

“BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS”

Our Lord Jesus Christ warned: *“Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ [from the Greek word *christos* meaning Anointed]; and shall deceive many.... For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”* (Matt. 24:4,5,24). *“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things”* (Luke 21:36). *“And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”* (Mark 13:37).

The apostle John warned: *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”* (I John 4:1). How do we *“try the spirits”*? By the scriptures (Isa. 8:20; Matt. 22:29). The Holy Bible is *“the sword of the Spirit”*, *“and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* is our measuring stick (Eph. 6:17; II Tim. 4:1-4; Heb. 4:12). *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (II Tim. 3:16). Regardless of who the messengers are, whether they be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers or *“an angel from heaven”*, the Holy Bible is the only ruler by which we should measure their words and deeds. And as we judge all things by the pure word of God in the Holy Bible, which are the Lord's preserved words, the scriptures that *“shall not pass away”* (Psa. 12:6,7; Prov. 30:5,6 Matt. 24:35), we will know the truth just as Jesus promised:

“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31,32).

Note that the Lord Jesus Christ did not say that ye shall *“feel”* the truth, but that ye shall *“know”* the truth, and [the truth](#) shall make you free. (John 8:32). Jesus said, *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* (John 17:17). *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”* (Prov. 3:5). Sadly, many in the church-world today are leaning unto their *“own understanding”* placing their own heart's desires above the scriptures by following their own [feelings and emotions](#) instead of God's word in the Bible (Prov. 3:5; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:14). Of course, our feelings and emotions are touched with *“joy and gladness”* (Psa. 51:8) when Jesus Christ, who is the living Word, comes into our hearts by faith in his word (Eph. 1:13) and gives us *“the peace of God, which passeth all understanding”* (Philip. 4:7). However, any spiritual or emotional experience that will either contradict or not conform to the Holy Bible is not of God. The Lord warned us not to trust in the emotional feelings of our own heart: *“He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool”* (Prov. 28:26), and *“Cursed be the man that trusteth in man”* (Jer. 17:5,9), and *“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”* (Prov. 16:25).

Having a sincere heart will not make you free from error. Some people believe that sincerity equals truth. I have known many sincere people over the years who were

sincerely wrong in their theologies and beliefs. Some people have misplaced faith. Some people are sincerely deceived, led astray by Hinduism, Mormonism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, and other false Christian doctrines and beliefs. Neither will spiritual experiences make you free. Jesus said, *“my word . . . the truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:31,32). *“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,”* (Eph. 1:13). God warns us in Jeremiah that the *“heart is deceitful above all things”*; and God warns *“of the prophets that prophesy... of the deceit of their own heart”*, which is why we should never leave the safety of [the scriptures](#) (Jer. 14:14; 17:9; 23:26;). Paul said, *“To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.”* (Phillip. 3:1). In all matters of faith and practice the Holy Bible is a Christian's only safety net, and is the authority by which we should *“judge righteous judgment”* *“and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not”* (Mal. 3:18; John 7:24; II Cor. 11:14,15; Gal. 1:6-9; Eph. 4:11; Heb. 4:12; II Tim. 2:15).

The Old Testament offices of priests and prophets were forever changed at Calvary when Jesus Christ said, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30). No longer would priests offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. No longer would prophets stand in the gap for God's people. No longer would God lead his people by the hands of the prophets, or speak to his people as *“in time past.”* The apostle Paul said, *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son”* (Heb. 1:1,2). The apostle John said, *“These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.”* (I John 2:26,27). Jesus said, *“It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God.”* (John 6:45). *“And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.”* (Heb. 8:11). Jesus said that when *“the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth:”* (John 16:13). All believers are now *“kings and priests unto God”* (Rev. 1:6). This is the New Testament priesthood of all believers. The apostle Peter said that *“ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood”* (I Peter 2:9). In 1928 Evangelist Donald Gee said,

“A careful study of the New Testament will reveal that the Early Church NEVER placed utterances through their prophets on a level with the Scriptures. Note carefully the distinctive phrase used in 2 Peter 1:21 to describe the latter—‘prophecy of the Scripture.’ See again the decision of Acts 15:28, where the difficulty was NOT solved by reference to the accredited prophets present (Barnabas, Judas, Silas, etc.), but by reference to the Old Testament Scriptures.” (Montanism, Donald Gee, 1928)

Going to a New Testament prophet for “a word from the Lord” is no different than going to the Pope. The scriptures were written for our comfort. The scriptures were also written for our learning and our admonition, for us to take heed and beware of false teachers who claim to speak for God, *“prophets of the deceit of their own heart;”* (Jer. 23:26), false prophets who claim to stand in the gap for God's people and lead them by *their* “visions” and “revelations” from “heaven” (see also Galatians 1:8; II Corinthians 11:4,13-15).

Eighteenth century Congregational preacher Jonathan Edwards cautioned those who would desire to have revival experiences to beware of the many delusions and false leadings of the Spirit. Known for his role in the First Great Awakening, Edwards experienced some of the first fires of revival at his church in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1733-1735. Speaking on the subject of the false moves of God and the “falsely supposed leading of the Spirit,” Edwards said that the true “Leading of the Spirit is a Thing exceedingly diverse from that which some call so; which consists not in teaching them God's Statutes and Precepts that he has already given; but in giving them new Precepts, by immediate inward Speech or Suggestion;” (*A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards, 1746, [p. 176](#)). Edwards warned:

“What has been said of the Nature of spiritual Understanding,.. not only shows that there is nothing of it in this falsely supposed Leading of the Spirit, which has been spoken of; but also shows the Difference between spiritual Understanding and all Kinds and Forms of Enthusiasm, all imaginary sights of God and Christ and Heaven, all supposed Witnessing of the Spirit, and Testimonies of the Love of God by immediate inward Suggestion; and all Impressions of future Events, and immediate Revelations of any secret Facts whatsoever; all enthusiastical impressions and Applications of Words of Scripture, as though they were Words now immediately spoken by God to a particular Person, in a new Meaning, and carrying something more in them than the Words contain as they lie in the Bible; and all Interpretations of the mystical Meaning of the Scripture, by supposed immediate Revelation.... An enthusiastical supposed Manifestation of the Love of God, is made by the exciting an Idea of a smiling Countenance, or some other pleasant outward Appearance, or by the Idea of pleasant Words spoken or written, excited in the Imagination, or some pleasant bodily Sensation. So when Persons have an imaginary Revelation of some secret Fact, it is by exciting external Ideas; either of some Words implying a Declaration of that Fact, or some visible or sensible Circumstances of such a Fact. So the supposed Leading of the Spirit to do the Will of God, in outward Behaviour, is either by exciting the Idea of Words (which are outward Things) in their Minds, either the Words of Scripture, or other Words, which they look upon as an immediate Command of God; or by exciting and impressing strongly the Ideas of the outward Actions themselves.” ([Ibid. pp. 176, 177](#))

Jonathan Edwards further warned about the heathen types of experiences in false revivals including “strange ecstasies and raptures”:

“Such Sort of Experiences and Discoveries as these commonly raise the Affections of such as are deluded by them to a great Height, and make a mighty Uproar in both Soul and Body. And a very great Part of the false Religion that has been in the World, from one Age to another, consists in such Discoveries as these, and in the Affections that flow from them. In such Things consisted the Experiences of the ancient Pythagoreans among the Heathen, and many others among them, who had strange Ecstasies and Raptures, and pretended to a divine Afflatus, and immediate Revelations from Heaven. In such Things as these seem to have consisted the Experiences of the Essenes, an ancient Sect among the Jews, at and after the Times

of the Apostles. In such Things as these consisted the Experiences of many of the ancient Gnostics, and the Montanists, and many other Sects of ancient Heretics, in the primitive Ages of the christian Church. And in such Things as these consisted the pretended immediate Converse with God and Christ, and Saints and Angels of Heaven, of the Monks, Anchorites and Recluses, that formerly abounded in the Church of Rome. In such Things consisted the pretended high Experiences, and great Spirituality of many Sects of Enthusiasts that swarmed in the World after the Reformation;... And in these Things seems to lie the Religion of many Kinds of Enthusiasts of the present Day. It is by such Sort of Religion as this, chiefly, that Satan transforms himself into an Angel of Light: and it is that which he has ever most successfully made use of to confound hopeful and happy Revivals of Religion, from the Beginning of the christian Church to this Day. When the Spirit of God is poured out, to begin a glorious Work, then the old Serpent, as fast as possible, and by all Means, introduces this Bastard Religion and mingles it with the true;... Great and strict therefore should be the Watch and Guard that Ministers maintain against such Things, especially at a Time of great Awakening: For Men, especially the common People, are easily bewitched with such Things; they having such a glaring and glistening show of high Religion; and the Devil hiding his own Shape, and appearing as an Angel of Light, that Men may not be afraid of him, but may adore him.” ([Ibid., pp. 177, 178](#))

Nineteenth century English physicist Michael Faraday (1791-1867) was a Bible believing Christian who said,

“That man in his natural state is greatly influenced by his fellow-creatures and the forms of emotion which are amongst them, is doubtless true, even when it concerns what he considers his eternal welfare. How else would the wonderfully varied and superstitious forms of belief have obtained in the world? What carries the Mormons into the desert, surrounded by trouble and the enmity of those around them? What sustains a spiritual dominion like the Papacy, aided by the nations around it, to proclaim the name of Christ whilst it contradicts His Word—refuses it (the record of the Spirit) to the people—and crushes out with all intolerance the simple obedience of the truth? Man's natural mind is a very unstable thing, and most credulous, and the imagination often rules it when reason is thought to be there. Mesmerism has great power over it; so has poetry; so has music; so has the united voice of the multitude; so have many other things: but these things are, so to say, indifferent as respects the character of the object they may be used to sustain, and are just as powerful in favour of a bad cause as a good one. Among the contradictory and gross systems of religion,... any one of them may be sustained by the use of such agencies as these.” (*The Life and Letters of Faraday*, Vol. 2, 1870, [pp. 431,432](#))

Michael Faraday stressed the importance of God's revealed written word in the Holy Bible, and our reliance upon the scriptures as our first and final authority in judging all matters of religion:

“The Revivals, &c., cannot trouble the Christian who is taught of God (by His

Word and the Holy Spirit) to trust in the promise of salvation through the work of Jesus Christ. He finds his guide in the Word of God, and commits the keeping of his soul into the hands of God. He looks for no assurance beyond what the Word can give him, and if his mind is troubled by the cares and fears which may assail him, he can go nowhere but in prayer to the throne of grace and to Scripture. No outward manifestation, as of a revival, &c., can give either *instruction* or *assurance* to him, nor can any outward opposition or trouble *diminish his confidence* in 'Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them who are *called*, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.' If his attention is called to the *revivals*, it cannot be that he should feel instruction there or assurance there, other than what he finds in the Scriptures, without reference to them; and it seems to me that any power they may have over his mind other than the Scripture has, must be delusion and a snare.'" (*The Life and Letters of Faraday*, Vol. 2, 1870, [p.431](#))

Some might say, "What about those who are exercising the gifts of the Spirit – prophesying, performing miracles, casting out devils? Surely they must be 'right with the Lord' and are not misleading people." Jesus said "*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*" (Matthew 7:21-23). This is quite an astonishing and sobering statement. Jesus said that many, not few, but many who confess him as their Lord and work miracles will not enter into the kingdom of God.

No one is immune to deception. The moment we think we are immune to deception, we are in fact being deceived. "*Let no man deceive you by any means:*" (II Thess. 2:3). "*Let no man deceive himself.*" (I Cor. 3:18). An important admonition given to God's people is "*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD:*" (Isa. 1:18). We must be careful not to allow our opinions and feelings influence our reasoning.