

Beware Spiritual Deception

By Peter McArthur



Following is a prophecy (in part) given at the Elim Bible Institute USA, in 1965 by the late Stanley Frodsham.

*Hearken diligently concerning these things, for in the last days shall come seducing spirits that shall turn many of My anointed ones away. Many shall fall through divers lusts, and because of sin abounding. I warn you to search the Scriptures diligently these last days. There shall come deceivers among My people in increasing numbers, who shall speak forth the truth and shall gain the favour of the people. For the people shall examine the Scriptures and say, "What these men say is true." Then when they have gained the hearts of the people, then and THEN ONLY shall they bring out these wrong doctrines. Therefore, I say that you should not give your hearts to men, nor hold people's persons in admiration. For by these very persons shall Satan enter into My people. WATCH FOR SEDUCERS. **Do you think a seducer will brandish a new heresy and flaunt it before the people? He will speak the words of righteousness and truth, and will appear as a minister of light, declaring the Word. The people's hearts shall be won. Then, when the hearts are won, they will bring out their doctrines, and the people shall be deceived.** The people shall say, "Did he not speak thus and thus? And did we not examine it from the Word? Therefore he is a minister of righteousness. This that he has now spoken we do not see in the Word, but it must be right, for the other things he spoke were true." **Be not deceived. For the deceiver will first work to gain the hearts of many, and then shall bring forth his insidious doctrines.***

(For the full text go here <http://www.inthebeginning.com/articles/1965prophecy.htm>)

It doesn't take too much to see that significant spiritual deception has infiltrated the Body of Christ these past 15 years in particular. Discernment is certainly an End Time characteristic, but it's useless and blind if it's not grounded on Scripture as the only criterion. Scripture Alone (or *Sola Scriptura*) is the long held view that the Bible is the revealed will of God and all that is necessary for our faith and practice. Remember that Jesus and His Word are inseparable.

Over the past decade I've noticed the "line has been crossed" by many ministries. What were once considered to be "good" ministries have gone too far. There seems to be a competing attitude (dare I say "spirit") among many today. Another gospel has arisen under the guise of "fresh revelation" or "deeper truths". It will be helpful to list some of these.

Angel Feathers and Gold Dust. These manifestations have been known for quite some years now, and the internet is full of stories of those caught planting bird feathers in the seats, and sprinkling fake gold dust in pew bibles. Of course there are plenty of others who are convinced these manifestations are legitimate. Just because the manifestations seem to be "real" is no proof they are truly of God. Demonic involvement and human trickery go hand in hand with this counterfeit.

Angels Orbs and Spiritual Portals. Visits to the "third heaven", talks with Jesus, swimming in the rivers of eternity, discussions with Moses, Daniel, Paul and others. All these are very popular amongst a wide spectrum of teachers and preachers today. What I've noticed however is how those who've "been to heaven" and talk regularly with the citizens there, always seem to want to out-do what the previous speaker shared! If someone said they went to heaven last month, the next speaker will share how he or she went three times more recently. And on it goes; such competition, which in itself should be a warning all this is not Godly.

More recently this has all expanded into the manifestations of floating Orbs of light, and Open Heavenly Gateways (or Portals) that lead you directly to the Third Heaven where all sorts of experiences await you. It's presented as a kind of spiritual wormhole leading you from one realm to another; a shortcut to the eternal realms where you can learn things the average saint back on earth has failed to learn. Elitism has always been a part of spiritual adultery.

Stigmata and Bleeding manifestations. These are the supposedly supernaturally received marks resembling the wounds of Jesus. Once the prerogative of Catholics this has now begun to surface in some Pentecostal circles. Not only is this a blatantly false manifestation, the nail marks are nearly always depicted as being on the palm of the hands, when we know historically that crucifixions were carried out by nailing the victim through the wrists. Did "God" get this manifestation wrong? What is most worrying is how so many Christians seem to have no ability to discern the error in all of this.

New Mystics. More recently there has been a return to some ancient spiritual techniques based on Catholic asceticism and Celtic spiritual exercises. John Crowder is the most notable among this group and is well known for his “tokin’ the ghost” in which he simulates smoking a cannabis joint as if filling up on the Holy Spirit. Such experiences and manifestations like bi-location, levitation, interaction with dead saints, angels, demons and even control over nature are supposedly marks of these new believers who will be able to “spit out fire” and bring the return of the Messiah.

Since the Bible is to be the authority for all Christians, mysticism wrongly shifts authority from God to man's own intuitive interpretation of experience. If your experience is to measure up to the authority of God's word, then it has to be examined and verified by objective Scriptural standards. A current error within evangelicalism is that often the mystical and the supernatural are used synonymously. They are NOT the same thing!

Grave Sucking. This rather strange but very scarily occultic practice has been on the increase recently. The practice includes lying down (“soaking” or “sucking”) on the grave of a dead revered Christian leader to try and “soak up” an anointing from their bones. It can so easily lead to saint worship and necromancy if a person gets caught up in all the hype surrounding this. What it does is to reinforce the belief held in Evangelical churches that Pentecostals and Charismatics are quick to emphasize subjective experience over the authority of Scripture. Not a good thing!

Intense Praying. While true Holy Spirit inspired prayer has always, and will always be a necessity, some have taking it to a whole new level. While “cult” might be a bit of an exaggeration, there is certainly a lot to be cautious of here. Amongst groups like the International House of Prayer (Mike Bickle) the intensity of prayer coupled with fasting and “seeking” more of the Spirit over extended periods, can easily bring about a false sense of spiritual accomplishment. While we should never put off those who want to pray more, the inter-related power of emotionalism, mysticism, and gnosticism is a very dangerous cocktail.

It's worthwhile remembering that experiences (personal or otherwise) are never a good way to validate if something is true or not. The accusation of gnosticism may seem a bit harsh here, but at the root is the idea of having certain “hidden knowledge” unavailable to others. This kind of knowledge is fostered in groups like IHOP and supposedly comes through prophecies, dreams and visions that God specifically gives to the certain privileged group of people who are willing to pay the price – and of course who belong to the group. It seems a major draw of IHOP is all about the spiritual experience you'll have compared to your former days as a believer.

Emerging Church. Again this has been documented fairly widely but I include it here because of its invasive tendency in today's church culture. Everything from the acceptance of “christian tattooing” and body piercing, to church services that focus on not offending the visitor (so called “seeker services”), through to avoiding using phrases like “sin” and “repentance”. The “emerging church” often caters primarily for the youth culture, and isn't so interested at all about receiving wisdom from the older saints.

I recently heard a Christian say they were having a guest preacher at their church next week because he was “a wonderful communicator”. What about being a holy preacher of the Word! This movement is more about espousing a doctrine of Christian post-modernism, and in direct contradiction to Scripture they believe that we aren't even suppose to understand what the Bible means anyway! All is relevant to the culture and how to “engage” with it to make the sinner feel welcome and accepted.

Prosperity Gospel. This is by far the widest spread and accepted incursion into the Church today. The theology behind it (sometimes referred to as the health and wealth gospel, or the gospel of attraction) is a belief that financial blessing and physical well-being is always the will of God, and that applied faith, positive speech, and right thinking will achieve this. Faith therefore becomes a kind of spiritually self-generated force that leads to happiness, well being and prosperity. According to some in this movement there’s even an angel of prosperity!

Whole new denominations have been based on this singular approach. Often the Scriptural hermeneutics used by adherents to prove their point are woeful, and lack consistency in application of doctrinal truths. There is a lot of picking the texts to fit the teaching. Their actual doctrine (compared to flinging out rote Bible verses) can be quite difficult to discern because they won’t talk much about in-depth theology. Having said all that, it’s true that the basics of the Prosperity Gospel are sound, in that it attempts to stick to the Word of God. Although it could be said it’s grasped onto some Bible truths, it has used those very truths in rather un-Biblical ways and for selfish reasons. It has gone too far, crossed the line, and become a twisted gospel. Sadly, millions have locked onto it and over played what the Word is telling us about having “faith”.

Dominion Theology. Also called Kingdom Now, Reconstructionism or Theonomy, is the teaching based on the following beliefs.

1. God initially gave Adam dominion over all the earth.
2. Satan tricked Adam and usurped that dominion for himself.
3. When Jesus defeated Satan He took back that dominion and returned it to the children of God.
4. The Church today must now work to salvage the dominion over the so-called seven “mountains” of Government, Religion, Education, Family, Media, Arts and Business (some even include the Military).
5. By doing so we establish God’s Kingdom on earth as it was originally meant to be;
6. Only when that is accomplished can Jesus return.
7. Hence the return of Jesus is dependent on us doing our part for God to bring the world systems into line with His purposes.

It shouldn't take too much to realize how defective this teaching is at the core. It's a travesty of solid Bible doctrine with its stated goal of political and religious domination of the world. It puts man's obedience to this Mandate as the method, rather than the Will of Almighty God! Some go as far to say that it's the duty of believers to create a worldwide kingdom patterned on the Mosaic Law, including both the blessings and curses attached to it. Interestingly enough Islam has a similar agenda.

Rhythmic Music. While we might already be aware of how music and certain rhythms can affect the mind of believers during a Church service, there's another deeper aspect to this, having surfaced in more recent years. Certain sounds, beats and rhythms operating simultaneously will cause a group of people to actually perform the same behaviours in synchronism. There is a mental co-ordination that begins to take place. Go to any night club or music event and you'll instantly see the result. Research has found that rhythmic sound not only co-ordinates the behaviour of a group, it also co-ordinates their individual thought processes - the thinking of individuals in the group then becomes mentally synchronized as a whole.

This finding perhaps explains why armies march to war with bagpipes, drums and bugles blaring, why tribal people for centuries have united around the thumping of drums, and even why we appreciate the flow of good poetry. Maybe also why we love to hear the beautiful rhythm of a language like French!

On the other hand there's a definite danger in some of the pagan rhythm drum beats used in contemporary "soaking" services where seemingly endless beats are used to induce the "worshippers" to let go and flow with the Spirit. Just to listen to this constant rhythm should ring warning bells (pun intended!).

Today many of our church services focus on entertainment, characterised by beautiful people on stage (usually under 30 years of age!), casual but cool dress codes, some stand-up humour, banal personal stories that belong on Facebook, and upbeat contemporary "christian" music. The latter often lacks distinct doctrinal substance and is shaped more by secular values than real Biblical thinking. Such quantity and repetitiveness are really only substitutes for quality and variation. Mediocrity has indeed overtaken excellence. Few people now take church music seriously enough to think about what the words they're singing actually mean, and whether they conform to the Bible, let alone decent theology.

Of course there is a place for contemporary instruments in worship, and even repetition of some words, if the lyrics are high-quality enough or lifted directly from Scripture. Yet even then there's a need for prudence. But is endlessly repeating the same chorus a sign of reflective thought or is it more to do with superficial novelty – one of the signs of this particular age?

Atmosphere Changers. There's a lot of talk these days about "spiritual atmospheres" and how you can change it for the better. Just Google "atmosphere changers" and watch what you'll get! Even songs in Church depict this kind of New Age thinking; "The atmosphere is changing now, the Spirit of the Lord is here" (*Here as in Heaven*, Elevation Worship). This is like

coaxing the Holy Spirit to come and act, as if He can only do so when the atmosphere is right. Who is in control here?

Note what these advocates of this kind of thinking say:

- “As believers, we are to be **atmosphere changers**. We have the authority to change things wherever we go. The key to **changing the atmosphere** around us is to establish the Kingdom of God within us. When Jesus has full rule and authority over your life, you will be empowered with authority wherever you go.” (Ingrid Hansen).
- “God responds to **atmosphere** as well. He is everywhere, but He does not manifest His presence equally everywhere. God manifests His presence when the **atmosphere** is right. He...feels comfortable to sit down in the place where the **atmosphere** is filled with celebration, praise and worship.” (Jentezen Franklin “The Spirit of Python”).
- “I am a Kingdom Citizen by choice, an **Atmospheric Changer** by design and I love God dearly. As a Child of God I have been given the authority to declare changes in **atmospheres** over lives, homes, churches, businesses, communities to line up with the Word of God.” (Evette Pratt, Bahamas).

It’s one thing to be the Salt and Light in a situation, but that’s NOT what’s being advocated by many when they talk about influencing the atmosphere. Much of this kind of teaching has its roots in a sort of occultism or magic that attempts to create the right conditions for the supernatural to start working. The Heavenly Father does not require certain conditions to be present in “the air” before He begins to act. Scripture repeatedly shows that He is supreme over all circumstances and is quite able to act whether the conditions are right or not!

Now quite obviously not every one who uses the word “atmosphere” in their blogs, preaching or songs is a wolf in sheep clothing, or a false prophet. However there’s sufficient cause for concern here, because those who enthusiastically endorse this kind of thinking are really following the latest religious fad, worldly talk, or at worst are quite un-discerning.

All the above are signs of rabid **syncretism** in the Body of Christ today. It is nothing more than the mixing of the holy and the profane in order to bring forth a new style of thinking or practice. It is Satan’s grand plan to dilute the purity of God’s work and to introduce a counterfeit. The enemy has done this right from the beginning and he will continue it, rapidly escalating it as the End draws nearer.

Syncretism is defined in Webster’s Dictionary as “the combination of different forms of belief or practice”. Spiritually speaking syncretism is the “attempt to unite and harmonize, especially **without critical examination** or logical unity.” Oh, if only the saints would learn to discern!

Following are some helpful rules of thumb to watch for as syncretism and false teachers infiltrate the Church.

Just because the proponent of the New Teaching is earnest, enthusiastic or erudite doesn't make the message right. Many people think that because the teacher has zeal, is seemingly versed in Scripture and even pleasant to look at (you'd be surprised!), the teaching must therefore be right. "But he's such a nice man!"

Intellectualism, theological or university education still tricks many Christians into thinking the teacher is safe to listen to; after all he knows Greek and Hebrew!

With the popularity of the internet and "Dr Google", Christians are easy prey to false teachers because these days we seem to esteem free and independent thinking as not being bound by past religious straight-jackets. To accept the latest spiritual fad is to be seen to be "led by the Spirit". What is in fashion isn't at all a good indicator of what is Truth.

When we fail to rightly judge a teacher according to Biblical principles, we are prone to go with the outward appearance of the person rather than the inward fruit of their lives. The teacher is seen to be kind, caring, non-critical and even humble. How can he or she be wrong? Their manner is "so loving" so how can he or she be so wide of the mark?

False teachers never hand out their doctrines full strength to start with; they deliver it in small portions wrapped in the bread of Bible truths – to deceive your spiritual taste buds! When they do use Bible verses and phrases they nearly always use it in an unscriptural way. What you think they mean by a particular verse is not what they mean by it.

These days with our craving for the celebrity figure, Christians are prone to be swooned by the appearance of the teacher, how he presents himself, how many books he's written, even how many times he's been to heaven! There's a craving for the sensational that overflows to the style of preaching and worship on stage that entertains rather than equips. The more stories the teacher tells (of his experiences of course), the grander the church building, the more trendy the blog page, the more excessive the miraculous claims, all this seduces the undiscerning believer. Nothing has changed in this tactic of Satan; it's just grown more sophisticated. We want the here and now spiritual experience, rather than appreciate the slower and inward working of God in our hearts that leads to true maturity.

As in so many areas of life in the 21st century, experience seems to count for everything. What "I" think is just as important as what "you" think or believe. The LGBT community use the slogan "love is love" to bolster their belief system; so too false teachers use "truth is truth" to dupe the undiscerning believer. In other words what they say is that truth is progressive and advancing, and their new teaching is just the same. Anyway, should you criticize the "new wine" you'll be quickly branded as having a "religious spirit" and grieving the Holy Spirit.

These and many other symptoms are signs of the age we live in. If we're truly honest about the matter it would be hard to deny that these are rampant today. And because there are so many new revelations out there it becomes much harder to cry "danger" and be heard. It's almost as if because of the abundance of new teachings some of them (if not all) must be true – so think many of the undiscerning!

By and large this principle is helpful to consider:

The more people, the less truth.

The more people, the more compromise.

The more compromise, the less truth.

The less people, the more truth.

Let's us be on guard, test all things, and seek after greater discernment.

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