

THE OBSTACLE OF FALSEHOOD

I. INTRODUCTION

¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. ^{2:1} 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. (NASB 2 Peter 1:19 – 2:3)

- A. In this passage, Peter refers to the Gospel as “the way of truth”. The flock is brought along the way of truth through true shepherds who are sent from God. The flock is hindered from this path by those who masquerade as true shepherds but who are not truly sent. False shepherds have deceived and exploited the flock from the beginning and will continue to arise in greatest strength at the end of the age. This teaching will focus on how to discern between the way of truth and the way of falsehood.

II. SCRIPTURE'S WITNESS OF TRUE VS FALSE SHEPHERDS

- A. Throughout the Scriptures we see a tension that results in a dramatic confrontation between the True and False servants of the LORD. The mark of validity that a servant had actually been called by God or was speaking by God, was the Spirit of God. In the Old Testament, leaders were anointed with oil as an external acknowledgement that they were acting under the leadership of the Spirit of God, to do God's will and not their own will. The tension lies in that there were also many imposters, wolves in sheep's clothing, who also claimed to be acting under the Spirit of God.

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, ² “Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy from their own inspiration, ‘Listen to the word of the Lord!’ ³ Thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. (NASB Ezekiel 13:1-3)

- B. Oftentimes, the True Prophet was called in a time of crisis, as a result of God's contention with His people or the nations. The prophet was called to warn of impending calamity, and to turn the people back to God in repentance.

But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin. (NIV Micah 3:8)

- C. The tension was accentuated by the reality that the people often preferred the message of the false prophet as it appealed the flesh and the wisdom of man. To make matters worse, prophets were bribed to give false words. (cf. Num. 22)

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it? (NASB Jeremiah 5:31, cf. Dt. 32:29, 2 Tim. 4:3)

- D. The call to be God's True Prophet was not eagerly received because God's message would inevitably be rejected by a hardened people. Moreover, the Prophet would be accused as the one who is false, and be marginalized, persecuted and martyred. (cf. Jer. 20)

- E. This is why it would require God's Spirit and power to be God's true witness, the prophet would need the courage to suffer and endure backlash. Therefore, the strength to suffer on account of bearing a true witness is a defining mark of the true prophet.

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. (NASB 1 Peter 4:1-2)

- F. To reveal the depravity and hardness of people's hearts in seeking after falsehood, God would go to the extent of allowing false signs and wonders, to test His people. (cf. Dt. 13:1-3, Mt. 7:22-23, Mk. 13:22, 2 Thess. 2:9-12, Rev. 13:13-14)

⁹ that is, the [Lawless One] whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (NASB 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12)

- G. In the New Testament, we see that this tradition and narrative is a continuum that carries forth in the days of the Apostles who carry forth the witness of Christ Crucified. We are promised that the tension will culminate in the last days before God comes Himself to settle the controversy and vindicate His true servants. (cf. Rev. 6:9-11)

¹⁸ And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name... (NASB Revelation 11:18)

III. FALSEHOOD AND THE FLESH

- A. Western worldview narrates that the issue of truth and falsehood is one of knowledge and ignorance. Falsehood is something that can be overcome in the arena of the mind alone through education. However, the Biblical Witness is that falsehood originates in the heart (cf. Jer. 17). There is an inward rebellion against the Truth that God has made readily attainable for those who would humble themselves and approach God in sincerity. The inward rebellion in the heart of man pollutes and distorts the thoughts and beliefs. With the heart and mind compromised the wicked justify their wicked deeds.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, (NASB 1 Timothy 4:2)

- B.** Scriptures so often associates falsehood with other lusts of the flesh. Those who are false are also violent, lustful, murderous and greedy. The issue of falsehood is not the issue of well-meaning ignorance or genuine confusion, rather an issue of indulging the flesh.

Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, Her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord saying, "Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us." (NASB Micah 3:11)

"For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely. ¹⁴ "They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace. (NASB Jeremiah 6:13-14)

"Moreover, among the prophets of Samaria I saw an offensive thing: They prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray. ¹⁴ "Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah. (NASB Jeremiah 23:13-14)

²⁵ There is a conspiracy of her prophets in her midst like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her. ²⁶ Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things; ... ²⁷ Her princes within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to get dishonest gain. ²⁸ Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord has not spoken. ²⁹ The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice. (NASB Ezekiel 22:25-29)

- C.** Matthew 23 is in line with the prophetic oracles above, as Jesus exposes falsehood in the Pharisees and warns of impending judgment. The Pharisees were wolves in sheep clothing, they performed righteousness outwardly to gain a reputation before man, but inwardly they were wicked and false. The Pharisees in keeping with the tradition of false prophets and teachers deliver Jesus to crucifixion in an attempt to suppress and hide the Truth. Falsehood begins with small, white lies that are advantageous and expedient, but spreads like leaven and before you know it there is violence and bloodshed.

IV. OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLE FALSEHOOD

- A.** Falsehood is a symptom of our depraved flesh, and a life that is set on indulging the flesh will harden our hearts towards the Truth.

- B.** So how is Falsehood overcome? How is the leaven of the Pharisees choked off in our hearts that are so wicked and deceitful?
- C.** True repentance is not just an outward act, or a confession from our minds, it must begin at the heart. A sincere cry of the heart upon God's mercy to forgive and heal us. God hears the cry of the broken and contrite who have lost all confidence in the flesh, and He releases His Spirit and Power to crucify and deny the flesh. Only from that place can our mind and deeds also become purified and washed so that we can be true through and through, inwardly and outwardly.
- ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, (NASB Titus 2:11-13)*
- D.** The Cross of our Lord Jesus is the basis for God's mercy towards sinners. The Cross reveals the beauty, the wisdom, and the power of God in the life that is laid down and crucified with Christ. The Cross is God's righteousness, and it is also His measure for Truth. One cannot become true apart from the work of the Cross in their lives. The Cross reminds us to humble ourselves, to deny the flesh, and to stay on our knees in prayer and dependence upon God alone.
- E.** The Holy Spirit is God's response to the broken sinner who calls upon the God of the Cross. It is a divine grace that sets men apart to live for the will of God and to no longer be slaves to their own lustful desires. The Spirit empowers the small yes in our hearts.
- F.** The Return of Jesus anchors us in the hope of eternal life. Those who have lost hope and no longer believe God will come, cast off all restraint and give their lives to indulge the flesh. Those who know that *in just a little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay* are exhorted to live by faith in Christ Crucified. They choose the Way of Truth even if it's narrow. They no longer scoff, but believe that He is coming quickly and His reward and vindication is with Him.
- G.** As we near the end of the age, false prophets and teachers will continue to arise. They will perform false signs and wonders as God tests those who love the truth. In order for the Body of Christ to overcome the test of truth, we must learn today to deny ourselves in the small things, the small tests of truth.
- H.** We are also in urgent need of True servants who have been called to the Body of Christ as Shepherds. Those who have been tested and found true. Those who have denied themselves and are now bearing much fruit in the Holy Spirit. Those who are standing in the council of the Lord. This example gathers and protects the Sheep from false prophets who come in to scatter and devour. (cf. Mt. 7, 1 Pe. 5)
- I.** We must take advantage of the short time we have now. It took Moses 40 years of testing to be fitted, formed and found worthy to shepherd Israel. It takes years and decades for one to be tested thoroughly to form agreement and harmony between the message and the messenger Himself. There is no time to waste.