



WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL
Volume 16 Number 42
November 10, 2021

The Reasons Why We Must Defend the Truth

By Tal Davis

Recently I engaged an adherent of an unorthodox religious movement in an online dialog regarding the Deity of Christ. In the course of that conversation, my opponent accused me of being mean because I challenged some of the ideas he was expressing in his posts. He seemed to think it is unkind to criticize someone else's strongly held beliefs. In response, I wrote the following New Testament survey that shows why Christians must stand firmly for the truth. Actually most of the New Testament was written to counter the false teachings and practices that were infecting the early church. Can we not do any less?

I will call my opponent Mr. K.

Mr. K,

Thank you for your comments. First of all, we are not trying to be mean. What we do is out of love not disdain. We do what Jesus and the Bible writers told us when they said we should be discerning. We want people to know the truth as the Bible reveals it and so we must defend it when necessary.

Jesus cared for all people, but that did not mean He was unconcerned about what people believed. He constantly warned His disciples to beware of counterfeit messiahs, prophets, and teachers who would seek to mislead them from the truth. He even called them wolves in sheep's clothing.

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matt. 7:15 NASB)

And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many." (Matt. 24:4-5 NSB)

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them." (Matt. 24:23-26 NASB; see also Mark 13:5-23; Luke 17:23-27)

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul warned his readers not to be deceived by those proclaiming and doing things "contrary to the teaching which you learned...." Paul commended the Roman believers for their faith in the midst of strife in that great city. Nonetheless, he warned them not to be misled by false teachers who were distorting the doctrines they had learned.

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. (Rom. 16:17-18 NASB)

Still today, Christians must be ever vigilant not to be deceived by the "smooth and flattering speech" of false teachers.

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In another context, Paul warned the Corinthians of following "another Jesus," "a different spirit," or "a different gospel." The Corinthian church had a reputation of tolerating unsound doctrines and practices which had split the fellowship. Paul warned them about following counterfeits. Some teachers were proclaiming false ideas about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, and distorted versions about the way of salvation of grace through faith. Paul goes so far as to accuse the false teachers of being disguised agents of Satan.

For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things. (2 Cor. 11:4-6 NASB)

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. (2 Cor. 11:13-15 NASB)

Paul also warned the Galatians, in his letter to them, about following the "different gospel" of the Judaizers, even if it was preached to them by he himself or even an angel. Paul delivered one of his harshest rebukes against the believers in the area of Galatia. They had apparently abandoned the sound teaching he had given them concerning the free gift of salvation by grace through faith. They were now em-

bracing the teachings of legalistic Judaizers who convinced them that to be saved they had to first be circumcised as Jews and follow the Law. Paul reminded them that salvation is entirely by grace. It is the overarching theme of the letter. He told them in no uncertain terms, as a true Apostle of God, that anyone teaching a false gospel, no matter who, was accursed.

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:6-9 NASB)

Paul's stern warning is just as valid now as it was in the first century. Many teachers of false gospels fill the airways, write books, and speak in vast halls around the world. They should take careful notice of Paul's assertion that they are accursed, and Christians should avoid them like the plague.

Furthermore, Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians as a polemic against incipient Greek Gnostic philosophy. The pagan philosophy of Gnosticism was beginning to creep into the teachings of some churches of the first century (it later became much worse). Paul warned the Colossians not to fall into the trap of "secret knowledge" philosophy that the Gnostics proclaimed. He reminded them that Jesus had completely provided their salvation and that he was superior to all powers that may exist – spiritual or physical.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men,

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according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Col. 2:8-15 NASB)

In his letters to his protege, Paul instructed Timothy to silence and correct those in Ephesus who were teaching "strange doctrines."

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. (1 Tim. 1:3-4 NASB)

Paul also encouraged Timothy to preach the gospel faithfully and to beware of those who would turn from the truth to follow unsound teachers and doctrines.

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead,

and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Tim. 4:1-4 NASB)

The Apostle Peter wrote to believers in the churches in Asia Minor, most of whom were probably converts from paganism. He warned of false prophets and teachers among them who would introduce "destructive heresies." "Heresies" referred to doctrines that were out of line with authentic apostolic teaching.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment. (2 Pet. 2:1-4 NASB)

Today, many unorthodox groups teach doctrines that deviate seriously from sound biblical theology. For example, the Oneness Pentecostal churches teach that all of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are contained in the one person of Jesus only. Another cult, the Jehovah's Witnesses, deny the Trinity and the Deity of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle John, in his letters to the churches, called apostates "liars" and "antichrist" because they denied that Christ came in the flesh. Apparently John's readers were being influenced by a heretical teaching that Jesus only appeared to be in the flesh but was really only spirit. The historic teaching is that He was both Man and God incarnate (in flesh).

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:18-23 NASB)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. (1 John 4:1-5 NASB)

John also warned believers not to support or give aid to the false teachers mentioned above. By supporting them either financially, or even allowing them to lodge at their homes, they were participating in their evil deeds.

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 7-11 NASB)

James encouraged his readers to help those who have strayed to turn back the truth.

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20 NASB)

Unfortunately, some Christians have been deceived into joining cults or abandoning their faith. In those cases, we should do what we can, with God's help, to draw them back to the true God and Christ.

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Finally, Jude encouraged his readers to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered," and warned them against those who distorted grace and denied "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jude 3,4 NASB)

I hope these passages help you understand why we see our work as so important in the Kingdom of God. Now, as in biblical times, false teachers abound and need to be called to correction. Our purpose is not to be mean or unkind, but, on the contrary, to lovingly draw people back to truth.