



ARTICLES

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The Devil Made Me Do It

Part 15: Guarding against Satan's Influence through False Teachers

I would like to follow up our examination of the avenue of influence Satan can have in our lives through false teachers by looking at the instructions God has given to help us recognize these often cleverly disguised individuals so that we don't get misled by them. I have heard that the experts in identifying counterfeit currency in our country study the real thing, not the false thing. In other words, they try to become so familiar with the real thing that they can easily catch whatever deviates from that standard.

I believe the same principle is true in recognizing false teachers. We must be so familiar with the person of God, the Word of God, and our own heart's resonance with the Spirit of God that we can easily discern what is not in accord with these. In his scholarly way, Paul explained that as believers grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ towards full spiritual maturity, they will be much less likely to be led astray by false teachers (Eph. 4:13-14). John, in his more tender language of the heart, wrote that when we are truly bonded to our Shepherd, we become so thoroughly familiar with His distinct "sound," or ambiance, that we will easily recognize and shun anyone who might come in the garb of a shepherd but without this "sound" (John 10:4-5).

Later, in his epistles John gave further criteria by which to identify false teachers. Perhaps the biggest red flag, which even the most immature believer should recognize, is the denial of the deity of Christ. We must keep in mind, however, that when these deluded individuals put on their sheep's clothing, this belief may not be readily apparent. It may only be reflected in slight nuances of speech that could easily sail past nominal Christians. An astute believer, however, may pick up on these and be prompted to probe deeper with skillfully-directed questions that succeed in revealing the sacrilegious garb of this servant of Satan (1 John 2:23-24; 4:1-2; 2 John 7; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; cf. 2 Peter 2:1; Rev. 2:2).

Another flag should go up if this person does not accept the established doctrines of the Church or delight in listening to proven servants of God. Those within whom God has implanted His Spirit usually feel a longing to be with other men and women of faith and to sit under the teaching of more mature believers, whereas false teachers will generally shun these opportunities and are more apt to operate independently (1 John 2:23-24; 4:1-6; 2 John 7-9; 3 John 9).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus emphasized the importance of evaluating all teachers, prophets, and spiritual leaders by the nature of the fruit manifested in their lives. Through a parable He indicated that seed sown by Satan in the very fields in which He is "growing" His own disciples would be difficult to distinguish at first. Only as the plants came to fruition could the difference be recognized, but even then His servants were not to root out those that didn't belong there lest in the process they reject some that truly were children of God (Mat. 7:15-20; 13:24-30).

When Jesus spoke of fruit, He made it clear that He was not speaking of the performance of great "signs and wonders." He carefully warned that not all who prophesy, cast out demons, and perform miracles in His name are truly of His kingdom (Mat. 7:21-23). The quality of what comes out of a man's heart is far more important in distinguishing a true servant of God, with love for one another being the single, most distinctive mark (John 13:35).

In his epistles, John taught that the servants of God and the servants of Satan could ultimately be distinguished by their demonstration of true righteousness and love (1 John 2:9-11; 3:10; 4:8; 3 John 11). Paul listed love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as a broader list of fruit that give evidence of the Holy Spirit truly abiding in a person's life (Gal. 5:22-23).