

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Judgment is Focused and Consistent

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. (2 Peter 2:10–16, KJV 1900)

If we study Scripture with respect for its writings rather than seeking to find ways in Scripture to justify our preconceived opinions, we shall find it amazingly enlightening—and sometimes amazingly rebuking of our wrong-headed thinking. Do not be surprised if you see hints of your thinking in some of Peter's descriptions of the false prophets, for, to the extent that we fall short of Scripture's perfect model of God's truth and of His righteous ways, we may embrace some of those false ideas and ways. What distinguishes you and me from that false prophet? He is dedicated to promoting his error, to gaining followers to himself and to his ideas. If we see our errors in Scripture and strive to repent of them, we thereby separate ourselves from him. Later in this letter, Peter will remind us of Paul's writings that even Peter says are difficult, but the difficulty does not license us to indulge in false interpretations.

"...which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:16b)

To the extent that we are willing to "wrest" the Scriptures, trying to force them out of joint to support our false ideas, we sadly imitate the false prophet. Perhaps it is for this reason that a false prophet for a time appears so successful in gaining disciples to himself. He appeals to the inclination in each of us to sometimes twist the Scriptures to our great harm, rather than listening to them to our wise instruction. The best of us is not immune from this bad habit.

Peter lists a number of traits or behaviors that characterize the false prophet. No false prophet will exhibit all of these traits, but he shall surely display some of them, and those traits, consistently practiced over time, rather than subjected to godly repentance, define the man as a false prophet.

1. False prophets "*...walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness.*" In this setting, "uncleanness" may refer to any number of spiritual impurities that contain the stain of evil. No doubt many of the scribes and Pharisees who despised and rejected Jesus as their Messiah carefully avoided the gross sins of the flesh with great care, but their self-serving mindset left them blind to Jesus and to anything that glorified God. We who hold tightly to our faith may be more liable to those kinds of uncleanness than to the moral sins of the flesh that are no less unclean in the eyes of our righteous God.
2. They "*...despise government.*" I fear that many sincere, conservative Christian folks in our day may live closer to this sin than they should. Where ever we live, no human government measures up to God's rule of law that we read in Scripture. God instituted civil law in His revelation to Moses no less than He instituted the Levitical priesthood. While we should grieve any civil authority that fails to live up to that God-given rule of law, its failure does not entitle our despising and rejecting God's institution of civil government for the punishment of wicked people and for the protection of the righteous. (Romans 13:1-7) Both Peter and Paul write in their New Testament letters about this topic, and they command both respect for and obedience to existing civil authority. In discussing this question with Christians who have lost their balance on the question, I have consistently noticed that they think some measure of corruption or tolerance—or even approval—of unrighteous ideas by a government justifies their rejection of it. They forget that Paul and Peter lived and wrote these inspired letters during the Roman Empire. No amount of corruption of its legitimate, God-given authority in a present civil government can justify our

rejection of it or our refusal to obey its laws. A favorite practice of Christians who fail to obey this Biblical principle is to refuse to pay their taxes, a point that Paul specifically addresses in Romans 13:6-7. Even Jesus left us His example of paying taxes, and His payment was to Rome. The Christian who cultivates this sin of despising government often exhibits a destructive refusal to submit to Biblical authority in church, their faith, and other matters of life. Sin never compartmentalizes itself in one small corner of our lives. It spreads across every part of our behavior. Self and one's personal opinions become glorified to the seat of final authority and submission to Scripture, to the authority of the Lord's church, and to one's pastor often become as despised as government. God gave us the Scriptures to rule over our emotions and opinions; to correct and reshape them into Biblical godliness.

3. *"Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord."* Peter makes the point that I mention at the end of my second point above. If these traits characterize a false prophet—and they do—conscientious believers who sincerely desire to serve God faithfully should strive to avoid such attitudes and behaviors, not imitate them. To be selfwilled means that we strive for what we want and like above anything else or anyone else. When we allow false ideas or false prophets to rule our minds, we elevate our opinions and ideas above Scripture. Scripture becomes an irritating annoyance to what we think and want to gain for ourselves rather than the rule of our life. And we'll boldly "...speak evil" of anyone who dares to remind us of Scripture and its teachings. Peter rebukes this attitude strongly by reminding us that it is a primary rule of the false prophet's behavior. Such bold evil speaking is so wrong that Peter reminds us that even God's angels who serve at His command refuse to speak evil of the worst of God's adversaries. Jude 1:8-10 parallels this passage. Michael refused to speak evil of or to Satan, but rather replied to Satan's lie with "The Lord rebuke thee."
4. *"...speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time."* Here those who chase the "Who is and who is not a child of God" red herring often go off the rails. If we stay with Peter's inspired theme, the question is irrelevant. Whether the false prophet is a child of God or not, his speech and conduct are the focus of the lesson, not his ultimate spiritual identity and destiny. If a child of God, this person rationalizes acting more like a wicked

unregenerate (Not born again) person than like a child of the King. And, though the reward of such conduct for a child of God is not eternal separation from God, he no less shall receive *"...the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time."* These folks pretend—perhaps actually think—that they know more about God's truth and how right or wrong you are than anyone else who ever lived, and they are free to tell you how much they know and how wrong you are if you give them an open door. Turn God's Biblical spotlight onto them and watch them become quite uncomfortable. Sadly, their discomfort seldom evokes the right, Biblical response, Lord, "Is it I?" (Mark 14:19)

5. *"...following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity; the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet."* Through most of the historical record of Balaam in the Old Testament, he refused to be moved by money, but, in the end, either the wages of money or the wages of popular opinion in the eyes of men lead the false prophet to plant the idea in his "Employer's" mind that gained his money and a season of grief for Israel. Paul warns us against the dangers of desiring wealth. (1 Timothy 6:9-10) It is often the desire for unrealized wealth that corrupts a believer's heart as much as the actual possession of it. How can we insulate and protect ourselves from this enticing lure of the false prophet? *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God."* (1 Corinthians 10:31-32, KJV 1900) Do you think that you can twist God's moral commandments to serve your self-serving ideas and still glorify God? No way possible. The more a child of grace strives fiercely to gain his own ways or wants the more he puts himself in the Balaam role, resisted by God, not aided by grace. The greatest antidote to striving for our desires above others (Clearly condemned by the better way in Philippians 2:1-4, followed by Jesus' personal example as our guide) is to keep the Lord's rich and faithful promise in our minds. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Hebrews 13:5b) If He never leaves nor forsakes us, we have no reason to chase our sinful insecurities by demanding what we want instead of looking on the things of our brothers and sisters. (Philippians 2:4)

As these traits define the false prophet, they should be things to avoid in godly believers. We have a higher calling than to imitate a false prophet. Jesus holds our hands and points the way. Are we willing to follow His lead?

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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