A Mark of False Teachers

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The apostle Peter wrote describing Paul's epistles, "...*in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction*" (2 Peter 3:16).

There are many individual powerful practices which characterize the methods of deception employed by false teachers, but the twisting of Scripture is universal among them.

Few, if any, people go into a cult or aberrant religious movement by reading the Bible alone, so they must have some help from false teachers. These false teachers must come to terms with the authority of Scripture. They deal deceptively with this issue in several ways.

For instance, one approach is to give respect to the Bible but teach that it cannot be fully trusted. They teach for example that books must have been lost or that texts were altered. They then offer other authoritative books (additional revelations) as Scriptures. The Mormon Church and many New Age groups are examples.

Another approach is to hold the Bible as the authority but actually direct the student's attention primarily to the doctrinal books of leaders. These books usually contain some accurate doctrine, but are laced with the leader's heresy. Bible verses are sprinkled liberally in the books to make it appear that the student is studying the Bible. The result is that the Bible is really only being used as a reference book. One can make the Bible prove anything used in this manner. This approach is typical of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Another method is to actually rewrite the Bible making changes in the text to fit the group's theology. This is done subtly by the Watchtower in the *New World Translation* and blatantly by some New Age works like *The Aquarian Gospel* and *A Course in Miracles*. The Bible warns about these tactics as Paul compares his true ministry to the false apostles', "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully..." (2 Corinthians 4:2).

Describing the methods and motives of the false prophets and teachers, Peter says that," *many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you*..." (2 Peter 2:2-3). How does this happen? Very simply, the average church member is conditioned for it. Rather than follow God's direction and "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15), the average Christian's

approach is to expect others to teach them.

Additionally, there has been of a lack of emphasis on teaching sound, foundational doctrine in the church. Again, God warns His church concerning this (Ephesians 4:11-15; Colossians 2:6-7). Christians must learn to feed themselves as well as give attention to the sound, established, systematic doctrine that has stood the test of time and solid scholarship.

Most Christians are not familiar with Greek and Hebrew nor the way to study the Scriptures with objective study helps. Many do not even read a whole book in the Bible through for its intended context. Therefore, when a false teacher comes with a plausible argument and presents what appears to be a scholarly approach, the novice is impressed.

False teachers twist Scripture through pseudo-scholarship, by deleting and inserting words, by focusing on texts out-of context, and by employing collapsing contexts (unrelated verses put together to say something different).

Watchman Fellowship encourages the Christian to become a student of God's word. The truth of God's Word working with the illuminating and empowering Holy Spirit transforms the Christian into how he is intended to experience life, being conformed to His image.

Jesus prayed "*Sanctify them through thy truth :thy word is truth*"

(John 17:17).

By Craig Branch
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