



Test the Spirits

When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

—Deuteronomy 18:22

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

—2 Peter 2:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

—1 John 4:1

Not everyone that does or says something in the name of Christ is from Christ. Just because it has a television show or a book or recognized by a wide audience does not mean it's sent and approved by Christ. God has made each of us personally responsible for determining such for our self.

For those of us living in a consumer-driven culture, the natural tendency is to believe that success is defined by market share, and the best way to increase market share is to increase coverage and "get the word out" as to what we're offering. The more that hear what we have to offer, the more that will respond and we are sure we'll then be

successful with what God has given us. Please direct me to the biblical examples that follow this pattern. I can't find any.

God calls and the called go and do what HE directs. No one in the Bible— not even Christ Himself— held a healing crusade, or a rally, or even had an idea that closely resembled today's thinking, "Think how much more effective this ministry would be if we put it on television!" Many of the things presented to us today may have originally started off right, but along the way they've taken their own direction. And the Word of God, over and over again, identifies such as false teachers and false prophets.

We're specifically directed *"do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God"*. It's **our** responsibility to make sure for ourselves that those that come in the name of Christ are indeed sent by Christ. What is the test? How do we make sure? And what do we do about those that flunk out?

The first and most obvious test is for those that claim to have a word or prophecy from the Lord. According to Deuteronomy 18:22, the test is quite simple: Did it come true or not? If someone prophesies 100 times and is right 99, he/she is not from God. They are a false prophet, over and out, no exceptions. For example, this is why Benny Hinn is false. Of all the prophecies he has proclaimed in God's name, find the ones that have actually come true among the overwhelming majority that have not. If you feel it rude of me to point this out, remember that it's a biblical command— *God's Word to be obeyed*— that we evaluate Hinn and everyone like him according to this standard. God will judge the outcome of his life— WE are to judge whether what he says meets the minimum biblical requirements and, if having found him to fail, to take the action of rejecting him personally.

The second area of testing is more difficult because false teachers rarely invoke a false prophecy in the name of the Lord; they twist His teaching into something else. The most obvious is when their teaching

is found to be "*denying the Master*" in teachings such as "Jesus didn't really come in the flesh", or "Jesus' work was not actually finished on the cross", or anything that similarly contradicts the plain and written Word of God. But there's an even more subtle, harder to discern group of false teachers for which we have to not only examine the degree to which their teaching is in harmony with the Bible, but realize that their personal acts of behavior betray whether they have put the Gospel into practice in their life or just talk about it.

2 Peter 2 is a great resource to study in depth on this subject, and some of the symptoms that reveal a false teacher is their appeal to sensuality (2 Peter 2:2, 18), greed (2 Peter 2:3), they are self-willed—that is, regard themselves as the central and final authority over everything (2 Peter 2:10), they revile and persecute those that challenge them rather than admonish and teach (2 Peter 2:12-13), are unfaithful in their relationships (2 Peter 2:14), like to attract weaker personalities they know they can exploit (2 Peter 2:14), and have a problem of repenting over and over of the same sin and yet always returning to it (2 Peter 2: 20-22). The Bible teaches that the proof of a true follower of Christ is whether or not they put into practice obedience to His Word— whether or not their behavior and character actually walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

So what should we do when our tests produce a failing grade for someone?

First and foremost, final judgment is reserved exclusively by God, not us.

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,
—2 Peter 3:17

We are to be aware of them, what they represent, and not allow ourselves to be carried away by their error. We are to remain, in and of our self, steadfast in our faith and walk in Christ.

Another thing we're obligated to do is to publicly identify them. You will find that Paul, Peter, John, even Christ Himself actually name names and warn of specific individuals. There's a false teaching going around that misrepresents 1 Samuel 26:11 wherein they intone, "Touch not My anointed." (Remember 2 Peter 2:10, that they falsely believe they are the sole and final authority over everything and often mis-quote Scripture to silence their critics.) Well, David didn't "touch" the murderous, sinful Saul— God's then-anointed king of Israel— but David did not hesitate to publicly declare before Saul and everyone present what exactly Saul was and what His sins were. Similarly the apostles and Christ Himself name the names of those that are false and must be avoided by true followers. It's our sacred duty to declare publicly to our brothers and sisters in Christ the names and deeds of false teachers and false prophets so that the church will steer clear of them. Final judgment is with God, but in this life their identification and our avoidance is our task at hand.

No doubt, that if you've read this far, that at least one name has popped into your head. To be sure, you must follow up and test that name by biblical standards. But don't just assume that all other names are automatically OK. Do the biblically right thing and test them for yourself. For though you may have to reject some as false, you will treasure even more those that you're 100% confident are true messengers of God in your life.

In His Love,

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