

HOW DO I KEEP FROM BEING DECEIVED?

BY PENN CLARK

As a young disciple, I had to learn about the anointing within the hard way. Back in 1980, I had been attending a large, week-long, Full Gospel Businessmen's Convention in Hamilton Ontario, which presented a range of speakers from all over. Looking back on it now, some of the speakers were excellent, while others were boastful, pretentious, and carnal. Some were not doing well spiritually, prophesying things that were clearly off. At the time, I was less than two years old in the Lord and seeing all of this was a bit overwhelming. To make matters worse, it seemed like nobody else was seeing what I was seeing. It looked like people were eating it up with a spoon. I didn't want to create any dissension by my discernment, especially if it was off, but when I discreetly asked others what they were hearing and seeing it became clear to me that we were not affected the same way by what was going on. I felt a bit like Alice in Wonderland, who was normal as could be, and everyone she met in Wonderland was weird, yet the most difficult thing for her was the way they treated her as if she was the one that was weird. This can be very disconcerting.

There was one speaker who always made a grand entrance, talking incessantly about himself, holding the audience hostage long after his session was supposed to end. He was not teaching the Bible as much as telling unbelievable stories about himself. I had gotten close enough to him when he prayed for people that I could see that he was just making it up. One time he held the hands of an attractive young woman he was praying for and began to prophesy that a man would be coming into her life. At that moment, his little fingers fleetingly scanned her fingers for a wedding ring, which he found. He quickly dropped her hands and moved on to the next person in line. Both the woman and I were stunned by what had just happened. Another man prophesied very specific things over people, like, "Your mom is in the hospital and God wants you to know that everything will be all right". After the applause died down, I happened to be near him enough to him that when the young couple came forward, I could see how confused and concerned they were. They told him that neither of their moms were in the hospital.

This kind of thing went on all week. However, there was one speaker there who seemed to have a lot of integrity. To me he seemed to have found the balance between having spiritual power and holiness, which made him the odd man out in this line up of questionable speakers. I wanted to get to him to ask if he was seeing anything wrong. I needed someone else to validate what I was discerning. I had a difficult time getting to him, because of all the people in the place, but when I finally did get to speak to him, it was a bit hurried, as we moved along with the crowd. I must have come across as being distraught, when I said, "Not everything that is happening here is right... there is a lot of things being done that are wrong to me." Rather than receiving my complaint, he wisely directed me to the man in charge of the conference. I didn't want to go to him or file a complaint. I also understood that discernment is difficult to prove; I didn't want anyone to say that everything was all right in Wonderland, I just wanted someone to say that everything was all right in me, and that what I was seeing was actually happening, and that others were

seeing it too. In the end, all I had to go on was what my heart was saying. What I now know to be the anointing within kept me sane. I had an assurance within me that what witnessed to truth. I realize this is subjective, but it was all I had. My head was confused, yet my heart stayed steady, letting me know that I was going to be fine. I had not experienced anything like this before and would never forget it.

At the end of the conference, I drove almost a hundred miles in order to talk with a pastor I knew and trusted. He let me share my concerns, patiently allowing me to pour out my heart, and listened to me as I tried to make sense of it all. It was after our talk that I came across what John said about the anointing within would not allow us to believe a lie, which helped me to see that it was the anointing within that was keeping me safe.

Q. Is it possible for any teacher to have pure doctrine?

A. It must be possible to have pure doctrine because Paul told Titus to strive for this:

In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame. (Titus 2:7-8, AMP)

This does not mean our doctrine has to be perfect. I understand the opposite of purity is mixture, which is a little error mixed with a little truth. The enemy used this strategy from the beginning when he asked Eve,

“Has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?” (Genesis 3:1)

God had told them to not eat from *one* tree, not all the trees.

I have noticed the more personal integrity a minister has, the purer his doctrine seems to be.

CULTS OR CULTISH?

Q. How do you know when a Christian group has become a cult?

A. One way to discern if something is a cult or not is by what they do with Jesus. Every cult misses it concerning who Jesus really is. The devil always has to skew something about Him and cannot accept Him as Lord (1 John 4:3).

There are groups that are cultish in the way they try to control people, using the same fear and intimidation to motivate them as cults do. They may not be a cult in their basic theology but

are cultish in the way they relate to their adherents.

CONFRONTING WITH MEEKNESS

Q. Don't you get angry when confronting false or flaky teaching?

A. I do, but I probably would get a lot angrier if it were not for what Paul told Timothy. He said that a servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be patient with those who were deceived while trying to correct them in the right spirit:

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in meekness correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may acknowledge the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.
(2 Timothy 2:23-26)

He said that he needed to correct them in meekness. Meekness means putting aside our own riled up temperament and becoming dependent upon God. One of the reasons why meekness is required of us is because dealing with deceived people will make you angry. I always feel a mixture of urgency, fear, frustration, and anger. This can cause us to lash out and say things that only add fuel to the tension or serve to confirm to them that they are right. What is needed, however, is our putting aside our own fiery nature and letting God speak through us.

Correcting in a wrong spirit can be just as bad as teaching the wrong doctrine.

DEALING WITH DEMONS

Q. Isn't some false teaching demonic?

A. Yes, the apostle Paul saw some false teaching of his day as having a demonic origin. He saw those who taught or received false teaching as captives of the enemy, doing his bidding. He told Timothy that, if confronted in the right spirit so that God might grant them repentance, they needed to acknowledge the truth, come to their senses, and escape from the devil's influence in their lives.

In 1 Timothy 4:1-3, he called this the work of seducing spirits and doctrines of devils:

Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to

abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

The Spirit of the Lord had been saying that false teaching was coming and that many would be taken from the faith because of it. The Holy Spirit had also been indicating that dealing with it just on rational terms would not be enough. You cannot argue with demons. Paul noted that those who were inspired by demons had a conscience but it was no longer working, which would normally help them know what was true or false. Yet, if they were loved and confronted in meekness, there was a chance they might be able to get free.

Q. What can I do to avoid becoming deceived?

A. I asked the Lord Jesus about this when I first started walking with Him. He immediately told me to stay close to Him and in His word. That turned out to be solid advices, which is born out in a number of other places in scripture:

- 1. Abide.** We must abide in Him (keep talking to Him), and let His Word abide in us (let Him keep talking to us), and we will not readily fall into error.
- 2. Stay in fellowship.** The temptation to isolate yourself or your people from all the bad teaching out there can get you into trouble. Part of the enemy's goal is to get you to become isolated. It will be less likely that you will be deceived if you stay in close fellowship with others who are strong and growing in the Lord.
- 3. Become a good Berean.** Search the Scriptures for yourself. Don't just blindly follow any author (including me). Be a Berean and search the Scriptures as they did (Acts 17:1).
- 4. Don't be a parrot.** Don't be quick to re-teach what you have just heard or read. Let it work in you for a good while so you can see what kind of fruit it produces in you. We ask our pastoral staff not to re-teach from the latest book they are reading for at least a year, so it can be proven in their own lives first.
- 5. Draw from different sources.** Ask the Lord to establish what He is saying through a variety of sources, rather than one source of teaching. If He is speaking to one part of the Body, He will also be saying the same thing through another part of the Body.

6. **Stay in right relationship to those in authority.** It is important that you have a good, open relationship with those in authority. You should cultivate the kind of relationship that assures they could speak into your life if they saw something you were doing or believing wrongly (Hebrews 13:17; Ephesians 5:22-24).

GUARDING WHAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN

Q. You seem to put a lot of emphasis on Paul's teaching, implying that, if he did not teach it, it is not valid. Aren't you going too far with this emphasis?

A. Paul wrote Timothy, saying,

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. (1 Timothy 6:20-21)

This is a good word for us today. We need to guard what Paul has entrusted to us in order to avoid falling into error.

When being introduced to some new way of doing church, or a new doctrine, we should ask ourselves, does this concept contradict or confirm what Paul wrote to the churches? It is that simple. Pastors should get to know his letters to Timothy and Titus like the back of their hands. His letters to the Corinthians are for apostles what his pastoral epistles are to pastors. I felt compelled to spend a lot of time studying them, for which I will always be grateful. They have helped me in my ministry more than I can say.

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