

Spiritual Discernment & False Teaching

Spiritual Discernment has become a lost discipline or skill in the church today. Believers are unable or unwilling to judge the teachings that are coming from the pulpits of our churches.

TV pastors and evangelists that teach aberrant Christian doctrines, cults, world religions, books that are considered Christian such as *The Shack*, and books that are obviously anti-Christian, for example *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Secret* all teach spiritual cyanide and the sheep eat it up as if it were the Word of God.

Spiritual discernment is defined as "the skill of understanding and applying God's Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong."¹

When we speak of discernment, we speak of truth versus error (or half-truths), right versus wrong, we speak of judging and making judgements, we speak of insight and understanding doctrine and theology, in other words, ways of thinking correctly about God.

A discerning mature Christian is one who is "trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:11-14) and thus, knows how to apply Scripture to everyday life. We compare, test or judge what we see or hear, to Scripture and to what God has defined as right and wrong doctrine and theology.

In the Hebrew, the main word used for "discernment" is *bin*. This word and its variants are used hundreds of times in the Old Testament and is commonly translated as "insight" or "understanding".

In the New Testament, the word *discern* [Greek: *diakrisis*] means “judicial estimation” or in other words, “to judge or to assess”.

The Bible commands us to judge or “test all things”, in other words, to practice discernment:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 says, “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

First, the word *test* [Greek: *dokimazo*] means “to allow, approve, discern, examine, prove, and try” and literally means “the testing of something in order to prove or disprove it as genuine or worthy.”

Second, we act on that test by either “holding fast” and accepting it or “abstaining from” it and rejecting it.

- 1 John 4:1 tells us to “not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”
- Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, *that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*” (ESV)
- Acts 17:11 says that when Paul taught the Bereans, they were “more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, *and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*” (emphasis added)

Just as the Bereans did, we compare what anyone says to the Bible, our *final court of appeal* to see “whether these things are so” and we make a judgment to discern truth from half-truths or falsehood, right from wrong.

Discernment takes practice, it takes being and staying in the Bible and we learn discernment by sitting under good solid Bible teaching and in fellowship with other strong believers and the more one exercises and applies discernment, the better one gets at it.

Tim Challies, author of *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, says that “the Bible tells us that discernment is the mark of those who have *spiritual life*, the mark of those who have attained *spiritual growth* and the mark of those who have attained *spiritual maturity*.” (emphasis added)

Discernment and the mature Christian should go hand-in-hand according to the Bible, since “everyone who partakes only of milk...he is a babe.”

- Hebrews 5:14 says that, “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”
- This same verse in the NASB says, “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

The word *exercised* [Greek: *gumnazo*] means “to practice or train” and we get the word *gymnastics* from it.

Babies do not discriminate [discern] between good nutritious foods and harmful things they put in their mouths; whereas the mature adult knows how to “judge or assess” between what is good and what is bad to put in their mouths.

Likewise, mature Christians who are spiritually discerning are required to be able to discern good doctrine and theology from bad doctrine and theology.

As noted above, spiritually discerning Christians can be categorized into three areas. Having discernment is proof of having a spiritual life (Proverbs 9:10; Ephesians 5:8b-10), spiritual growth (Mark 8:17-21; Matthew 13:16-17), and spiritual maturity (Hebrews 5:14).

Tim Challies points out that "Scripture portrays those who lack spiritual discernment in three ways: they are spiritually immature, they are backslidden, and they are dead. Those who lack discernment or do not care for it will fit into one of these three categories."²

The Bible never portrays those who are undiscerning in the ways of God, in a good light (Romans 1:28-32), but we are consistently encouraged and pushed on to discern the will of the Lord.

- Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

The root word *understanding* [Hebrew: *bene*] means "to separate mentally or distinguish, consider, be cunning, diligently, direct, *discern*..."

- Ephesians 5:8-10 says, "for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to *discern* what is pleasing to the Lord." (ESV)
- Hebrew 5:11-14 says, "[About this] we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to *discern* both good and evil."

Why do we need to be discerning? Author Tim Challies states the obvious:

- "The truth is under attack more today than at any other time in history and this should not be surprising in a culture that so values religious freedom and tolerance. Add to such an accepting culture unparalleled speed of communication and the ability to publish books and other writings quickly and easily, and we can rightly conclude that error is being spread with startling speed and efficiency. What the church

needs today is a class of believers who are identified as the experts in discernment and as those who have special ability in this area...Where evangelism is a gift that is offensive in nature, taking the battle to new regions, discernment is a defensive gift that protects the ground that has already been taken."³

The Bible says that we are to "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

Since the beginning, our enemy, the devil, has done everything imaginable to deceive people, distort the truth, and destroy the spread of the gospel.

He does this by using false teachers who teach destructive heresies, aberrant Christian doctrines causing division within the church, by creating cults that teach against essential Christian doctrine and world religions that teach against the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Most of the time, his attacks are covert, meaning they are not blatant or "in your face" but he mixes truth with non-truth – he makes it palatable by "stuffing the skin of a truth with a lie" so we can swallow it.

Satan and his demons don't come to us in a red suit, tail, horns and a pitchfork saying "Hey, here I am and I have something to tell you – it's not true, but I think you're going to find it appealing and believe it anyway."

Instead the Bible says that "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:14)

Dr. John MacArthur comments on this verse saying:

- "It is in that guise that he appears to the church, not the pitchfork, horns, and pointed tail of mythology. Satan is most effective in the

church when he comes not as an open enemy, but as a false friend; not when he persecutes the church, but when he joins it; not when he attacks the pulpit, but when he stands in it.”⁴

Biblically, we want to keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2) but we can gain insight into the strategy of our enemy by what God says about him in His word – the Bible.

By looking at Scripture, we can gain insight into at least three areas.

1. Who is the enemy?
2. What does Satan do?
3. How does Satan deceive people?

Who is the enemy?

The Bible tells us that Lucifer (“day-star”) was an intelligent, beautiful angel created in a state of perfection, according to Ezekiel 28:12, 15:

- “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty... You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created.”

Lucifer was perfect until sin or iniquity was found in him as Ezekiel 28:17 says:

- “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor”

Lucifer was so proud and became so corrupt that it overtook him and he desired to be like God.

Dr. Ron Rhodes elaborates:

- “Lucifer was so impressed with his own beauty, intelligence, power, and position that he began to desire for himself the honor and glory that belonged to God alone.”⁵

We get a glimpse of Lucifer's pride in Isaiah 14:12-17:

- "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: '**I will** ascend into heaven, **I will** exalt my throne above the stars of God; **I will** also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; **I will** ascend above the heights of the clouds, **I will** be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit."

Because of his pride God cast him to the earth in Ezekiel 28:17:

- "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground" and he fell "like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18)

So, Lucifer "day-star" became Satan "adversary, accuser or slanderer" and opposes God and all of His purposes.

What does Satan do?

As Dr. Steven C. Riser explains, "The names of a person frequently reveal the nature, activity and mission of a person."⁶

Dr. Ron Rhodes echoes the sentiment when he says, "We learn much about Satan and his work by the various names and titles used of him."⁷

- Satan is the *adversary* (1 Peter 5:8, 9). An adversary is someone who offers opposition; an opponent. He stands against us.
- Satan is *Beelzebub* (Matthew 12:24). This literally means "dung-god" and carries the idea of being the "god or lord of filth."

- Satan is the *devil* (Matthew 4:1). This literally means that Satan is a “false accuser and a slanderer.”
- Satan is the *evil* or *wicked one* (1 John 5:19). This literally means that Satan is “diseased, derelict, vicious, grievous, and malicious.”
- Satan is the *father of lies* (John 8:44). Satan was the first one to lie (Genesis 3:4) and it’s been his nature ever since.
- Satan is a *murderer* (John 8:44). Literally a “manslayer or a man-killer.”
- Scripture also calls Satan the *god of this world* (2 Corinthians 4:4), *prince of the air* (Ephesians 2:1-3), *accuser of the brethren* (Job 1:6-12; Revelation 12:10), the *enemy* (Matthew 13:39), the *tempter* (Matthew 4:3), and a *roaring lion* (1 Peter 5:8).

As we can see, Satan is a hateful and powerful being, but he is not God, he doesn’t have the power of God and the Bible encourages us by telling us that “He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

How does Satan deceive people?

Our enemy uses false teaching of doctrine and theology by using false apostles, false christs, false teachers and false prophets.

The apostle Paul warned of “**false apostles**, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” in 2 Corinthians 11:13. These men preached another Christ (2 Corinthians 11:4) are deceitful (2 Corinthians 11:13), servants of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:15), liars (Revelation 2:2), were well-trained in speech (2 Corinthians 11:6) and were oppressive (2 Corinthians 11:20).

The apostle Peter said that “there were also **false prophets** among the people, even as there will be **false teachers** among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” in 2 Peter 2:1.

Jesus warned that “**false christ**s and **false prophets** will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” in Matthew 24:24 and Mark 13:22. Jesus warned His followers to be skeptical of those who point to signs and omens to authenticate their false messianic claims.⁸

Satan uses false teachers, cults and false religions to bring division from within as well as from without:

- Jude 4 says, “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, Screwtape, an older demon, writes to Wormwood, a younger demon about how to be effective in deceiving people. Screwtape writes, “Your man has been accustomed, every since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily ‘true’ or ‘false,’ but as ‘academic’ or ‘practical’.... Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church.”

So, why do we need to be discerning Christians? What is causing false teachings and false teachers to grow exponentially?

Let's focus on seven areas that the enemy attacks the Christian faith and things to look for when it comes to discerning the attacks from the enemy.⁹

- 1. Supremacy of God's Word**
- 2. Sufficiency of God's Son**
- 3. Singularity of God's Gospel**
- 4. Sovereignty of God's Grace**
- 5. Security of God's Children**
- 6. Severity of God's Punishment**
- 7. Sanctity of God's Church**

Let's start off by looking at the first of the seven – Supremacy of God's Word.

1. Supremacy of God's Word

When we talk about the supremacy of God's Word, we're talking about its authority; it's inerrancy over all areas of life. We rest upon the Bible as our *final court of appeal* in all matters of faith as the Word of God.

There are typically three areas the enemy uses to attack the Supremacy of the Bible:

The Bible is not sufficient:

False teachers will deny that the Bible is sufficient and is all we need, i.e., *Sola Scriptura* [Latin: Scripture alone] in matters that pertain to faith and life.

The Bible is not complete:

False teachers will deny the Bible in regards to its completeness. In other words, they say the Bible has been corrupted and changed down through the centuries.

The Bible is not without error:

False teachers will deny the supremacy of the Bible saying that it has not been interpreted correctly and so they add to it or change it to match their theology instead of letting the Bible set their theology.

Islam teaches that the Bible has been corrupted by the Jews and Christians and contains many untruths. These untruths are corrected by Islam's Holy Scripture called the Koran. Muslim apologist Alhaj Ajijola asserts:

- "The first five books of the Old Testament do not constitute the original Torah, but parts of the Torah have been mingled up with other

narratives written by human beings and the original guidance of the Lord is lost in that quagmire. Similarly the four gospels of Christ are not the original Gospels as they came from the prophet Jesus...The fact is that the original Word of God is preserved neither with the Jews nor with the Christians." ¹⁰

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the Bible has not been properly interpreted, so they bring in their own "scholars" and have created their own translation of the Bible called the "New World Translation" and they add words where it contradicts their beliefs. A Jehovah's Witness publication acknowledges:

- "Was there really need for another translation?...the fact is that most of these [Christian] translations were made by clergymen and missionaries of Christendom's religious sects, and to varying degrees their translations were influenced by the pagan philosophies and unscriptural traditions that their religious systems had inherited from the past..." ¹¹

Mormonism, like Islam, teaches that the Bible has been corrupted down through the years by poor or faulty transmission. Mormonism's eighth "Article of Faith" states "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly..." Mormon apostle Orson Pratt stated:

- "Who, in his right mind, could, for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide? Who knows that even one verse of the Bible has escaped pollution?" ¹²

Roman Catholicism teaches that the supremacy of God's Word is on par with Roman Catholic tradition and when the two conflict, tradition always wins out and takes precedence over the Bible. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:

- "As a result the [Roman Catholic] Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, *'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both*

*Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence”*¹³ (emphasis added)

Biblical Teaching

In 2 Timothy 3:15-17 we read, “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

- First, notice that the “Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation”. In other words, you need no other literature, the Bible is sufficient in and of itself to provide the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Second, the Bible is given *by inspiration of God* [Greek: *theopneustos*] literally meaning *breathed out by God* or simply *God-breathed*.
- Third, notice that by the Word of God, a person will be “complete” and “thoroughly” equipped for every good work.

Also, the Bible was given once and so there is no need for the *Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* or the *Koran*, which is said to hold the truths that were corrupted in the Bible.

Jude 3 tells us, “I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was *once for all* delivered to the saints.” (emphasis added)

- Notice the “definite article” (e.g., *the*) in front of the word faith. It means the “one and only faith”.
- The word *once* [Greek: *hapax*] means “one (or a single) time.” This is something that never has to be repeated again and cannot be changed.

- The word *delivered* [Greek: *paradidomi*] refers to an act that was completed in the past with no continuing action. In other words, the verb tense that is used here refers to a once-and-for-all completed action.

Indeed, even the Bible itself argues against the possibility of its corruption:

- In Isaiah 40:8 we read, "The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."
- Jesus says in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

2. Sufficiency of God's Son

It's often said that if you get the nature of God wrong, everything else will undoubtedly follow because nearly all theological heresies begin with the misconception of the nature of God and spiral down from there.

As a result, false teachers, cults and world religions will attack the nature of Jesus Christ by claiming that He was a "good teacher and prophet", but nothing more. They will also claim that He was not God or He was *a* god (small 'g') but not the God of the Bible.

These beliefs of course mean several things. First, if you have the wrong Jesus, you have the wrong salvation which, to many groups, translates into a works based religion meaning Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was insufficient to save us from our sins.

And to other groups, Jesus is just one of many ways to God and still others believe He was just a man and nothing more.

Buddhism teaches that Jesus was an enlightened man, but not God.

- According to a Buddhist dictionary, enlightenment occurs when a person reaches a place when all negative aspects of the mind have been completely eliminated and one has reached a perfection of all positive qualities.¹⁴
- Buddhism does not teach the concept of a personal creator or God... [Buddha] said there was no need to believe in God.¹⁵

Christian Science believes that the Christ is the "divine-idea man." It is a principle that dwells within each and every one of us. Christian Science denies that Jesus was the Christ.¹⁶

- Jesus was not the Christ, S&H 333:3-15; 334:3
- "Jesus Christ is not God, as Jesus himself declared, but the Son of God." S&H 361:12-13
- Jesus did not reflect the fullness of God, S&H 336:20-21

Hinduism believes that Jesus could be the latest avatar (incarnation) of Vishnu or Krishna.

- Many Hindus believe that Jesus was a good teacher and perhaps one of their 330 million avatars (or incarnations of Brahman-the impersonal, supreme being that fills the universe).¹⁷

Mormonism teaches that Jesus Christ was the first "begotten" spirit child of the Father (Elohim) and one of his many unnamed wives often referred to as the "Heavenly Mother".

- "Jesus, as a spirit-son, then progressed in the spirit world until He became a God."¹⁸

Islam teaches that Jesus Christ was one of many thousands of prophets of Allah. They teach that He was a sinless messenger from God bringing truths for His particular time but not the Son of God nor God in human flesh.

- Sura 43:59 says that "Jesus was no more than a mortal whom [Allah] favored and made an example to the Israelites."
- Sura 5:72-75 says that "They do blaspheme who say: 'God is Christ the son of Mary'...Christ the son of Mary was no more than an apostle."

Scientology believes that Jesus was just a great teacher.

- "You will find the cross as a symbol all over the universe, and the CHRIST LEGEND as an implant in preclears a million years ago."¹⁹
- Neither Lord Buddha nor Jesus Christ were OTs [Operating Thetans, the highest Scientology level] according to evidence. They were just a shade above clear.²⁰
Scientology's website states that a "clear is a person who no longer has his own reactive mind and therefore suffers none of the ill effects that the reactive mind can cause."²¹

And to John Dominic Crossan, co-founder and co-director of the **Jesus Seminar**, the real Jesus,

- "[that] existed in history was not the virgin-born Messiah, the Son of the living God. He did not in fact do any of the miracles attributed to him in the Gospels. He was executed for revolutionary activities and, instead of being resurrected; his body was devoured by wild dogs."²²

These are just a handful of false teachings about who Jesus is. It's clear that in order to confront these and other false teachings on the *Sufficiency of Jesus Christ*, we need to be diligent in our study of what the Word of God has to say about it.

Biblical Teaching

Sufficiency in Jesus means that Jesus is our “all-in-all”, we are complete in Him and there is no other name under heaven by which men are saved (Acts 4:12).

First, sufficiency means we must have the correct Jesus. If the Jesus we think we have is not the Jesus of the Bible, then the sufficiency we think we have is not Biblical sufficiency.

- Matthew 16:15-17 says, “[Jesus] said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’”

Second, people will claim to know Jesus, like the previously mentioned quotes from false teachers, cults and world religions, but they have a different Jesus than the Jesus of the Bible.

- Matthew 7:21-23 says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

Finally, Jesus Christ's sufficiency and saving power is through Him and Him alone because Jesus is able to save those who come to Him:

- In John 14:6 Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
- Acts 4:12 says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

- Hebrew 2:10 says, "For it was fitting for [Jesus], for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory"
- Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."
- Hebrews 7:25 says, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

3. Singularity of God's Gospel

Central to the Bible is the *gospel* [Greek: *evangelion*] and it appears about 103 times in the New Testament and means "good news or a good message" and is the message of salvation of mankind through the redemptive work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The gospel of salvation by grace through faith is one of the favorite doctrines that false teachers, cults and world religions like to add to and has been under attack for as long as the gospel has been preached.

A different gospel can take form in different ways. It can be a different Jesus, a different message, substitution or addition of works, confusing and contradictory directions and even denying the saving work of Jesus Christ altogether.

Islam corrupts the gospel of Jesus Christ by denying the Biblical Jesus and adding works as a requirement for gaining acceptance into heaven. This gospel was supposedly brought by the angel Gabriel.

- Regarding works, the Koran says, "In the day of judgment, they whose balances shall be heavy with good works, shall be happy; but they, whose balances shall be light, are those who shall lose their souls, and shall remain in hell forever." (Sura 12: 102,103)

Mormonism adds to the gospel of Jesus Christ by requiring works, membership and a life of obedience to the laws and teachings of the Mormon Church. This gospel was supposedly brought by an angel named Moroni.

- “The true gospel of Jesus Christ was restored to earth in the last days through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith. It is found only in the Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints.”²³

Roman Catholicism adds to the gospel of Jesus Christ by teaching that salvation is only through Mary, only through the Roman Catholic Church and only through Popes.²⁴

- Pope Pius X (1835-1914) said, “For, since it is the will of Divine Providence that we should have the God-man through Mary, there is no other way for us to receive Christ except from her hands.”
- Pope Boniface VIII (1235-1303) said, “Outside this Church there is no salvation and no remission of sins.”
- Pope Boniface VIII (1235-1303) stated, “We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”

Wicca does not believe that humanity is sinful and thus does not need to be saved. In other words, there is no need for the good news of the gospel to them.

- “We are aware of our own goodness and strength, and we are not afraid to admit it. We are not sinners and we know it. We don’t have a Devil to blame our mistakes on and we need no Savior to save us from a non-existent Hell.”²⁵

Word of Faith Movement teachers warp the gospel of Jesus Christ for monetary gain. To many of the WFM teachers, material gain is the gospel and the reason to come to Jesus, or in other words, coming to the Master for what’s on His table instead of just coming to the Master.

- “What’s the gospel to those who are poor? Prosperity! What’s the gospel to those who lack? Prosperity! And if you don’t preach it, then you won’t be able to do anything about the poverty situation.”²⁶

Biblical Teaching

The gospel of Jesus Christ must not be added to, changed, altered, taken away from or denied. It’s simple, clear and concise.

All people are sinners (Romans 3:23) and the penalty for that sin is death (Romans 6:23a) but Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty in our place (Romans 5:8) and all we have to do is accept the free gift of salvation (Romans 6:23b) by confessing and believing that He is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9, 13).

Tim Challis states that “the gospel can be spoiled, though not objectively, for it is an objective reality. Yet it can be spoiled by us and to us. We can modify the gospel, either deliberately or inadvertently, stripping it of its power and glory. We can bring people a counterfeit gospel that is no gospel at all. *It is the discipline of discernment that God has provided us to guard the purity of the gospel.*”²⁷ (emphasis added)

The Bible makes it clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ was delivered once and everyone comes to God one way and one way only – through Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:8 says, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”

Just as Paul encouraged Timothy, so we must heed Paul’s advice to guard what has been committed to us -- the good news of Jesus Christ.

- 1 Timothy 6:20, 21 says, "O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith."
- 2 Timothy 1:13, 14 says, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you." (ESV)

4. Sovereignty of God's Grace

Without grace, none of us would be able to spend eternity with God. The Bible teaches that all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23) and since God is Holy (Isaiah 6:3; Rev. 4:8), He cannot tolerate, wink at or even look upon sin (Isaiah 59:2).

But while we were still sinners Jesus died for us (Romans 5:8) and because of what Jesus and Jesus alone did, we can come boldly to the throne of grace (Hebrew 4:16) through Jesus since He is the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

One mark of false teachers, cults and world religions that falls outside the "pale" of orthodox Christianity and corrupts the gospel of grace is that they teach that "by grace through faith" is not enough and that works are required.

Another mark of false teaching is the over emphasis of God's grace to the exclusion of His holiness, righteousness and judgment.

Freemasonry – Many masons deny the Christian doctrine of "original sin." They teach that people make mistakes and so salvation can be attained by moral and ethical living because man "is not a perfect being...nor is he a

debased, rotted creature, wallowing in mire until touched by the arbitrary grace of some supernatural power.”²⁹

- “Man can be saved by his own labors without faith in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.”³⁰

Jehovah’s Witnesses is a works-oriented cult that requires not only door-to-door witnessing, but also obedience to God’s law and being associated with “God’s visible organization” on earth, i.e. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

- *The Watchtower Magazine* teaches, “To get one’s name written in the Book of Life will depend upon one’s works” and that Witnesses will find themselves “working hard for the reward of eternal life.”³¹

Mormonism teaches the necessity of good works to obtain salvation.

- “one common erroneous concept is that belief alone in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only requirement for salvation...Salvation comes through living the Lord’s commandments and doing good works.”³²

Roman Catholicism adds to the gospel of grace by requiring works to be done such as taking the sacraments.

- The *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* asserts that “The sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for the salvation of mankind...for the attainment of eternal salvation...without their use salvation cannot be attained.”
- The *Council of Trent* taught that, “If anyone says that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation, let him be anathema.”

Biblical Teaching

The essential Christian doctrine that believers are saved by grace through faith cannot be looked at as a secondary issue; to do so would ultimately mean that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was not enough and that human beings need to finish the work He could not.

The Bible explicitly teaches that there is nothing a person can do or needs to do (i.e., works) except believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

All we have to do is turn to our Bibles, the *final court of arbitration* to see that close to 200 times in the New Testament, salvation is said to be *by grace through faith alone* – with no works in sight:

- John 3:15 tells us "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."
- John 5:24 says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."
- In John 11:25, 26 Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"
- John 12:46 says, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."

It must be pointed out to those who reject the "grace of God" that we are saved by grace through faith *for* good works. In other words, works are a result of a faith that is a saving faith.

The New Testament repeatedly states that salvation is a free gift from God – salvation is by grace and grace alone entirely apart from the law or any works:

- Ephesians 2:8, 9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

- Titus 3:5 says, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us”
- Romans 3:20 tells us that “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified [declared righteous before God] in His sight”
- See also Romans 4:4; 11:6 and Galatians 2:26

This is great news! This means we don't have to work for salvation but that God's grace is sufficient for each and every one of us, but if you still feel the need to do works, Jesus said: “This is the work of God, that *you believe in Him* whom He sent.” (John 6:29)

5. Security of God's Children

Eternal security is the Christian doctrine that the true believer in Christ is eternally secure in respect to their salvation from the point of regeneration, i.e., being born again going forward.

Quite often, cults, false teachers and world religions will use fear and intimidation as a way of reinforcing control by telling their congregation that they will lose their salvation if they leave their organization.

It's a means of manipulation and a way to keep a hold of those who are trapped in those systems.

The argument goes like this, “If you leave this organization, you are leaving God's ordained visible authority on earth and are walking away from your only hope of salvation.”

They say that eternal security is only assured if you keep your place in the organization.

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the only way to salvation is through "God's visible organization"³³ on the earth.

- "come to Jehovah's organization for salvation"³⁴

Mormonism teaches that salvation is found only in being a member of the Mormon Church.

- "If it had not been for Joseph Smith and the restoration, there would be no salvation. There is no salvation outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."³⁵

Roman Catholicism teaches that salvation is found only in joining their organization and as recently as Vatican II (1962-1965), the Roman Catholic Church stated:

- "This holy Council ... [b]asing itself on Scripture and Tradition ... teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation...Hence they could not be saved who, knowing the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it"

Seventh-day Adventists teach that you must "understand and accept" the teachings of their church in order to be saved.

- "One who truly understands and accepts the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church can assuredly know that he is born again, and that he is fully accepted by the Lord. He has in his soul the assurance of present salvation..."³⁶

Biblical Teaching

Our eternal security is not found in an organization or institution. Those who say "we are the only way and salvation is found only in us", are deceived, and as Christians we need to be able to discern the false teachings of these groups by always comparing what they say against Scripture.

Salvation is not found in any church, organization or teacher. The Bible makes it clear that salvation is found in the person of Jesus Christ and Him alone. One thing these cults and world religions have in common is that they all require some form of works, including being a member of their group, to help you complete the process of salvation.

- John 3:15 tells us that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

In case we missed it, Jesus says it again in John 3:16, “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

- John 5:24 says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word *and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life*, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (emphasis added)
- In John 11:25 Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. *He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.*” (emphasis added)
- John 12:46 says, “I have come as a light into the world, that *whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.*” (emphasis added)
- In Luke 23:39-43, the thief affirms Jesus as Lord and King “‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”

This thief did not have time to join any of these organizations or do any works at all – not one! All he did was believe on Jesus and Jesus promised him paradise based solely on his saving faith in Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we have the assurance of eternal security and the Bible over and over again affirms that while we are still living, salvation can never be lost. As a matter of fact, there are over 50 verses that make a Biblical argument for the eternal security of the believer. Here are a few:

- John 6:39-40 says, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (NIV)
- John 10:27-28 says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." (NIV)
- Hebrew 10:14 says, "because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." (NIV)
- 1 John 5:13 affirms that "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life"

Do not be misled into thinking that an organization takes the place of having a personal relationship and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can sustain us so that we can never be snatched out of His hand.

6. Severity of God's Punishment

As mentioned earlier, false teachers will often over emphasize God's grace to the exclusion of His holiness, righteousness and judgment. There needs to be a Biblical balance.

Yes, God is merciful and extends grace to those He desires as Romans 9:18 says, "Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden" but God is also a God of judgment and He punishes the wicked as the Bible makes clear.

While many false teachers will overemphasize God's grace to the exclusion of all else, still many others will deny the existence of Gods punishment

altogether and teach the false doctrines such as soul-sleep, annihilationism and even the denial of hell altogether.

A Course in Miracles, a book transcribed from a channeled "inner voice" claiming to be Jesus Christ that uses Christian terminology but is clearly New Age in content, teaches the following: ³⁷

- "The Holy Spirit teaches thus: There is no hell. Hell is only what the ego has made of the present."
- "Judgment is not an attribute of God."
- "The Final Judgment on the world contains no condemnation."

Christian Science teaches that there is no final judgment:

- "No final judgment awaits mortals..."³⁸

Freemasonry teaches that an eternal hell is something that it's members need not even worry about.

- "Members don't need to be worried about the dangers of an everlasting hell."³⁹

Jehovah Witnesses teach the false doctrine that when we die, we enter soul sleep and our consciousness ceases to exist. They also believe that "hell" is a metaphor for the grave and thus the wicked will not spend eternity in hell because they will be annihilated.

- The WTBS teaches that "when a person is dead he is completely out of existence. He is not conscious of anything" and that the idea of hell as a place of eternal punishment is a "God dis-honoring religious doctrine."⁴⁰

The Shack leans more towards the unbalanced concept that God is a good-ole-boy, buddy and pal and that He doesn't punish people for their sins.

- [Papa, speaking to Mack says] "I don't need to punish sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It's not my purpose to punish sin; it's my joy to cure it."⁴¹

Biblical Teaching

Clearly, false teachers and cults want to give you the "it's all good" line and teach that whatever you do here and now won't be judged because God's a God of love and peace and He only wants what's best for you.

First, the Bible teaches that justice and judgment are basic attributes or characteristics of God's nature:

- Isaiah 30:18 states that "the LORD is a God of justice"
- Psalm 9:7, 8 states that as the moral lawgiver, it's His nature to judge because "He has prepared His throne for judgment. He shall judge the world in righteousness, And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness."

Second, when Jesus returns at the Second Coming, He will bring God's punishment on the wicked and ungodly:

- 2 Timothy 1:7-9 says that "the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"
- Jude 14, 15 says "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute *judgment* on all, to convict all who are *ungodly* among them of all their *ungodly* deeds which they have

committed in an *ungodly* way, and of all the harsh things which *ungodly* sinners have spoken against Him." (emphasis added)
Jesus spoke often of that "day of judgment" at His Second Coming:

- Matthew 10:15 says "Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"
- Matthew 11:22 says "But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you."
- Matthew 11:24 says "But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."
- Matthew 12:36 says "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment."

And finally, the Bible teaches that there will be an eternal punishment for the wicked and unrepentant and that those in hell will be conscious:

- Matthew 13:41, 42 says that "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."
- Revelation 20:15 says that "anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."
- Jesus repeats three times in Mark 9:44, 46 and 48 that in hell "Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."
- Matthew 25:46 speaking of hell states that "these will go away into everlasting [aionios] punishment, but the righteous to eternal [aionios] life."

The Greek literally reads "And will go away these into punishment eternal, but righteous into life eternal."

It's important to note here that the punishment is said to be everlasting or eternal [Greek: *aiionios*]. It's the same Greek word used to describe the righteous to eternal [*aiionios*] life.

As for the false teaching of annihilationism, Dr. Ron Rhodes states that "one cannot deny that for one who is suffering excruciating pain, the extinction of his or her consciousness would actually be a blessing – not a punishment (cf. Luke 23:30; Revelation 9:6)."⁴²

So, as we look at the Biblical concept of Divine judgment and punishment, we do indeed see that God is a God of justice and judgment as well as mercy and compassion and both sides need to be effectively communicated as to not give an unbalanced view of our Lord.

7. Sanctity of God's Church

Certain cults, false teachers and world religions will claim that they are the only true church and in order to be sanctified and "set apart" or "right with God", we must listen and submit to them and them alone as the final authority in all matters. Often these groups will have an "us versus them" siege mentality.

Others will claim that because of a complete apostasy of the original church, the church needed to be restored to its original form. This is the claim of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* or *Mormonism*.

Still others will claim that because they use the name of God or Jesus in the title of their church that somehow makes them the "one true church".

Evangelist Mike Gendron nails it on the head when he says regarding the Sanctity of God's church: "We are to be Christ exalting (not man pleasing) and Spirit led (not purpose driven).

International Church of Christ claims to be the one true church that has the gospel.⁴³

- "There is one church! There is one God. There is one kingdom of God and this is it!"
- "your salvation is hanging in the balance. When you walk away from the movement of God, there is no where to walk. Walking out of the light into the darkness. There is nobody else in this country that has the true gospel -- that is, trying to make disciples of Jesus. There is nobody else in this entire world. This is the movement of God! There is no place to go."

Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be the one and only mouth piece for God or the "visible organization of Jehovah" on this earth, and therefore speak as the sole possessor and propagator of God's truth:

- "We acknowledge as the visible *organization* of Jehovah on earth the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and recognize the *Society* as the Channel or instrument through which Jehovah and Christ Jesus give instructions and meat in due season to the household of faith."⁴⁴ (emphasis added)
- "Jehovah's *organization* has a visible part on earth which represents the Lord and is under his direct supervision."⁴⁵ (emphasis added)

Mormonism teaches that only their church is the true church and states the following:

- "This Church [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] is 'the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth' (D. & C. 1:30), the only organization authorized by the Almighty to preach his gospel and administer the ordinances of salvation, the only Church which has power to save and exalt men in the hereafter. Membership in this divine institution is a pearl of great price."⁴⁶

Roman Catholicism teaches that only the Roman Catholic Church is the true church and the Body of Christ:

- “Those outside the Church do not possess the Holy Ghost. The Catholic Church alone is the Body of Christ...and if separated from the Body of Christ he is not one of His members, nor is he fed by His Spirit.”⁴⁷

Biblical Teaching

The term *sanctity* or *sanctify* [Greek: *hagiazō*] means “holy, set apart, purify, consecrate or to dedicate certain persons or things to God” so something that is sanctified for God is something that is “set apart” for God.

The word *church* [Greek: *ekklesia*] is used approximately 80 times in the New Testament and simply means “a popular meeting, a religious congregation or an assembly”.

When we break the word *ekklesia* down, we see that *ek* means “out of” and *kaleō* means “to call” therefore, the sanctity of God’s Church means that the church, i.e. the people, are the “called out ones, set apart ones or the holy and dedicated ones” of God.

The name that you have in the title of your church does not matter. You can use words like “*Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, or *Jehovah’s Witnesses*”, but that doesn’t make you a Christian. Following after the “one true God” (John 17:3), surrendering your life to His Son Jesus Christ and being born-again i.e., born from above (John 3:16) makes you a Christian.

Nowhere in Scripture are we told that we need to join an *organization* or that there was a *complete apostasy* that occurred in the original church resulting in a need for a restored church. In fact, Scripture argues against a complete apostasy:

- Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16:18 that “on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

First, Jesus says that it’s His church and not mans church.

Second, by stating that “Hades shall not prevail against it” we see that the enemy’s work against God’s church will not hinder its growth, its work or its people.

- Jesus also said in Matthew 28:20 that “I am with you always even until the end of the world.”
- Jesus said in John 14:16, 18 “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever..I will not leave you orphans.”

J. Vernon McGee says, “What a mistake we make if we think that the church has the authority to decide what is right and what is wrong. The true church is made up of believers in Jesus Christ, and they form what Scripture calls the body of Christ. They are to be lights in the world. And if we are going to be lights in this dark world, we need to be careful to identify with the person of Jesus Christ and recognize, not the church, but the Word of God as our authority.”⁴⁸

The church is a collective body of believers (1 Peter 2:5) that Jesus Christ purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28) and we become part of the body of Christ when we are born-again (John 3:16) and not by joining an organization, a religion, or a denomination.

- 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”
- Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
- Ephesians 5:25–27 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might

present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

Conclusion

In these last days, we are living in the last of the seven "church ages", (Revelation 2:1 – 3:22) with the last church being the lukewarm church of Laodicea. What's interesting is that Jesus says of this church in Revelation 3:18:

- "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; *and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*" (emphasis added)

Jesus is saying to this lukewarm body of believers that He desires that they seek Him so that He can cure their spiritual blindness - why?!? Because this church is spiritually blind and has no spiritual discernment.

The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 that "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. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ."

Paul is saying that the natural man is spiritually dead and cannot grasp the spiritual things of God.

But the church [also called the body and the bride] of Jesus Christ must judge, discern, separate truths from error, truths from half-truths and right from wrong so that when a counterfeit does, and it will, loom on the horizon, we can spot it a mile away and not be "tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

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If you have questions or comments, please feel free to email info@calvaryCO.church.

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