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Because Someone Challenged: "Why Are Doing What You Do?"

By Tal Davis

Recently we received a message criticizing our work exposing the false teachings of cult groups. Below is the text of the message. Following that is my response. (To protect his privacy I changed his name to a generic "Mr. Smith.")

To: MarketFaith Ministries
From: Mr. Smith

I just read your article on The Way International. I have met many people in this organization, and I like the fact they can back up scripturally what they teach. Seems to me your responses are what I have seen in my Church and others. Lots of theology or doctrine based on what you think. I know one thing, they are Christian, as are Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and other groups who may not agree with what you think the scriptures teach. Why not teach what you think and leave the rest to God. If you want to correct anyone, perhaps try those who are not Christian. Some food for thought.

Mr. Smith:

Thank you for your comments. I respond to your comments this way. First, it is important how we define what is authentically Christian. We define a truly Christian movement as one that, at minimum, upholds the essential biblical teachings on the following doctrines (and doctrines do matter). (Note the three Persons of the Trinity.) 1) The eternal and infinite nature of the One Creator God (God the Father). 2) The full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ (God the Son). 3) Jesus' historic death and resurrection. 4) The deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit. All of the groups you listed (The Way International, Jehovah's Witnesses,

and Mormons), though they call themselves Christians, do not believe in the Trinity and/or deny one of more of those other essential principles. Thus, by our definition they are not authentically Christian.

The second thing is that apparently you don't think we should write anything that criticizes any other movement that claims to be Christian. Most of the New Testament was written for the expressed purpose of correcting false teachings that had crept into some of the churches and warning believers not to fall prey to those teaching them. We are simply following the example of the biblical writers in exposing false teachers.

One of the greatest needs among evangelical Christians today is to develop a sense of discernment about spiritual matters. Cults and sects aggressively seek to seduce believers into heretical doctrines. Here is a survey of New Testament passages that illustrate the need for Christians to be alert to false teachings.

Tal Davis

Jesus Himself Warned of False Christs, Teachers, and Prophets.

Jesus loved and cared for all people, but He 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)

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4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many ... 23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 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." (24:4-5, 23-26 NASB; see also Mark 13:5-23; Luke 17:23-27)

Jesus Warned That Not All Calling Him "Lord" Will Enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus warned that just because someone claimed Him as his or her lord did not guarantee the validity of that testimony. He said the test was whether or not he or she sincerely did God's will for his or her life.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (Matt. 7:21 NASB)

Saul (Paul) Denounced the False Magician/prophet Bar-jesus.

Barnabas and Saul (Paul) went to Paphos to share the Gospel with a Roman official named Sergius Paulus. There they encountered a false prophet and magician named Elymas who tried to prevent them from speaking to Sergius. Saul, however, rebuked Elymas who then went blind.

6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barna-

bas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 11 Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord. (Acts 13:6-12 NASB)

False teachers and false prophets today should be exposed for what they are so that believers and nonbelievers alike will not be misled. Today, a large number of so-called psychics and spiritual teachers in cults, the occult, and the New Age Movement are deceiving people with fake miracles and bogus healings. In those cases we must confront them with biblical truth and, when necessary, expose their deceptive methods.

Paul confronted the pagan philosophers in the Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Athens with the truth of the "Unknown God."

Paul brilliantly made his case before the pagan philosophers at the Areopagus, first for the true God and creator of all things and humanity, by quoting some of their own poets. He then told them of the One Man (Jesus) who God raised from the dead and had sent to redeem all peoples. Luke recorded how Paul received mixed reactions to his message from the Athenians. Some of them scorned him, some wanted to know more, and some believed (including Dionysius and Damaris).

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22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; 26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' 29 Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. 30 Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:22-31 NASB)

Like Paul, we must take the message of Christ to the centers of pagan worship, false philosophies, and unbiblical worldviews. We must continue to send missionaries to places where the light of the gospel is unknown, while the darkness of paganism and animism still dominates. Even in America, there are places where the gospel is restricted or

scorned. For instance, many secular college campuses are biased against Christian concepts and hinder their proliferation by any way possible.

Paul Warned His Roman 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.

17 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. 18 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.

Paul Warned the Corinthians of "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.

4 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. 5 For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. 6 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 ... 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 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. 11:4-6, 13-15 NASB)

Paul Warned the Galatians about Following the Judaizers' "Different Gospel," Even If it Was Preached to Them by Himself or 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 embracing the teachings of legalistic Judaizers who convinced them that to be saved they had to first be circumcised as Jews. 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 (even if it was he himself or an angel) was accursed.

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 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! 9 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 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.

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 for their salvation, and that he was superior to all powers that may exist – spiritual or physical.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 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; 12 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. 13 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, 14 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. 15 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)

Paul Instructed Timothy to Silence and Correct Those in Ephesus Who Were Teaching "Strange Doctrines."

3 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, 4 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 Encouraged Timothy to Teach the Gospel Faithfully, and to Beware of Those Who Would Turn from the Truth to Follow Unsound Teachers and Doctrines.

1 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: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove,

rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 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, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Tim. 4:1-4 NASB)

Peter 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.

1 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. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 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. 4 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.

John 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).

2:18 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. 19 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. 20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. 21 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. 22 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. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also ... 4:1 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. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 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. 4 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. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. (1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-5 NASB)

John Warned Believers Not to Support or Give Aid to the False Teachers Mentioned Above.

By supporting false teachers, either financially or even allowing them to lodge at their homes, John's readers were participating in their evil deeds.

7 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. 8 Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. 9 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. 10 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; 11 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.

19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 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, many 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.

Jude Encouraged His Readers to "Contend Earnestly for the Faith Which Was Once for All Delivered" and Warned Them Against Those Who Distorted Graced 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. 4 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)

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