

Recognizing the False

Introduction

One of the things that we know is that the scriptures tell us that deception increases as the Day of the Lord draws closer. Each time that end day deception is mentioned in the Word it is preceded by a warning to let no one deceive us. Major deception is one of the marks of the close of this age. We must learn how to discern and recognize the false if we are to survive spiritually.

Recognizing the false sounds like a “no brainer”, but it is not as simple as it sounds. You can have a true message from a false prophet and sometimes a false message from a true prophet and sometimes a true message from a true prophet that doesn’t happen. When any of these occur, it becomes confusing and hard to separate the true from the false. This is made harder when there appears to be miracles happening too.

True and False

Most people think that in the Old Testament if a prophet spoke a false or incorrect word, he was stoned to death. This was not always the case as this example with Nathan shows.

2 Samuel 7:1-5 NASB

- (1) Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies,
- (2) that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains."
- (3) Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you."
- (4) But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying,
- (5) "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?"

2 Samuel 7:12-13 NASB

- (12) "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom.
- (13) "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Even though Nathan didn't say “thus says the Lord”, he is the prophet of the Lord and spoke direction to David as if it were from the Lord. But, Nathan’s words in verse three are not from the Lord for later the Lord spoke to Nathan and told him what to tell David. Therefore, Nathan’s first word to David was incorrect or false. He spoke out of his own understanding, desire, or reason but not out of the Spirit of the Lord yet Nathan was not stoned to death.

A good, clear example of a true message from a true prophet that doesn't happen is the story of Jonah and the word of the Lord for Nineveh. The people of Nineveh received the word of judgment and sincerely repented before the Lord. As a consequence, the Lord did not do any of the things prophesied by Jonah. To all outside appearances, the prophecy of Jonah was incorrect yet he was not stoned.

How to Recognize the False

Then, how do you recognize the false? First, let's look at the Old Testament and then we will look at what Jesus said.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 NASB

- (1) "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,
- (2) and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,'
- (3) you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.
- (4) "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.
- (5) "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.

The question here is one of motive. Even if the message, sign or wonder is true, if the motive is to turn the people of God away from Him to serve other gods, then the prophet is false and must be dealt with in the appropriate manner.

Jesus gave us the yardstick by which we are to measure prophets and others that minister in the power of the Spirit. If they don't measure up then they are false, even if their message is true.

Matthew 7:15-20 NASB

- (15) "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.
- (16) "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?
- (17) "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.
- (18) "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.
- (19) "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- (20) "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

The yardstick is *fruit NOT gifts or power or anointing*. The exercise of a gift does not give a divine stamp of approval to one's methods, doctrine, or lifestyle. This is not to say that one needs to be

perfect before he can be prophetic or operate in the power of the Spirit, only that our life should be producing good fruit for whatever level of maturity we may have achieved.

These are the areas that need to be inspected for fruit in the life of anyone ministering to God's people:

1. **Attitudes**—such as anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, greed, elitism, favoritism, etc.
2. **Appetites**—lusts, gluttony, drugs, perversions, etc.
3. **Actions**—strife, seditions, heresies, adultery, homosexuality, violence, etc.

Everyone must pass this “triple A” test.

The Coming of the False Ones

We know that the last days will be full of peril, both natural and spiritual. Jesus repeatedly warned us of the false ones who would come.

Matthew 24:4-5 NASB

- (4) And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you.
- (5) "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.

Matthew 24:11-12 NASB

- (11) "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.
- (12) "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.

Matthew 24:24-25 NASB

- (24) "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.
- (25) "Behold, I have told you in advance.

The word for Christ also means anointed. Not only will many claim to be Messiah, others will claim to be the “anointed” of God. These are impostors. (This should give pause to those who constantly run from meeting to meeting chasing an illusive “anointing” because someone said the anointing is here or the anointing is there.)

Notice that the false will show miraculous signs and wonders as part of their deceptive practices. Again, we can only measure them by their fruits not by any power that may be displayed during their ministry.

When the man of lawlessness is revealed he will bring forth the greatest deception that has been seen since the time of the Garden of Eden. It will bring to its fullness the lie spoken by the serpent that we “shall be as gods”. The man of lawlessness will epitomize this and perform signs and wonders to add validity to his doctrine

2 Thessalonians 2:8-10 NASB

- (8) Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth

- and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;
- (9) that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders,
- (10) and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

Those who love the truth are not deceived by signs and wonders because they know that real miracles flow from the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. Our greatest protection from deception is that the Lord would give us a love of the truth—Jesus as Truth, His Word as Truth, and the Holy Spirit who administrates all of the things of Jesus.

Twelve Characteristics of False Prophets

1. **Out of Alignment**—Jesus is central to the prophetic and the purposes of God are central to Jesus. True prophets stand in the stream of the timeline of God and are aligned with those who came before them. Those not in alignment will also major on minors—strain at gnats and swallow camels. They are usually not in alignment with God given authority either.
2. **Approval Seeking**—they desire the approval of men and therefore become too sympathetic to the interests of people. Jer. 5:31; James 4:4
3. **No fear of the Lord**—they are too familiar with God. Psalm 25:4; Amos 3:7
4. **Only Source of Truth**—they alone see the way things really are, everyone else is blind and deaf.
5. **Hypocrites**—the word and the walk don't match up. Do as I say not as I do syndrome.
6. **Prophecy Prejudices**—they bring forth from their own heart things such as pet doctrines, bitterness/resentment, rejection, rebellion, pride, sectarianism (party spirit), etc. and try to add validity to them by their words or actions as if approved by God.
7. **Taking Authority that is not given**—prophetic revelation or doing signs and wonders does not necessarily give authority to dictate policy, doctrines, or actions.
8. **Moving Prophetically with the Flesh**—the actions or words are outside the parameters of the fruit of the Spirit. Example: Moses struck the rock when he was supposed to speak—he demonstrated anger when the Lord wasn't angry. When this becomes the norm rather than an occasional mistake, then the prophet is false.
9. **Sin**—prophets are the “eyes of the body” and therefore are frequently attacked through their eyes with pornography, lust, etc.
10. **Patterned after Old Testament**—we are under a covenant of Grace. The Old Testament prophetic pattern is not applicable to the New Testament Prophet.
11. **Exempt from Requirements**—prophetic people are in no way exempted from any biblical

requirement for procedures or protocol. Many believe that their primary job is to police the Kingdom because the Old Testament Prophets were used to bring judgments. However, under the New Covenant, correction is the responsibility of the Apostles and Elders. Prophets and miracle workers, like everyone else, must follow the guidelines of Matt. 18 and Gal. 6:1.

12. **Spectacularly Dramatic**—they presume that the prophetic must be specific and spectacular to be correct. Emphasis is placed on signs and wonders, many of which are unverifiable.

The only sure way to recognize the false is to be in true union with the Lord. Walk in the Spirit and we won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The false always appeals to something in our flesh.

The Persona of the False

Those who operate from the flesh or from demonic power all exhibit various types of personas, that is, they usually look and act in a particular manner. They have not died to self and as a result there is in them some form of exaltation of self or self-interests.

1. **False spirituality:** The person assumes a persona that he (she) believes to be the way a "spiritual" person would look and act. As a consistent expression of the prophetic, they can take on a "wild-eyed" expression, speak in a deep resonant voice, utilize "spiritual language", that is, "Thus saith the Lord God" in King James English, and raise their voices in loud declaratory shouting. While at times, some of these things *may be* appropriate; they should not be the norm. They will also emphasize their dream, visions, revelations, or angelic encounters as proof of their spirituality.
2. **Spiritual superiority.** These people believe that they have matured into a special relationship with the Lord. They begin to think very highly of themselves and as a result they believe that they are

Always right: Because the person is hearing from God, he (she) will begin to take a stance of always being right, hearing right, and speaking right. They forget that we hold the treasure in an earthen vessel.

Uncorrectable: This is a result of the "always right" problem. Once a person believes that he (she) is right, it becomes very difficult for them to receive anything that would differ from their perception.

Clone syndrome: "If you were really close to the Lord like I am, you would be doing the same thing that I am doing (and doing it the same way)". God doesn't produce clones; He produces sons and daughters.

3. **Spiritual approval and endorsement.** Because they move in the gifts of the Spirit and God does miracles or other astounding works, these believe that God has put his divine seal of approval on them. This results in incorrect attitudes such as

Gifts = character: This becomes an incorrect assumption among people who are operating in the gifts of the Spirit. Gifts are just that—gifts. They are not earned nor bestowed as an act of approval. Character development is a requirement of maturing in

God. It doesn't matter how many gifts nor how powerful the gifts, we are not excused from the proper development of godly character.

Gifts = doctrinal accuracy: This problem is a corollary of the one above and is very dangerous to the Church. Gifted and prophetic people make the incorrect assumption that God has put His stamp of approval on their doctrine. For some reason, people who operate in the gifts always want to teach, which is usually not their area of calling. The result is muddled, confused, and erroneous teaching that leads many astray from the purposes of God. Assuming doctrinal accuracy just because a sign or wonder was performed is the height of spiritual naivety and opens one to deception.

Gifts = maturity: Gifts of Grace are given to all levels of maturity. They are not merit badges, nor earned by consecration. Sometimes this will encourage some to "fake it" so as not to appear un-gifted.

4. **Anointing hype:** Methodology or style does not produce anointing. Neither gifts nor anointing are a divine endorsement of ministry style. The anointing is not dependent upon mood or atmosphere. Methodology becomes a prop and leads to hype and exaggeration. We desire to never look weak; however, Paul delighted in weakness (see 2 Cor. 9-10).
5. **High mindedness:** Prophetic people need to guard against becoming high minded and thinking more highly of themselves than they should. Gifted people do not necessarily have a gift of leadership. This is one of the reasons that leadership is always plural.

God has made a way for true prophets and truly gifted people to develop and become a blessing to the people of God. It is called "becoming a disciple" and there is no way around it into the things of God. All must go through discipleship because that is where the Holy Spirit begins to conform us to the image of Christ. It is there that we learn to deny ourselves and take up the cross where, in practice and not just in theory, we are crucified to the world and the world is crucified to us.

Our ministry develops in the local area as we grow up among our fellow believers. There will then come a day when the grace of God upon us is recognized by the mature responsible brothers and we are "endorsed" or publicly recognized within our local assembly of believers. After testing and proving, the Holy Spirit may then send us out to other areas for ministry according to the purpose of the Lord. Until we have a proven local ministry, we will never have an approved trans-local ministry. If we could just get this through our heads it would eliminate the major portion of those running around operating in the flesh and producing deception among God's people.