

Combating End-Times Disinformation

By PAUL J. SCHARF

The strangely ill-advised notion of a federal Disinformation Governance Board came to a merciful end this week—thankfully, at least for now.

As Americans, we cherish our First Amendment freedoms of religion, speech and the press, and tend to oppose anything that even vaguely appears to threaten them. Furthermore, as has been expressed far and wide in response to this oddly-timed proposal, we rightly view it as our role as citizens to critique the government of this Republic—not vice versa.

My purpose here, however, is to introduce a greater dilemma. Specifically, how are we as Christians to Biblically combat doctrinal, especially prophetic, disinformation?

Drawing further upon our heritage in the United States, we would never want to outlaw or silence anyone—even if they are actually heretical—lest the force of government, or *big tech*, also be used to *cancel* our ability to communicate. In fact, there have been numerous examples in recent months which make such a frightening proposition hit all-too-close to home. So, what are we to do?

It's my observation that the Internet is breathing new life into various heresies and *isms*, along with so-called *theological oddities* of various stripes, allowing previously debunked positions to thrive once again. The spiritually “untaught and unstable” (2 Pet. 3:16) may thus be drawn in, thinking they've found someone who knows a heavenly secret—uncovering something that no one else has seen or taught before.

Much of this spiritual disinformation comes in the sphere of Biblical prophecy, where so many have questions today as they watch the vast changes that are unfolding in the world. Now, I suppose that some on what I would view as one extreme of the spectrum may consider what I just wrote to be theologically provocative. Obviously, I do not regard it as such. I am concerned, however, with what I call speculative or sensationalistic teaching on Bible prophecy, especially because it can be used to discredit all that I teach as a premillennial, pretribulational dispensationalist who believes that God still has a future for Israel.

So, how are we to respond to aberrant end-times doctrine? Well, first of all, if we understand the New Testament correctly, it appears that we should *expect* disinformation of all kinds to flourish as we move toward the time of prophetic fulfillment. Forms of the words *deceive*, *deceit* and *deceptive* are used a total of 19 times in prophetic contexts in the New Testament.

Secondly, we should be like the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11) and *explore* the roots of all the teachings that we encounter (see 2 Tim. 2:7). I would like to share some basic concepts that can keep us from becoming the suppliers of last-days misinformation. Even more,

they can also help us to recognize the kinds of teaching that ought to set off our spiritual alarm systems as we navigate, perhaps, the closing days of the church age.

One way to fall into the disinformation trap is to follow the *just-me-and-my-Bible* approach—discounting the fact that others also have the gift of “teaching” (Rom. 12:7; see also Eph. 4:11) and may have actually wrestled with the same questions we encounter and, by the grace of God, said something helpful about them. An offshoot of this error is to rely on just one authoritative figure—especially if his theology is dubious.

Assuredly, no one deserves the place of a guru in our Christian lives. Even the Apostle Paul himself—although he taught Timothy exhaustively—was, nevertheless, not Timothy’s only teacher. Rather, Paul had conducted his ministry “among many witnesses” (2 Tim. 2:2).

A second, related trap to avoid is to arrogantly assume that Christians in all the centuries preceding us have nothing to teach us. Extending beyond that, some—apparently finding church history as it really exists either too difficult or too distant—seek to invent a fanciful version of it that never existed. They then appeal to this imagined, alternate universe in order to prove their point.

Utilizing either of these tactics is much easier than doing the hard work of study, and allows for the proclamation of astonishingly novel pronouncements. Obviously, both miss the mark of digging to find out if others—those who preceded us, or our own contemporaries—have struggled with the very issues we are pondering.

Some would argue that dispensationalism itself is the result of this type of historical and theological negligence. Of course, I disagree vehemently, and view the refuting of that allegation to be part of my life’s goal.

Thus, it seems to me that we who wear the mantle of dispensationalism should be especially sensitive regarding the methods we employ and the ministers that we empower, lest we give merit to the claims made against us. We should also have such a burden for declaring truth, in the precious time that remains, that we will become able to respond graciously, but skillfully, whenever “those entrusted to” (1 Pet. 5:3) our spiritual care encounter the purveyors of prophetic misinformation.

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