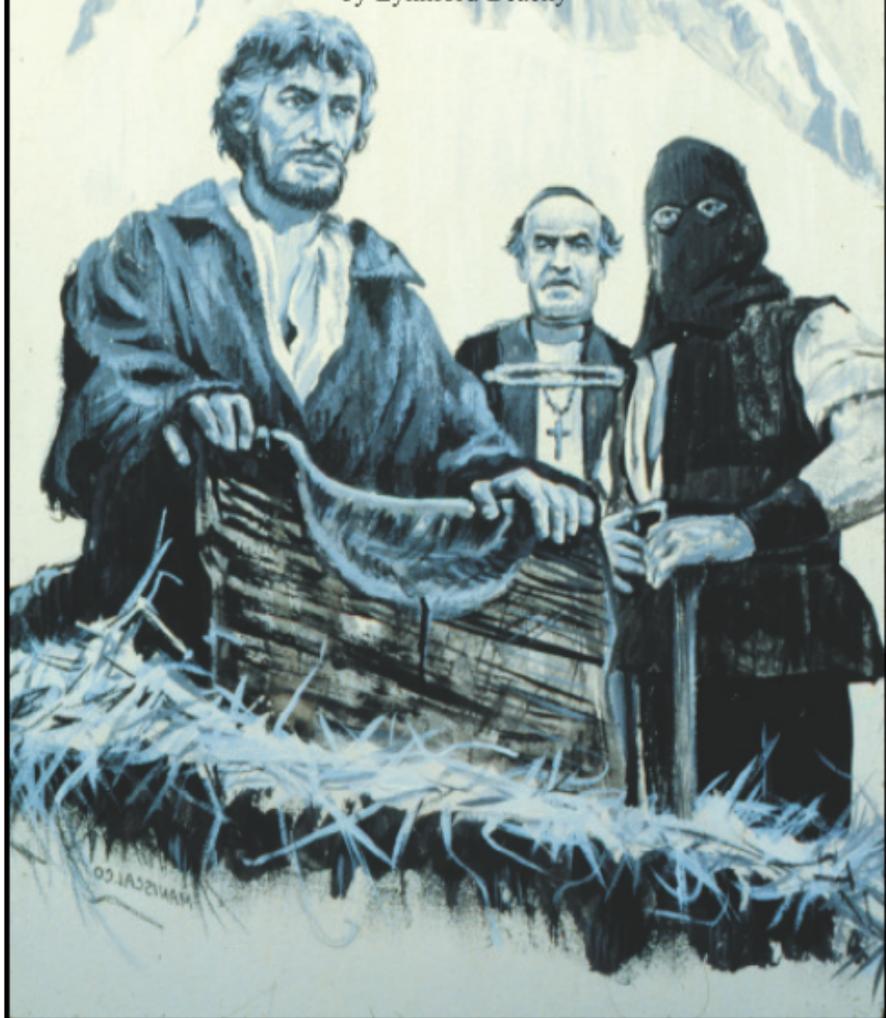


Heresies Among You

by Lynnford Beachy



Heresies Among You

Paul made an astounding statement when he wrote: “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19). It seems strange that Paul would mention heresies among us as something that can have positive results. Heresies are generally considered something to avoid. The *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* defines *heresies* as, “a body of men following their own tenets (sect or party), dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims.”

One English dictionary defines *heresy* as “An opinion or a doctrine at variance with established religious beliefs, especially dissension from or denial of Roman Catholic dogma by a professed believer or baptized church member. b. Adherence to such dissenting opinion or doctrine” (*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition*).

There is an ever increasing number of heresies going around. As a traveling minister I encounter a large variety of strange teachings, some of which are so strange and unbiblical it is amazing that

anyone would believe them. We must be able to distinguish between what is truly heretical and what is biblical.

Warning Against False Prophets

Jesus said, “Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:11). Paul warned, “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 20:29, 30).

Paul prophesied, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3).

John admonished, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

With all this counsel and warning we can see the necessity of carefully studying the Bible for ourselves, and never taking any man’s word for what is truth. We

must demand a plain, “Thus saith the Lord” to support everything we believe as truth.

Study to Shew Thyself Approved

Paul said there *must* be heresies among you, and the reason given is so that “they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19). In another letter Paul explains how a person can be “approved.” He admonished, “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). To be approved we must diligently study the Bible and rightly divide the word of truth. This implies that there is a wrong way to divide the word of truth, and wrongly dividing it will make us unapproved.

One effect of heresies is that they cause people to study the Bible. This process reveals who is really studying correctly, and who is just blindly following what others are saying. Friends, we need to study for ourselves to not only know the truth but to know for sure that it is truth because we have read it for ourselves.

The book of Acts records one of Paul’s visits where he found some diligent Bible students. “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the

synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:10-12).

The brethren in Berea heard some new things and received the word with an open mind, but they were not content to take Paul’s word for it. They wanted to know if he was telling the truth so they studied the Bible daily to see if those things were so. They took seriously the counsel, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

Paul contrasted these brethren with those in Thessalonica who evidently did not study to see if those things were so. There is a danger in this lazy approach to Bible study, for there are two sides of the ditch we can fall into if we do not study for ourselves. We could be in danger of rejecting the truth because we were not able to recognize it as truth, and were unwilling to study to see if it is truth. We could also blindly accept false doctrines as if they were truth, not realizing that the Bible does not teach those things. There is another danger not

as easily noticed. We may accept the truth, but do so only because respected men or women are advocating it. If I came to you and told you the truth about the Bible and you believe it without checking it out for yourself, then your faith in the truth cannot be very strong. All Satan has to do is convince you that my word is not reliable, and then you are likely to reject the truth. Do not take my word for anything. I am just a human like you, subject to mistakes. The greatest theologians in the world, men who are respected for their insights and piety, have been wrong many times.

Studying for ourselves is an essential aspect of our Christian experience. We cannot trust what others say, for many will tell us lies about the Bible. Most of the time these lies are not intentional, they are just repeating what someone told them about the Bible. Yet a lie is dangerous whether it is intentional or not and every teaching requires diligent study so that we can know what is truth.

Paul desired that we come to the full knowledge of Christ “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).

Paul said that the reason heresies must exist among us is so that

it will cause us to study the Bible. Yet, heresies can have a damaging effect, especially on those who do not study the Bible, for they are in danger of receiving “damnable heresies.”

Peter warned us: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And 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: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

We have been warned that false teachers will come among us secretly bringing in damnable heresies. Many shall follow these heresies, and the way of truth will be evil spoken of by those who follow these heresies.

Judging by Numbers

Some people have a tendency to determine the truthfulness of a doctrine based upon the number of people who adhere to it. These often will judge a doctrine untruthful if only a few believe it and the majority speak against it. Keep in mind that just because many

people speak against a message, it is not proof that it is truly a heresy. During the time of the early Christian church, the Christian faith was not widely accepted, and it was considered a heresy. Several Jews confessed to Paul, “But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this **sect** [Greek: *hairesis* or “heresies”], we know that every where it is spoken against” (Acts 28:22).

The majority of the professed followers of God spoke evil against the Christian faith for many years. We cannot judge a teaching solely because the majority accept it or reject it. Often the truth is not accepted by the majority. Jesus Himself said, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14).

When the Jews accused Paul of bringing in strange doctrines he told the Roman authorities, “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14). Just because the majority of Christians think that the way you worship God is heresy does not mean that it is heretical. In fact, if you are worshiping God correctly, it is likely that many will call you a heretic. But the only

thing that truly matters is what God thinks about it.

Paul’s accusers said of him, “For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the **sect** [Greek: *heresies*] of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).

Even though Paul’s message was called a heresy, and was everywhere spoken against, it was vital truth. We cannot judge a doctrine by the number of its adherents.

Judging by Miracles

Some people have a tendency to determine the truthfulness of a doctrine by whether or not miracles attend its preaching. Yet, this is not a sure sign either. Jesus warned, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24). Some of the greatest signs and wonders will be performed by false prophets. This is a tool of Satan to convince people to believe false doctrines.

Remember, Satan can perform miracles. The Bible tells us about a beast power that “deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast” (Revelation 13:14).

Jesus said that when He comes to save His people from this earth,

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Today, there are television evangelists who appear to perform miracles before large crowds. Often these evangelists touch a person and they fall down on the ground shaking, or they just raise their hand toward a person or group of people and they all fall down shaking. Many people suppose that this means the evangelists are telling the truth. Yet, there is not a single instance of anything like this happening in the Bible. In the Bible when a person was healed they rose to their feet and walked or began to see after being blind, or were visibly healed of leprosy, etc. There is no record of anyone being healed and then falling on the ground shaking.

We cannot judge a doctrine by whether it is attended by miracles, for Satan can perform miracles also.

Judging by Godliness

Many people judge a doctrine's validity by whether those promoting it are godly or not. Support for this method is sometimes drawn from Christ's words, “By their

fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). Yet, even this method can leave a person mistaken, for Paul warned against, “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Satan's ministers can masquerade as ministers of righteousness, so we can be mistaken if we judge a doctrine true solely because those promoting it appear to be godly people. On the flip side to this, there are some very ungodly people who believe the truth and even add their voice in support of the truth. Satan himself believes the truth of the singularity of God, yet we cannot trust him. James wrote, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19).

On one of Paul's journeys a possessed woman followed him saying, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). This woman was telling the truth about Paul even though she was possessed by a devil. This continued for

many days, and finally Paul “turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour” (Acts 16:18). This possessed woman was teaching the truth, but her proclamation of it was bringing the appearance of harmony between Paul’s message and her work of soothsaying. Many times Satan has his agents proclaim the truth so that he can spread lies along with the truth.

So we cannot determine the truthfulness of a doctrine solely based upon whether its promoters are godly or not.

The Only Sure Standard

There is only one sure standard to determine the truthfulness of a doctrine. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Everything must be compared with the Bible by prayer and study. Only then can we be sure that we believe the truth. Prayer is an important element in our Bible study. When we open the Bible we should ask the Father to guide us by His Spirit so that we can understand what we read. The Father promised to send the Comforter and that “when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

A Lesson from My Experience

Early in my Christian experience I was faced with the importance of studying for myself. When I was in the world I thought that there were Christians and non-Christians, and that Christians generally all believed the same things. I was surprised to find out that there are a large variety of beliefs among Christians. At first this revelation troubled me a lot. It left me wondering what I should believe. I realized that if all of these different churches cannot agree, then I cannot trust anyone to tell me the truth. Instead of giving up in disgust, I was driven to study the Bible diligently so that I could know for myself what is truth.

As I look back on this experience I am thankful for it. Without it, I may not have taken the stand to study the Bible so diligently. I can see the truthfulness of Paul’s words, that heresies must be among us so that we will study to show ourselves approved.

A Challenge

Friends, what will heresies do for you? Will you study the Bible for yourself or will you let someone else do your studying for you and hope they have it right? If you decide not to study, who will you choose to follow? Beware, for the Bible says, “For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed”

(Isaiah 9:16). We are counseled, "...put ye not confidence in a guide..." (Micah 7:5). "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14).

I pray that you will take Jude's challenge: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:3, 4).

I would like to leave you with a challenge to study a few things out for yourself, and search the scriptures daily to see if these things are so. The first is a doctrine that has the potential of "denying the Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." I challenge you to study the Bible to find out if the trinity doctrine is true or not. Is God really three persons in one God? The Bible has the

answer to this question. I challenge you to find it.

Secondly, I encourage you to study the Bible to see which day is the Sabbath. This has been a key sign of God's people since He created the Sabbath over 6,000 years ago.

Thirdly, please study the Bible to find out what happens after death. Are the dead still alive somewhere or are they sleeping?

Fourthly, in your study, search the Scriptures and rightly divide the word of truth to see if the human soul is immortal, or can it die?

The answers to all of these questions are found in the Bible, and now the ball is in your court. Will you take the challenge and study these things out for yourself? Or will you succumb to peer pressure and take it for granted that the majority must have it right when it comes to these doctrines?

Don't be afraid to stand against the tide with Paul and confess that the way which they call heresy is the way that you worship God.

May God guide and bless you as you consider these things.

For further information, or more copies of this tract write to:

Present Truth Fellowship

PO Box 315

Kansas, OK 74347 USA

<http://www.presenttruth.info>

E-mail: tracts@presenttruth.info

phone: (304) 633-5411