

THE BEREAN CALL

“[The Bereans] . . . searched the scriptures daily, [to see] whether those things were so.”—Acts 17:11

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The Demise of Biblical Discernment

T. A. McMahon

In last month’s issue of this newsletter we exhorted our readers to discipline themselves to read the Word of God daily. The emphasis was on developing a habit, the best and most necessary habit—one that every believer should have. Of course, we encouraged reading the Bible as a basis for living one’s life by what it teaches, which is the only way that one who is born again spiritually can mature in the faith. Yet, here is the simple truth that too many Christians have missed: if we don’t read God’s Word for ourselves, we can’t truly know its instructions. If we don’t know God’s instructions, we can’t follow Him, and we therefore can’t do what pleases Him. Tragically, many if not most Christians haven’t considered that simple truth. Their spiritual beliefs tend to be a collection of things they’ve heard (sermons, radio, TV, books, movies, etc.) mixed with what they may or may not have gotten from the Bible. They have been spoon-fed rather than getting their spiritual meals directly from God’s Word.

Why is that tragic? Wouldn’t it be of value to get input from the various Christian media regarding the teachings of our Lord? Hasn’t our Lord gifted teachers to help believers better understand His Word? Certainly, but if that is our primary feeding of God’s Word, it leads to a spiritual anemia at best and makes us defenseless against spiritual deception at worst. How can a believer tell the difference between a good teacher and a false teacher? Although Scripture tells us that God gave some to be teachers (Ephesians 4:11), His Word also tells us, “There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). So how can we know what’s what and who’s who?

Most Christians are not asking such questions—nor do they seem to be concerned about the consequences related to a lack of biblical discernment. The second chapter of Hebrews begins with a warning that we could drift away from the Scriptures and find ourselves going along with something that seems biblical but is not. More and more frequently these days, I hear confessing and professing Christians excusing themselves and others for their unbiblical beliefs and practices by declaring that they

all nevertheless “love Jesus.” What Jesus might that be? Is it the biblical Jesus—the One who declares that He is “*the way, the truth, and the life*”? Is it the Word incarnate, who challenges everyone who professes to be a believer in Him by asking: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Would our reply be, “Sorry, Lord, I wasn’t aware of most of the things that you said”? If that’s the case, having “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16) is a wishful delusion.

Just so there is no misunderstanding, the heart of this article is a *concern for the fruitfulness* of everyone who truly knows the biblical Jesus, everyone who has by faith alone put his or her trust in Christ as Savior, the One, the only One, who could (and did) pay the full penalty for the sins of mankind. For those who have put their faith in Him and have received His gift of eternal life, what follows is their life *in Christ*, which is all about living a godly and productive life. Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). A believer’s fruitfulness not only greatly enriches his own life, but his new life in Christ becomes a testimony, a witness to the truth of the gospel that changed his life, so that others may be drawn to Jesus. Yet a believer’s life in Christ will be spiritually futile if he (or she) doesn’t really know what Jesus taught.

An unproductive life in Christ is bad enough, but it can go far beyond just being spiritually feeble. Not knowing the Word of God sets one up for being spiritually deceived. Again, it should be rather obvious: if we don’t know what the Bible says, we can’t discern what is true to it and what is contrary to it. Consequently, a person who is ignorant of the Scriptures is ripe for being led away from God’s truth. When such a condition becomes epidemic among Christians, they become collective pawns of God’s adversary, Satan, and participants in the apostasy as well as unwitting contributors to the emerging religion of the Antichrist (Revelation 13). But could such a thing happen?

Both Dave Hunt and I have been observing trends in the evangelical church for 35 years. In those three and a half decades significant developments have taken place, all of which have greatly undermined the belief in and dependence upon the Scriptures. We have documented such developments in the twenty years of TBC’s existence and

five years prior to that in *The Seduction of Christianity*. In past articles we have shown from God’s Word that Satan’s primary strategy as the deceiver of mankind is reflected in his initial statement to Eve in the Garden of Eden, a tactic calculated to weaken her trust in God’s Word by questioning it: “Yea, hath God said . . . ?” (Genesis 3:1). Down through history, he has expanded his assault on the Word beyond planting seeds of doubt to distorting, denigrating, corrupting, compromising, and outright lying about the Scriptures. In the last 30 years, some of his most effective devices have seduced Christians away from the written Word of God, replacing it with subjective and experiential content (feelings-oriented beliefs). Briefly (see our archives for more extensive writings on these subjects and others), that drift has been a major contributor to the *demise of biblical discernment*.

For example, the false teaching known as *Rhema vs. Logos* says that God *speaks* today to believers with the same or even greater authority than is found in the Bible. For decades this doctrine has led millions of Charismatic and Pentecostal believers away from the objective, written Word of God.

The subjective pseudoscience of Christian psychology, with its goal of integrating psychology with the Bible (primarily through psychological counseling), has infected the conservative evangelical church with the humanistic doctrines of self-love and self-esteem. Even more damaging, it has all but eliminated the belief in the *sufficiency of the Scriptures* for multitudes of Christians.

The Church Growth Movement (the attempt to increase church membership through various consumer-oriented devices aimed primarily at meeting the “felt needs” of the lost) has turned to the “way that seemeth right unto a man” (read *marketing*) in opposition to God’s way. That development has been a major factor in ushering man’s so-called wisdom into the church and distancing it from the Scriptures.

The youth-oriented Emerging Church Movement (ECM) is an attempt at supposedly reaching the “culture” for Christ by emulating that culture and much of its worldly affinities. ECM writers (many of whom have conservative evangelical backgrounds) have advocated “reinventing Christianity” in order to reconcile it with what the world *believes* and acts upon socially, psychologically, politically, morally, scientifically, and theologically. Because it claims

absolute authority in its doctrines, the Bible itself is the chief obstacle to the ECM, and therefore “must be re-imagined” in order to accommodate man’s thinking. Such distortion of God’s Word is deceptively tragic for a generation of young Christians, few of whom have been disciplined in the faith.

These are just a few of Satan’s most successful assaults against the doctrines of the Bible and the people of God. Should anyone be surprised that the Adversary would be so effective among those who profess to be Christians? Shocked perhaps, but not surprised. When an army lacks training, discipline, and is ill equipped to do battle, should it come as a surprise that the enemy is taking many of its soldiers captive?

Let’s spell out the problem in spiritual terms once again: lack of training (no discipleship), lack of discipline (not reading the Scriptures daily), and being ill equipped (mishandling the Sword of the Spirit). But don’t take my word for it! Let’s go to God’s infallible Word. Regarding the particular *time* when biblical truth will be abandoned by great numbers in the church who have been deceived, Jesus gives us a sobering warning, characterizing the last days prior to His return in these words: “Take heed that no man deceive you....” He then adds that the deception will be so great that the very elect will be vulnerable (Matthew 24:4,24). Furthermore, most of the epistles also address the subject of believers drifting away from sound doctrine.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul wrote, “For the time will come when they will *not endure sound doctrine*” (2 Timothy 4:3). Paul is obviously speaking to the church. Those in the church who do not study the Scriptures for themselves cannot endure (take to heart and live out) *sound doctrine* (God’s instructions). He wrote to the church at Ephesus, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and *carried about with every wind of doctrine*, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

Scripture seems to be making it quite clear that not enduring sound doctrine opens one up to spiritual deception. To the Ephesian elders Paul issues a warning of what would take place after his departing: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30). This was Paul’s parting warning to his beloved

Ephesian believers, a message of critical concern for their future in Christ. Paul knew what devastating destruction would result from their turning to *false doctrine*. It was a message that he preached continuously and tearfully during his three years with them.

Those who do “endure sound doctrine,” besides having the primary foundation for a fruitful life in Christ, are also equipped to *discern and resist* the wiles of the Adversary’s many deceptions. That’s the good news. The not-so-pleasant news is that they will find themselves on the front lines of a spiritual battle that is increasing in intensity daily. One need only conduct a cursory review of the Scriptures and later church history to get an idea of how destructive, even deadly, have been the consequences related to the church’s non-adherence to biblical doctrine. We see many reacting today by claiming that it is the doctrines of the Bible themselves, especially when they are accepted dogmatically, that create division. Such thinking is a fulfillment of “not enduring sound doctrine.” It is *false doctrine itself* that divides because it separates a believer from the truth.

Paul clears up the misconception: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses *contrary to the doctrine* which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). Incredibly, it is that verse, misapplied, that has been used against the multitudes who have contacted us because their church leadership would not hear their concerns regarding false doctrines and programs that had entered their fellowship. Most have been threatened with “disfellowship” for actually *enduring* sound doctrine. Such situations are intensifying throughout the church, undoubtedly for some of the reasons listed in this article but perhaps in fulfillment of Peter’s prophecy: “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God...” (1 Peter 4:17).

Although for decades we at TBC have been exhorting and encouraging believers to be Bereans (i.e., to check out everything they are being taught by searching the Scriptures—Acts 17:10-11), we too have experienced the increased intensity of the spiritual battle and witnessed its exponential growth. The latest issue, which we submit to you for prayer support, is a threatened lawsuit over the book we published by David James (*The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?*). The complaint is that the author used too many quotes from the *New York Times* best-selling book, *The Harbinger*, without permission from author “rabbi” Jonathan Cahn and publisher Charisma Media Publications (CMP). The complaint further states that our use of the quotes has inhibited the sales of *The Harbinger* and has thus financially damaged Cahn and CMP in an amount yet

to be determined. In effect, we are being told that we must limit our documentation in warning the body of Christ of the biblical errors in *The Harbinger*. In other words, we cannot be Bereans or like the watchman of Ezekiel 3:17-19 without Cahn’s permission.

This is the first time in my 35 years of working with Dave Hunt and our addressing nearly every major religion, religious cult, aberrational Christian sect, unbiblical trend, religious publication, book, media production, etc., that any organization or individual has even hinted at suing us. Now, however, we are being threatened with legal action by those claiming to be in the church. More critical than the unbiblical action of a brother threatening to take another brother to court (1 Corinthians 6) is the issue of preventing the biblical evaluation of a work that is influencing hundreds of thousands of professing and confessing Christians, as well as those who don’t profess to know Christ. We have hired a copyright attorney to address the legal issues and have responded to the attorney for Cahn and CMP. Even so, we covet your prayers that the Lord will be glorified throughout the process.

As the spiritual battle rages around us, the Word of God gives us directives regarding how we are to function in it. Paul gives Timothy general instructions: “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13). In ministering correction, he writes: “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26). Then there may be times that, as the Spirit leads us, tougher action is to be taken: “These things speak, and exhort, and *rebuke with all authority*. Let no man despise thee...” (Titus 2:15). Titus was to minister the Word of God to his flock, his authority was the Scriptures, and he was exhorted to stand fast in them that he not be despised for backing away from sound doctrine.

Our prayer is that all who name the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will follow Paul’s encouragement to Timothy and to us as well: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.... Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.... Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:13,16; 2 Timothy 4:2).

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