

FALSE TEACHERS AS MINISTERS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Here's one of the stranger questions you will probably ever be asked at church. Here it is: 'What would you do if you were **the devil**?' It was brought to my attention quite some time ago that Paul Harvey had written an article entitled "If I were the Devil!" I went on-line and, sure enough, there are a number of renditions of it. The one I copied is from his newspaper column in 1964. I left out a few lines, but other than that I only added one word and a couple of commas.

"If I were the Prince of Darkness, I would want to engulf the whole earth in darkness. I'd have a third of its real estate and four-fifths of its population, but I would not be happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree. So, I should set about however necessary, to take over the United States.

I would begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve, "Do as you please." To the young I would whisper "The Bible is a myth." I would convince them that "man created God," instead of the other way around. I would confide that "what is bad is good and what is good is square."

In the ears of the young married I would whisper that work is debasing, that cocktail parties are good for you. I would caution them not to be "extreme" in religion, in patriotism, in moral conduct. And the old I would teach to pray — to say after me — "Our father which are in Washington."

Then I'd get organized. I'd educate authors in how to make lurid literature exciting so that anything else would appear dull, uninteresting. I'd threaten TV with dirtier movies, and vice-versa. I'd infiltrate unions and urge more loafing, less work. Idle hands usually work for me. I'd peddle narcotics to whom I could, I'd sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction, I'd tranquilize the rest with pills.

If I were the Devil, I would encourage schools to refine young intellects, but neglect to discipline emotions; let those run wild. I'd designate an atheist to front for me before the highest courts and I'd get preachers to say, "She's right."

With flattery and promises of power I would get the courts to vote against God and in favor of pornography. Thus I would evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, then from the Houses of Congress.

Then in His own churches I'd substitute psychology for religion and deify science. If I were Satan, I'd make the symbol of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle.

If I were the Devil, I'd take from those who have and give to those who wanted until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious. Then my police state would force everybody back to work. Then I would separate families, putting children in uniform, women in coal mines and objectors in slave-labor camps.

If I were Satan I'd just keep doing what I'm doing and the whole world [would] go to hell as sure as the Devil."

Eerily—and sadly—prophetic, isn't it—especially considering it was written 55 years ago! Although many of us could go through this list and think of a few things he missed, I believe a major one is this:

If I were the devil, I would have religious leaders preach and teach a false way to get to heaven.

Is that happening now? It certainly is and Jesus, John, Peter, & Paul all warned us to beware of false teachers!

--Here's one of Jesus' warnings—He gave several--found in Matthew 7:15 “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

--A warning from John is in I John 4:1 “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

--Here's Peter's incredibly strong warning found in II Peter 2:1 “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in **damnable heresies**, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”

This morning we are going to look at Paul's warning regarding false teachers in II Corinthians Chapter 11:8-15. Notice in verse 15 the word “righteousness” that has been somewhat of our theme over the past several weeks. Paul here tells the Corinthians—and us as well—that Satan's ministers—his servants—appear to be “ministers of righteousness.”

1. The description of false teachers (v 4, 13)

What are the marks of false teachers? Paul gives us a couple of descriptions in this passage.

First, they A. Preach a lie (v 4)

Notice verse 4. Paul refers to someone coming in and preaching another Jesus with another spirit and another gospel. His concern was that they would “bear with him,” that they would listen to him instead of ignoring him or rebuking him. In verse 3, we see that he was concerned that just as Eve was led away by the trickery of Satan, they would be led away from the simplicity that is in Christ.

What does it mean to preach **another** Jesus? Does it mean to preach about a new and different Jesus—or a different *view* on the one they already knew about? I tend to think it was the latter.

--To preach another Jesus is to suggest that we need to **help** Jesus get rid of our sin—we need to **add** to what He did because He did not do enough. That's not what the Bible says, though.

Hebrews 9:26b “...but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” **Ephesians 2:9** “Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

--To preach another Jesus is to suggest that His **first** death on the cross was not enough—we need to **repeat His death** over and over again for it to adequately take away sin. That's not what the Bible says though **Hebrews 10:12** “But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.”

--And to preach another Jesus is to suggest that Jesus saves us at first, but we have to *keep* ourselves saved. In other words, He died for our past sins and present sins, but not our future sins. Again, that is not what the Bible says:

Hebrews 7:25 “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” To be saved to the uttermost is to be saved fully and forever.

Why did Paul warn them about another Jesus and another gospel? Because he loved them! **Look at** verses 2-3: “For I am **jealous over you** with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtility, so your **minds should be corrupted** from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

Why do I warn you? For the same reason! I don't want you deceived; I don't want your mind corrupted!

Are there not false religions—and false teachers—that teach we must **add good works** to what Jesus did?

Are there not false religions that teach the **death of Christ must be reenacted** over and over again?

And are there not false religions that teach we are initially saved **by faith**, but **keep ourselves saved** by works?

There are, aren't there, and God warns us to be on guard against them.

Not only do false teachers *preach* a lie; they also....

B. Live a lie (v 13)

Verse 13 “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.”

“Transform” is an interesting word and the Greek word it is translated from appears only 5 times in the NT—3 times in these 3 verses. When we think of the word “transform,” those of us with children or grandchildren think of toys that are “transformers.” They look like a police car, but they “transform” into a fighting robot man (or something like that). “Transform” in English means to change in form or appearance, to change in condition, nature, or character; or to convert into another substance.

“Transform” is probably not the best translation because false apostles don’t become apostles of Christ—they just try to look like them and act like them. *Disguise* is probably an easier way to understand what Paul is saying here. False apostles that do deceitful works disguise what they really are and *masquerade* as true apostles that do true works.

How does Paul describe false teachers? They preach a lie—and live a lie. They pretend to be teachers of the truth, but they teach another Jesus and another gospel. They pretend to be true apostles of Christ, but they do deceitful work.

2. The expectation of false teachers (v 14-15a)

Paul tells us not to be surprised when we come up against false teachers; in fact, we should expect them. Why?

A. Satan disguises himself (v 14)

Notice verse 14 “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” Don’t marvel; don’t be surprised; don’t be shocked that there are false teachers that disguise themselves as true servants of God. Why? Because Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light! When did Satan do that?

It is noteworthy that *Lucifer* in Isaiah 14:12 means literally “bright one” so he was obviously an angel of light before he sinned and was cast out of heaven. It is also interesting that he was called “son of the morning” which also implies light.

It could be, though, that “angel of light” is used as a metaphor. From outward appearances, Satan would disguise himself so that he was not immediately thought of as evil and hideous and harmful. Think of when Satan tempted Eve in the garden. She was not repulsed; she did not run away screaming “Lord, the devil is after me, please help!”

Although he lied to her in Genesis 3:1 “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden;” he also appeared like he was being concerned for her and helpful to her. You know, “God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:5).

What happened next? Eve “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise...” (Gen 3:6). Satan—under the *pretense of being helpful* and looking out for her—claimed that he wanted her to have wisdom and that she would get it from eating that which God had forbidden! Does that not sound like the strategy of an angel of light!

Not only does Satan disguise himself as an angel of light,

B. Satan’s servants will disguise themselves (15a)

Notice verse 15 “Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers [servants] also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness...” Just like his “and no marvel” of verse 14, Paul says “it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness.”

Just as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, you need to expect Satan's servants to operate the same way. The Greek word for minister is "deekonos" (servant). Again, the idea is not that Satan's servants turn into servants of righteousness—it means they are disguising themselves and pretending to be servants of righteousness. So what is a servant of righteousness?

Paul was a servant of righteousness—he was a true servant of God who accurately and truthfully taught about God's righteousness—His perfectness and holiness—and how we can become righteous in God's sight. We dare not miss what Paul is saying here.

--Satan has servants --Satan's servants disguise themselves into being something they are not

--The disguise they wear is that of someone who teaches righteousness—the way to be forgiven and get to heaven. Who is supposed to teach people how to get to heaven? Religious leaders...Pastors..."men of the cloth." Don't misunderstand me—I am not saying that fallen angels **become** religious leaders. What I am saying is this—there are **false** religious teachers—pastors and priests—who don't know the truth or speak the truth and consequently they are **servants of Satan** and not servants of God! If Satan can wrongly use the word of God against Jesus, false teachers most certainly can use the word of God wrongly against people!

What is the end result? Notice the last part of verse 15 "...whose end shall be **according to their works.**"

3. The destiny of false teachers (15b)

A. The destiny of the devil and his angels

Matthew 26:41b "...Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Revelation 20:10 "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

B. The destiny of deceivers

Look at the last part of verse 15 again "whose end—destiny—shall be according to their works."

What were their works? Verse 4 says they preached another Jesus and another gospel—which means they preached lies. Verse 13 says they were "deceitful workers." Regardless of how good their disguise and lies were, God will not be fooled. They will be judged according to their works.

Revelation 21:8 "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, **and all liars**, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

In John 8:44, Jesus calls the devil a murderer from the beginning...and a liar...and the father of lies. The devil will get what he deserves; so will the deceivers. But what about those who are deceived? What is their destiny? Surely their end will be different, won't it?

C. The destiny of the deceived

Listen carefully—the destiny of the deceived is the **same** as the destiny of the devil and the deceivers. God has one way for us to be saved—His Son Jesus Christ! I believe Satan knows that—and wants to keep us from that truth. **II Corinthians 4:3-4** "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: ⁴In whom the **god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not**, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

John 3:36 "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Revelation 20:15 "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Imagine being the devil: the most beautiful...and powerful...and wisest being that God created—until pride crept in and God kicked you out of heaven. What would you do? You know you can't **defeat** God, but you can "get back at Him" by seeking to destroy that which **He loves the most**—people! So you do everything you can

to keep people from believing the truth of God's Word by promoting a whole bunch of false religions—**led by false teachers**—to deceive people into believing the wrong thing and have them join you in hell!

CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS:

1. First—and most importantly—are you saved; or are you deceived? If you are not saved—if you have never given up trying to save yourself and trusted Christ as your Savior—there is a spiritual battle taking place over your soul. Satan is literally trying to keep you deceived and drag you to hell and uses false religious leaders to do so. Not all religions lead to heaven; not all religious leaders teach the truth.

2. Child of God, I wonder if we think enough about the fact that many of our friends and possibly family members have been deceived by false teachers. Are we burdened for them? Do we pray for them and try to warn them?

3. Lastly, why should we choose to attend a certain church? Is it because we like the Pastor and the people? It should be because some churches—MANY churches—teach falsehood and believers should not support that which God hates—and the devil loves!