

How to easily spot false “Christian” prophets

Make no mistake, false prophets affect our lives. They exist as a common part of everyday life. Newscasts, internet sites, books, and seminars allow them to promote their error filled messages to us.

For example, we hear them lecture on financial matters, recommending investments and forecasting future economic conditions. These false financial gurus give us faulty advice which affects the monetary conditions of most of us to our loss.

These same media promote false forecasters of the next big health solutions that require only 1 pill a day. You’ve seen their ads, maybe even followed some of them. I read one ad the other day that promoted its pill a day would cure over 30 different health problems. Yup, it advertised a multi-vitamin.

We cannot escape the constant barrage of false messengers, yet we often fall for their “too good to believe” messages, don’t we?

However, we do not need to follow every person who tries to lead us. Not every supposed leader deserves a following.

Sad, but true, we even fall for false prophets proclaiming untrue religious messages. Every culture allows these frauds to promote their heresies. We can identify some of them because of their obvious errors.

But, some of us follow deceptive messengers unaware of their deceitful messages, even purported Biblical, Christian messages.

Why do false “Christian” prophets fool us? In the Bible, God's message to humanity, we find solid direction on how to identify them and avoid them.

Many of us know the Bible story of Aaron’s making a golden calf for the Israelites to worship. (1) What preceded these events recorded in Exodus 32 may surprise you.

God brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt where they had lived for about 400 years. A brief time prior to the golden calf, God met with Moses on a mountain and gave him the Law as recorded in Exodus 20.

Exodus 24 describes how Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s 2 sons, and 70 elders of Israel went to worship God on that same mountain. As they worshiped, they saw God standing on sapphire stone, and they ate and drank with Him. (2) Out of that group, God called Moses to come up to His presence.

Before Moses and his helper Joshua went up to God, Moses told the others in the group to wait for Joshua and him to return. If the leaders in the remaining group needed help before Moses returned to them, he told them that they could ask Aaron and Hur for counsel. (3)

These events precede the disastrous events in Exodus 32. Those Israelite leaders who met with God, saw Him standing on a sapphire stone, and observed His wonder, majesty, and beauty. Yet they cried for new gods and new leadership.

This rebellion of Israel and Aaron’s role in their rebellion provides a clear picture of the conditions that give rise to false prophets and teachers.

Dissatisfaction For Delay

Few, if any of us, like delays. We want “Jack-in-the-box” responses to our needs and wants. The Israelites responded in the same fashion. When Moses delayed his return from his time with God on the mountain, the children of Israel grew restless. (4) They rebelled against God and Moses, impatient to wait upon God for His directions for them. These restless wanderers had seen the idols that the Egyptians worshiped.

The Israelites decided that they wanted the gods they had seen in Egypt. They sought something tangible to worship. So, when they came to Aaron with their demands, Aaron yielded and made them an idol like the ones in Egypt.

The restlessness of the Israelites and their failure to wait for God led them into grievous sin as they demanded something tangible to worship.

Disobedience Of God's Commands

When the Children of Israel demanded Aaron to make the idol, they disobeyed God's commands. God had told them not to make any graven images of birds, anything on earth or in the heavens, or especially of God. They must worship God and Him alone.

Even though the Israelites swore allegiance to God to worship Him only, they cried to Aaron to make them gods to go before them. They violated the First and Second Commandments.

Their disobedience caused God to bring severe judgment upon them for their sin.

Deification Of A Man

Amid their displeasure and disobedience, they deified Moses: "He brought us out of Egypt." They failed to wait for his return from his visit with God, yet they attributed to him that which God accomplished. God brought them out of Egypt.

- He parted the Red Sea when Moses stood there quivering and wondering before God: "What am I going to do?"
- God made the bitter waters at Mara sweet so that they could drink them. Moses threw the tree into the waters, but God made them drinkable.
- God provided the manna every morning for six days each week, not Moses.
- God caused the pillar of fire to guard them by night and the cloudy pillar to guide them during the day.
- God provided the water out of the rock when Moses spoke to it.

The Scriptures record numerous accounts of God's supernatural works on behalf of the children of Israel. But, they attributed them to Moses. They deified Moses and elevated him above God. Although God used Moses in spectacular ways, Moses was not God.

Their deification of Moses caused the Israelites to take their eyes off of God and to look to Moses for direction.

Disdain For Godliness

Exodus 32 describes the Israelites as wondering what had happened to Moses when he went up the mountain to see God. (5)

They knew where Moses went. He obeyed God's call to him to come up to meet with Him, which they knew.

Their leaders had met with God, too, saw Him standing on a sapphire stone, and beheld His glory. They knew that Moses had gone to meet with that God.

However, they preferred that Moses had stayed with them. They never considered what it meant for Moses to meet with God. On that mountain, God met with Moses and gave him instruction for the Israelites. This time alone with God brought Moses into close fellowship with God.

The Israelites devalued Moses' time alone with God, unaware and uncaring of the influence it would have upon Moses, their leader. They rejected the impact that God would have upon Moses, and upon them, too.

Denial Of Glory To God

After Aaron fashioned for them the golden calf from the gold that they brought to him, they worshiped it and said,

"These be the gods that brought us out of Egypt." (8)

They saw the wondrous displays of God, His nature, and His supernatural works on their behalf. No one could explain the deliverance from their Egyptian enemies, the parting of the Red Sea, and the provision of water except by God's grace, mercy, and power.

Yet, they took a chunk of gold, worshipped it, and said, "That brought us out of Egypt." They denied God the glory that He alone deserved. They gave it instead to a hunk of gold.

When Aaron submitted to the Israelites' demands, he led them into false worship of something tangible. It pleased the people, but angered God.

Correlation to You and Me

This setting of Aaron's making the golden calf provides clear examples of the circumstances that encourage false prophets who follow in the footsteps of Aaron.

Dissatisfaction for Delay

The Israelites' attitude toward delay emerges as one of the great evils present in the professing Christian Assembly today: an unwillingness to wait for God. We want God to respond yesterday to today's demands. The desire for instant gratification dominates our Assemblies' plans:

- the longing for numerical growth now;
- the desire for spiritual growth now; and
- the need to fill leadership positions now, even with unqualified people rather than wait for God to provide qualified ones.

The Scriptures relate dire illustrations of the disasters that come upon those who do not wait.

- King Saul's judgment from God for his rejection of Samuel's command to wait for him before offering sacrifices; and
- Abraham and Sarah's refusal to wait for God's promised son, which resulted in the birth of Ishmael and the subsequent pain and suffering instead of joy.

In contrast, the Scriptures teach the immense value in waiting. For example, God promised,

"They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (6)

Again, Isaiah records another example of God's instruction about waiting:

"Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him." (7)

Like the children of Israel who expressed dissatisfaction for delay for Moses and God's directions for them, the Body of Christ today does not want to wait for God. We want instant gratification.

Disobedience of God's Commands

God never changed the first and second commands. They apply to us today, too. Yet, professing believers today use religious paraphernalia, images, or other kinds of tangible items and replicas that we design "to make it easier to understand, to think about God, and to feel Him."

Again, like the Israelites, we want something tangible to worship, contrary to God's commands. We

introduce objects as part of our “worship”: icons, draperies, figurines, etc. This emphasis has experienced a sudden increase among professing believers today.

People flock to assemblies that make these things available as part of their “worship” in their vain and evil appeal to human nature. Although we do not worship a golden calf, similar practices detract from the true nature and character of God and degrade Him into things made with hands.

Excuses and explanations for these false practices abound.

- “If it only brings in one lost soul, isn’t it worth it?”
- “Anything is worth one soul, isn’t it?”
- “They make me feel closer to God.

The professing Body of Christ accepts almost any means that will bring about the desired numerical growth or the “success” of other special projects, even to the extent of violating God’s law.

The Lord Jesus, in John 4.23-24, said to the woman at the well,

“Those who worship me must worship me in spirit and in truth.”

What did He mean by that statement? God desires that we avoid anything in the worship of Him, i.e., tangible items, that would detract from His true nature and character. Nothing that we make can represent Him in His fullness nor draw us to worship Him.

He manifests Himself to His children in glorious ways beyond our imaginations, without resorting to religious paraphernalia. Can we make anything that can show the infinite God? No.

Deification of Man

In a similar fashion today, the professing Body of Christ deifies its leaders.

- We desire leaders with glorious, wonderful personalities.
- We want pastors and teachers who will draw in the masses.
- We want preachers who sway us with magnetic personalities and wonderful message delivery.

That describes what people want for their leaders. They have deified man and elevated him to the position above God. The professing body of Christ replaced God with a popular man. The want ads in the back of Christian magazines that advertise for pastors and Christian leaders illustrate this practice.

Rather than looking for Godly characteristics and experience with God, they instead concentrate upon relevant work experience, education, ability to manage a multiple staff, and other human qualifications.

In essence, they seek a man. The Christian community today places its emphasis upon man. Man runs and directs the Body today, not Christ, the Head of the Body. In the minds of the children of Israel, Moses brought them out of Egypt. That pattern repeats now among professing believers.

We want someone to lead us into the new millennium, deifying a man and rejecting God.

Disdain for Godliness

Look again at the magazines that advertise for pastors and leaders of Christian colleges and organizations. These ads do not declare that they want a man who meets with God.

They do not say,

- “We want a man of prayer.”
- “We want a man who will come and spend hours on his knees beseeching God to meet with us.”
- “We want a man who walks with God, who knows Him intimately, and can share that

Several years ago, my wife served as a secretary in a large church. One time, the pastors of that assembly gathered to pray. While the pastors met in prayer, she received a phone call from a member who asked to speak with one of the pastors.

My wife replied, "Oh, I'm sorry. He cannot come to the phone right now. He is in a prayer meeting with the other pastors."

The caller replied, "What do you mean he is in a prayer meeting? He ought to be working."

That description depicts the attitude of many in the Christian congregation today. Few members realize the absolute necessity of their leaders spending time alone with God. Worse yet, few pastors and leaders recognize its importance. Too often, schedules, demands, and activities have a higher priority than time with God.

Several years ago, I served on a pastoral search committee of the assembly that we attended at the time. As the committee met, we established a list of criteria for the new pastor, which emphasized the very issues mentioned earlier in this study.

At that time, I joined in the chorus of agreement with the list...until we met one of the candidates, Rev. Robert Hobson.

I will never forget him. It was, I am sure, God's appointment to bring that man in as a candidate just for me, because that interview changed my life.

I will never forget sitting in that meeting. As the committee questioned him on every conceivable issue, he replied in the same fashion.

After every question, he gave his answer to the question and finished his answer with this statement:

"...but the most important thing is this. What are you doing with Christ? Are you walking with Jesus? Have you yielded your life to Christ? Is He working and functioning in your life on a day-to-day basis? That is the most important issue."

At the end of the session, God had used Bob's statements to change my life. That congregation rejected him as the pastor because of these responses to the committee's questions.

One of the "respected" leaders on the committee swayed the congregation with this telling statement,

"Well, you know, we really do need a whole lot more than just hearing messages about Jesus."

That attitude permeates the professing Bride of Christ today. It does not want a godly man. More than any other qualification:

- Christ's called out ones today need leaders and pastors who know God;
- Christ's called out ones need to hear from those who have an intimate relationship with God, who spend time on their knees and on their faces before God beseeching Him on behalf of the congregations, trying to know Him, trying to understand Him.

That describes the Godly leaders and pastors the Christian Assembly needs today.

Denial of Glory to God

How does the professing Christian congregation follow this pattern today? It gives honor to programs and people for the "successes" they "delivered."

Too often, when a congregation increases in size with multiple programs, it honors the programs and the pastor that fostered the growth, adding praise to the wonderful personality who leads the programs.

God receives no glory.

The Bible warns believers that God will not share His glory with another. Thousands of years ago, the Israelites denied glory to God for His works, and the Body of Christ today follows them.

In that day, God judged them for their sin. In this day, He, too, has withdrawn His glorious presence and begun to judge the house of God.

Summary

Why do we follow false “Christian” prophets? This setting of Aaron’s making the golden calf provides clear examples of the circumstances that encourage false prophets and our following them. The signs present in that day,

- dissatisfaction with delay,
- disobedience to God’s word,
- deification of man, and
- denial of glory to God,

have become increasingly predominant in this day.

Christ followers must awaken to this condition, reject false “Christian” prophets, avoid them, and seek God for direction and spiritual revival of His glorious manifest presence among the children of God.

References

1. Exodus 32.1-6
2. Exodus 24.9-11
3. Exodus 24.14
4. Exodus 32.1
5. Exodus 32.23
6. Isaiah 40.31
7. Isaiah 30.18
8. Exodus 32.4

Questions For Reflection and Application

1. What caused the sons of Aaron and the 70 elders, who saw God in His glory, to decide they wanted new gods?
2. What does the modern evangelical Church want?
3. In what ways do you see disobedience to God’s word in the church you attend or in the churches near you?
4. What does John 4.23-24 mean?
5. How did the Israelites deify Moses?
6. How does today’s Church deify their leaders?
 - a. How does that harm pastors?
 - b. How does it harm the congregation?
 - c. How does it harm nationally known “spiritual” leaders who appear on television, write best selling books, and speak at large conferences?
7. What reasons does the average Church have for failing to seek out Godly, praying men of God with Biblical qualifications to shepherd?
8. How do we, as individuals, fail to give God a place of glory in our lives? How does that reveal itself?

Thank you, heavenly Father, for this example that you have given us in your Word of the failure of your chosen people to follow after you and in choosing the idols and choosing of leaders that would be other than the ones that you had in mind for them. I pray that you would teach us from it and conform our lives to the truth. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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