

Do False Teachers Still Exist Today?

by Shane Idleman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of contending for the faith and warns against false teachers, prophets, and leaders who reject God's truth and lead people astray.

Scripture: Jeremiah 23:16, 1 Timothy 4:16, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:3

Topics: "False Prophets", "Biblical Authority"

Description

Shane Idleman emphasizes the importance of contending for the faith and discerning true prophets from false ones, drawing parallels between the Old Testament prophets and modern-day preachers. He highlights the necessity for preachers to speak the truth in love, confront compromise, and denounce sin to reconcile people to God, echoing the prophetic ministry. Idleman stresses the infallibility and sufficiency of the Bible as the ultimate authority, warning against adding or subtracting from God's Word and emphasizing that those who speak God's Word are subject to it.

Transcript

"Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (Jude 3-4).

Old Testament prophets were often statesmen, authors, reformers, and preachers. They were used to turn God's people back to Him. They appealed primarily to Israel's past and her future, with striking similarities for us today. They had a true call from God; whereas those attempting to speak without God's seal of approval were false prophets (cf. Jeremiah 1 and Isaiah 6).

Some are baffled by this mode of communication that God often used. However, in my opinion, it makes sense: God communicates through the spoken and written word. Prophets often used dramatic illustrations to communicate their message, and miracles often followed to confirm the message. Some were also appointed by God to record His word (cf. Isaiah 8:1; Ezekiel 43:11). They were sent to test and challenge, to build and restore, and to rebuke and convict (Jeremiah 6:27). They were called to be the watchmen of God's people (cf. Ezekiel 3:17). Their words were saturated with truth and their ministry confirmed God's will.

Some prophecies had direct, literal fulfillment such as the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5-6; Mic. 5:2), others had not yet occurred. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled during Christ's ministry and some still need to be fulfilled.

A test a true prophet was their character and the fulfillment of what they said...did it line up with the heart of God. For example, the false prophets in Jeremiah's day were telling the people that everything was fine; that God was somewhat of a doting grandfather winking at sin and looking the other way. They would manipulate the people for financial and personal gain. Sound familiar? The majority of Christian television programs promote the same thing today.

False prophets offer people a false sense of assurance, but God warns of this: "This is what the Lord Almighty says, 'Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The Lord says: You will have peace'. And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you'" (Jeremiah 23:16-17).

These leaders, like many today, perverted the words of God and led people astray by not warning, instructing, challenging, and contending. In short, false spokesmen did not, and do not, speak the truth.

Fast forward to the New Testament. Prophets played a foundational role in the early church (1 Corinthians 12:28-31). The angels' visitation and prediction provoked Mary and Zecharias to prophecy (cf. Luke 1:11, 26-27). John the Baptist predicted that Jesus' ministry would start soon. And "A certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea" and warned Paul that danger awaited him in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21).

Although many are divided on this issue (John MacArthur and John Piper for example, and Tullian Tchividjian and Mark Driscoll for the younger crowd), Scripture seems clear that the gift of speaking prophetically and boldly today to the church still exists, but the words of today's preachers are not equal to, and do not supersede, the word of God.

The Bible is our infallible rule of faith, being sufficient to give us the sure knowledge of the Gospel: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). We cannot add or subtract, whereas, cults teach that the inspired words of their prophets become scripture; thus, superseding the Bible. But God is very clear on this point: Those speaking God's Word are subject to it; they are not above it.

Those who have been called to preach, much like prophets of old, will confront compromise, condemn disobedience, and powerfully denounce sin in the hope of reconciling man to God--they speak the truth in love. They ruffle feathers, and rightfully so...their ministry is "prophetic." A true spokesman confirms the word of God; never contradicts it. Paul warned Timothy for this very reason, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3).

Not only will false leaders reject God's truth, many will actually look to them to confirm their sin: "Tell me that everyone will go to heaven. Tell me that I can turn a blind eye to homosexuality and sexual immorality and still be a Christian. Tell me that God's truth is relative and not absolute." We are clearly seeing this today. This is why we must watch our life and doctrine closely. We must persevere, because in doing so, we will save both ourselves and our hearers (1 Timothy 4:16).

Truth is not "flexible" when it comes to absolutes--it's solid and unyielding. Truth liberates. Truth rebuilds. Truth restores. Truth heals. Truth transforms. Truth prevails--you don't change truth--truth changes you!

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