

10 ways to identify false teachings

By Rick Becker 10 May 2018

Throughout history false teachings have infiltrated the church. Heresies that plagued the early church have not been silenced; instead they continue to flourish. The “Christian” who slams the door on a visiting Jehovah’s Witness has no qualms embracing a “born again Jesus” that came to make us wealthy, suffered in hell, and laid aside his divinity during his incarnation. These are some of the heresies promulgated by well known brands such as Hillsong, Bethel, and the host of word of faith and prosperity churches that litter the globe. In this post, we offer some simple markers that will be helpful, in a general sense, to identify a false teaching.

1. False teachings are **Man Centered**

The description of this current generation is found in 2 Timothy 3:1-9, and could be summed up in three words found in those verses: “lovers of self.” It is this love of self that has been injected into scripture via narcigesis, and in doing so, the bible has become a book about us. We become the hero in a biblical story – a good example can be found in the way many popular teachers approach the biblical account of David and Goliath. This story has become a source for many topical sermons, comparing us to David. We become the giant slayers, the hero of the story. While we may certainly learn from David’s faith in God, there is a bigger and marvelous picture in the account that escapes many due to the tendency of narcigeting texts. David is a type of Christ, who has overcome the enemy for us. If we were represented in the story, we would be the dismayed and fearful Israelites, perhaps even the stubborn Goliath who needed to be slayed. This man centered approach will focus on your destiny, your legacy, your gifts, your breakthrough, your potential, your worth etc. You determine your future through your creative words that contain inherent power. False teachings will meet your ‘felt needs’ instead of addressing your real needs. Your emotions will be tickled, your conscience ignored. Contrary to popular teaching, our “best life now” can only be found when our identity is in Christ, not self.

2. False teachings **Misrepresent** the nature of God and man

False teaching emphasizes some attributes of God and excludes others. God is loving, kind, and gracious; his love is so great that Christ died for us while we were sinners. This same loving God is also righteous, a consuming fire that hates evil and punishes sin. There is mercy because there is judgement, and the good news of the gospel is good news for those who know and accept the bad news – that they are sinners under the wrath of God. This is the nature of all men and women, but false teachings would have us believe that all humans are inherently good, just somewhat lost and damaged, but not depraved. We are purported to be victims, not perpetrators; worthy of salvation, not deserving punishment. If that were true, we would not need a savior but a life coach. The truth is that the brokenhearted will find consolation in the work of the cross, but not before the wretched heart in all of us is dealt with.

What we believe about God and ourselves is what defines us.

A different Jesus, more human than divine, has duped thousands into believing they can walk as the Son of God walked on earth. A new breed are so familiar with “papa God” that when he supposedly manifests his presence in a glory cloud, they whip out their smartphones to record the fog. Where is the reverence for a holy God that should cause us to fall prostrate before him, trembling in awe? The future of those who have such a low view of God and high view of man can only be further deception, and apostasy.

3. False teachings promote **Methods**

False teachings contain methods to harness spiritual benefits – a quick sinners prayer gains entrance into the kingdom of heaven, breaking a generational curse will restore health and finances, tithing will ensure prosperity, praying in tongues will ensure a breakthrough, praying the prayer of Jabez will enlarge your camp, spiritual mapping identifies strongholds, spiritual warfare will bind demons, aligning oneself under an open heaven will bring revival....and the list goes on. Each year a plethora of new courses flood the market. Not content with income from book sales, teachers now offer paid courses based on their latest book release. Their revelations are touted as words for the body of Christ. We are told that we can discover our prophetic personality, find out what our Kryptonite is, or discover the keys to success and prosperity. False teachings place the emphasis on what you must do, instead of what Christ has accomplished for us.

4. False teachings **Minimize** the cost of following Christ

False teachings ignore the consequences of escaping the dominion of darkness and being placed in the kingdom of God. New believers are entering a war zone, yet the new gospel on offer is sold to happy consumers delighted to hear that God wants to make their dreams come true. Better relationships, job promotions, and a bright future in this present world await those worthy creatures upon whom “Papa God” is eager to display his favor.

Jesus warned us about what it would cost, to be his disciple: “Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:25-33

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of

me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Matthew 10:34-39

False teachings offer a gospel that does not offend the natural man. An attractive gospel produces decisions for Christ, but not true converts. An attractive gospel shuns self denial and replaces it with self-aggrandizement. The true gospel has two effects – it brings life or it brings death. Life to those who are regenerated, great condemnation to those with hardened hearts who reject truth: *“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” John 3:19*

5. False teachings **Misinterpret** the kingdom of God

Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world, but some teachings make the kingdom all about this world. Dominion theology teaches that man lost dominion in the garden, and this is the time of restoring that dominion. The church will supposedly conquer the seven mountains of society: religion, education, business, family, government, arts, media.

Jesus contradicted this false notion: *“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” John 18:36*

The idea is to bring heaven to earth – “invade Babylon” and establish the kingdom of God on this earth – something only Jesus can accomplish. Jesus told the Pharisees, who asked when the kingdom of God would come: *“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” Luke 17:20-21*

In one sense the kingdom is here, in another, it is yet to come. Those in the New Apostolic Reformation are always looking for visible signs, and they do all that they can to influence society. Bringing heaven to earth means conditions on earth should match heaven – no sin, sickness or suffering in heaven. Heaven will come to earth when Christ returns, not before. God is building his church, not earthly kingdoms.

6. False teachings **Misapply** promises God made to Israel

How many times have you heard 2 Chronicles 7:14 being applied to your nation recently? We have been taught that if the body of Christ would “humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways” that God would “heal the land.” As a result, the economy will prosper, crime decrease, corrupt officials rooted out, and a Christian nation would emerge. False teachings claim the promises of Deuteronomy 28:1-13, but fail to teach on the dire consequences of disobedience in verses 14 – 68.

You will be taught that *“all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God.” (28:2)* A South African favorite due to the drought: *“The Lord will open to you his*

good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands..” (28:12)

You probably won't be taught: *“The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.” (28:20)*

False teachings offer the blessings of the Mosaic law but ignore the curses...but not always. Some false teachings apply “generational curses” to the body of Christ based on the Old Testament law that God would visit *“the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”* Panic stricken people search their family tree to find out which great uncle was a freemason, or which grandmother read her horoscope. The cure apparently is to confess their sins, forgive them, break soul ties, and break the curse. This is an exercise in futility as *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” Galatians 3:13.*

False teachings make no distinction between the gospel and the law or between descriptive and prescriptive texts. This allows for misapplication of scripture.

7. False teachings **Marginalize** the word of God

The word of God is effectual: *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” Hebrews 4:12.*

When we neglect the word of God, we quench the working of God in our lives. The church has never been as active as it is today, yet we find ourselves in the midst of a great falling away, a departure from the faith. God is doing a new thing – and it's not revival, it's a strong delusion from God on those who reject the truth. Unthinkable yet true – the only infallible source of communication from God has been relegated. A false teaching will declare that unity is far more important than truth. The irony of course is the fact that this unity is based on what is false, and therefore not a biblical unity, but merely a crowd of deluded people.

The content of many teachings consists of well crafted stories that appeal to the senses. Unverifiable testimonies, opinions, and new revelations have replaced a thorough exegesis of scripture. The few verses that are thrown in to give the teaching some form of authority are usually out of context, and from a perversion of scripture such as The Passion or The Message “bible.”

New mediators between God and man have appeared in the form of modern apostles and prophets who receive direct revelations from God. Their revelations hold just as much authority as scripture, and they ignore the infallible blueprint for the church in favor of what they heard from God. In place of a series on biblical passages with clear expository teachings, series follow the vision of the modern apostles and prophets. This is the year of acceleration they proclaim, next year will

probably be a year of accelerated acceleration. Teachings then focus on how to position yourself for this divine acceleration in order to reap the benefits – increased signs and wonders, creative ideas, great success in your business, opportunities that will thrust you years ahead, greater anointing etc.

8. False teachings **Magnify** experiences

When the word of God is neglected, something else will creep in and take its place. Entertainment has become part and parcel of many a church program, but spiritual experiences and encounters with God have become the real threat of late. Mysticism is widely accepted in the New Apostolic Reformation. People supposedly take trips to heaven, receive downloads, new revelations, and new interpretations of scripture. Teachings are based on experiences and encounters with God, angels, or visions.

This fascination with experiences has permeated the way some evangelize the lost. False teachings suggest that the unsaved need an experience or encounter with God in order to believe, whereas scripture states that power is in the gospel, not signs and wonders: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”* Romans 1:16

An experience never takes precedence over the word of God: *“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”* Galatians 1:8

The rich man in Hades thought that if his five living brothers had the experience of someone returning from the dead preach to them, they would repent. Abraham replied: *“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”* Luke 16:31

Could it be said any plainer – scripture is sufficient to save!

Paul, a real apostle who had a real experience in the third heaven wrote of his experience in the third person: *“and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.”* Today’s “apostles” flout their so called trips to heaven and subsequent revelations on the Sid Roth Show. Gullible folk are mesmerized by artificial smoke, glitter, gold dust, and feathers in meetings, convinced that this is an experience from heaven. While these are fake, even genuine signs and wonders will not persuade those who reject the truth – Jesus knew this:

“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people” John 2:23-24

9. False teachings **Monetize** the Gospel

A mandatory tithe is a false teaching that makes the Industrial Evangelical Complex a lucrative business. Manipulative pastors will tell you that If you don’t give your tenth, God will curse your

money and you have opened the door to demonic attack. Other teachings promise that if you give a certain amount during a specific time, God will bless you for the remaining year.

As noted, false teachings misapply God's promises to the nation of Israel. Here is an example and this verse is used as justification for tithing: "*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*" Malachi 3:10

This was a specific word for Israel, who were neglecting part of the law – the tithe (which amounted to approximately 23%). The body of Christ is not under the Mosaic covenant, but the new covenant. The only time Jesus mentioned the tithe, he was addressing the Pharisees under the law. Any teaching that commands you to give a certain percent is false. Any teaching that guarantees you financial gain because you have tithed is false. Any teaching that claims God's will is to financially prosper all believers is false.

Ask a prosperity teacher to explain these verses:

- "*I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)...*" – Rev 2:9
- "*For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property*" – Heb 10:24
- "*as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything*" – 2 Cor 6:10
- "*For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*" – Psalm 73:3
- Scripture does instruct us to support those who preach the gospel, and to give generously. What amount should we give: "*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*" 2 Corinthians 9:7

10. False teachings **Modernize** the gospel

Modern man has demanded a modernized gospel – one suitable for the present time. One result is a politically correct gospel that offends none and saves none. Social justice takes precedence over evangelism, and an all inclusive approach legitimizes sins condemned in scripture. Liberalism, Feminism, Mysticism and a host of other poisonous "isms" have influenced teachings in the visible church. When truth becomes relative, it can no longer be defined as truth. A modern gospel that questions the sufficiency and infallibility of scripture in order to appease skeptics and appear seeker friendly has created hordes of false converts. If Jesus was not born of a virgin birth, if he was not fully God and fully man, if he was not resurrected in his body – you have another Jesus. If scripture is not infallible we have no objective source of truth. A modernized gospel is nothing less than an attack on God's word.

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