel but equally true is **Ephesians 5:5-6**.

Liberal progressive thinkers are negatively affecting the way many churches practice their faith. Today we are accommodating the moral mess of society rather than changing it and soon the church and the world look the same. Instead of being a lighthouse of hope for the world many churches are reduced to a goodwill, humanitarian charitable organization that helps the needy and a civic organization that champions human rights instead of people’s need for a Savior. As a result, people stream into hell well fed and clothed with a sense of belonging.

Those of us in the Pentecostal and Charismatic part of the Body of Christ are not exempt from this slow departure from the faith. We must honestly relentlessly and fearlessly contend for the faith.

FIVE RED FLAGS THAT WARN US OF FALSE TEACHERS

Spiritual discernment is rare today, but the Holy Spirit can help us recover it.

By J. Lee Grady

Last week I wrote about how grieved I was that so many Christians naively swallowed the teachings of Nigerian prophet T.B. Joshua—in spite of repeated warnings from Nigerian pastors who knew of his occult origins. Sadly, even after evidence surfaced proving that Joshua practiced juju rituals and sexually abused women, some of his followers still defend him.

People ask me: “But if T.B. Joshua was a false prophet, how could he perform miracles?” Or they ask: “How could he be false when he used the name of Jesus?” Those questions alone indicate that they forgot Jesus’ own words; He warned that false prophets “would show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24). Jesus also said charlatans would use His name to gain credibility (24:5).

Because I’ve encountered many false prophets, swindlers and spiritual quacks since the 1970s, I learned that there are several red flags that warn us of wolves in sheep’s clothing. If you see any of these qualities in a “minister,” you can be certain something devilish is lurking behind the curtain. If you choose to follow these blind guides, they will lead you into a ditch.

1. Beware of the arrogant. Satan fell from heaven because of pride. He is an egomaniac. Likewise, false prophets and false teachers are narcissists. Remember Simon the sorcerer, who tried to buy spiritual power from the evangelist Philip in Acts 8? He called himself “the Great Power of God” (Acts 8:10). He was full of himself! Anytime you hear a “minister” bragging about how he or she is the “best” or the “greatest,” run as far as you can.

2. Beware of occultism mixed with Christianity. T.B. Joshua’s most serious problem was his connection to African witchcraft. Most of his followers didn’t know he routinely visited a ritualistic shrine filled with fetishes and idols in order to draw power from dark forces. No genuine Christian would mix idolatry with the Holy Spirit. This is called syncretism, and it is a deadly concoction.

I once met a man who claimed to be a “bishop,” but he seemed spiritually off. I couldn’t put my finger on the problem until one day he admitted that he believed in astrology. This man actually believed that God “anointed” him because he was born under a certain Zodiac sign! I wasn’t surprised when this man’s ministry ended in scandal. Paul warned us in 2 Corinthians 6:14-15: “What fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial?” Anyone who mixes truth with the occult will lead others off the narrow path of Jesus.

3. Beware of illusion and manipulation. False prophets claim to walk in God’s supernatural power, but they use slight-of-hand tricks to deceive. I knew a popular “prophet” who memorized a ministry address list in order to call out “words of knowledge” about people. (He pretended to get street address numbers from God.) I knew another man who claimed to have the gift of healing, but he used a tiny microphone in his ear to get information from his staff about people in the audience. Fraudsters like this use smoke and mirrors to bilk people.

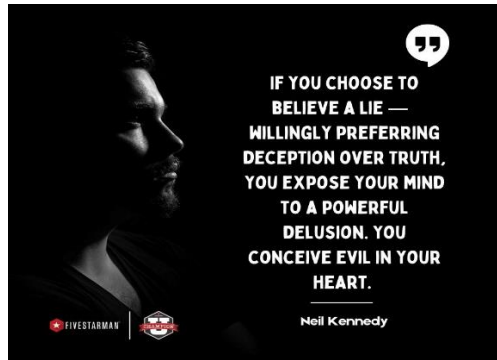
4. Beware of the sexually immoral. False prophets almost always end up in sex scandals. Consider Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon religion; he taught that God allows polygamy, because that doctrine gave Joseph Smith an excuse to have sex with multiple wives. This explains why Mormonism has always been oppressive toward women.

The short epistle of Jude gives a sobering warning about spiritual predators who teach false doctrines while preying on the vulnerable. And Jesus, in one of his prophetic messages in Revelation, warns the church of Thyatira about a woman identified as “Jezebel” who taught God’s people to commit immorality (Rev. 2:20). Any “preacher” who carries a message of sexual permissiveness, or who lives that lifestyle, is a dangerous wolf.

5. Beware of pretenders. Christian leaders should be genuine and authentic. They are approachable, loving, forgiving, humble, and open about their flaws. The letter of 2 Corinthians is a masterful discourse on how ministers should be real and sincere. Paul said: “You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach for personal profit. We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ’s authority, knowing that God is watching us.” (2 Cor. 2:17, NLT). Paul was basically telling his colleagues: “Don’t be fake!”

We live in the era of social media influencers. Anybody today can launch a YouTube channel or an OnlyFans account; any false teacher can gather a million followers on Tiktok. Don’t jump on bandwagons because a preacher looks cool, or because he can “slay” a crowd with his “new revelations,” or because everybody is talking about him or her. Pray for spiritual discernment and learn to use it; then, teach others to discern between truth and error.

(This article first appeared in Lee Grady's "Fire in My Bones" column on Jan. 24, 2024. fireinmybones.com.)



Here are 10 Biblical Keys to Guard Your Heart from Lies:

1. **Seek Wisdom from God:** Proverbs 4:5-7 tells us to seek wisdom and understanding above all else. Pray for discerning hearts and minds, asking God to reveal the truth.
2. **Saturate Yourself in Scripture:** The Bible is the ultimate source of truth and a shield against deception. Reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word will equip you to identify lies and build a foundation of truth. (John 8:32)
3. **Discern the Fruit:** Jesus taught us to "beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:15-16) Look for the fruits of the Spirit- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control- rather than the works of the flesh.
4. **Test Everything by Scripture:** In 1 Thessalonians 5:21, we are instructed to "test all things; hold fast to what is good." Compare any teaching or information you encounter against the Word of God and reject anything contradicting it.
5. **Trust in the Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit is our guide and comforter. Ask Him to convict you of sin, reveal deception, and lead you into all truth. (John 16:13)
6. **Fellowship with Believers:** Iron sharpens iron, and surrounding yourself with other Christians keeps you accountable and grounded in biblical truth. Share your struggles and encourage one another to follow God's word. (Proverbs 27:17)
7. **Live in Humility:** Pride can blind us to our vulnerabilities and make us susceptible to deception. Remember that we are all fallible and in need of God's grace. (James 4:6)
8. **Forgive and Let Go:** Bitterness and resentment can create fertile ground for lies. Choose to forgive those who have deceived you and release any anger or hurt you may harbor. (Ephesians 4:31-32)
9. **Guard Your Thoughts:** As Proverbs 4:23 warns, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Our thoughts and emotions influence our actions. Be mindful of what you allow into your mind and focus on truth, love, and peace. (Philippians 4:8)
10. **Walk in Truth and Love:** Ultimately, guarding your heart from lies is about aligning with God's truth and love. Live a life of integrity, honesty, and compassion, and the darkness of lies will have no power over you. (1 John 2:3-6)

Remember, guarding your heart is a lifelong journey. By relying on God's wisdom and strength, you can equip yourself to walk in truth and reject the lies that threaten to lead you astray.