

GOD SHALL SEND THEM STRONG DELUSION

Religious people often presuppose an inordinate security regarding doctrinal matters. A failure in allowing the truth to guide their thinking has left many with the idea that if a thing is believed strongly enough "it just must be so, God would not allow it to be otherwise!" Paul wrote of this attitude telling how some would perish:

Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth . . ." (II Thess. 2:10-12).

God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). But when people, even very religious people, tamper with God's truth and refuse to receive the love of the truth, he gives them up. Of those "who changed the truth of God into a lie" Paul said, "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections . . . God gave them up to uncleanness . . . God gave them over to a reprobate mind . . ." (Rom. 1:24-26, 28).

Ahab, king of Israel (875-854 B.C.), and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (874-850 B.C.), provide an Old Testament illustration of God sending strong delusion to those who love not the truth. When Jehoshaphat "waxed great exceedingly," Ahab sought affinity between Israel and Judah in order that they might go to war against Syria at Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat requested audience with a prophet that the Lord might be consulted concerning this matter. Along with Zedekiah son of Chenaanah who seems to be a ring-leader, about four hundred prophets prophesy the battling of Syria at Ramoth-gilead to be just the thing to do. Perhaps Jehoshaphat is skeptical of Ahab's prophets, so, he asked, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" Ahab replied, "There is yet one man, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla." The messenger that fetched Micaiah gave him instructions, "Behold, the words of the prophets declare good like one of theirs, and speak thou good." When Micaiah parroted the messenger's canned prophecy, Ahab retorted, "How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the Lord?" Micaiah then told the true prophesy from God: "These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in peace." King Ahab now admits that his presumptuous tampering with the four hundred prophets has not been able to shroud the truth: "Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good unto me, but evil?" At this point in the narrative the veil is drawn back and the reader is allowed to witness what had gone before in the development of these prophesyings, and it is here that the lesson of "God's sending them strong delusion" finds its greatest efficacy. Micaiah said,

Therefore hear the word of the Lord; I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall entice [persuade] Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spoke saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil against thee (I Kings 22:19-23, II Chron. 18:18-22).

Ahab listened to the lying prophets, went to Ramoth-gilead, and was killed by the Syrians, all because he "received not the love of the truth" as spoken by Micaiah.

The truth of God is the word of God: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). The gospel of our salvation is contained in the word of truth: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). The word of truth is alive and active: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The engrafted word is able to save your souls: "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). The word of God is active in man's redemption and lives and abides forever: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Pet. 1:23).

In piercingly plain words Isaiah rebuked those who erected false standards. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight" (Isa. 5:20, 21). When God's chosen people, Israel, accepted the false standards that were self-imposed, even they received condemnation. Again, Isaiah charged, "Therefore as fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as the dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 5:24, 25).

Today, there is an urgent need for God's people to love the law of the Lord as did David in Psalm 119:97: "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." Only by reading, studying, and applying God's word to our lives can we be assured we are not straying from heaven's way. No longer can we as a people fain ignorance of the departures from the truth currently underway among us. We cannot hide behind a shroud of self-righteousness saying we must experience the departure for ourselves, or we will not consider it valid. Great courage is required to "love the truth" enough to defend it (Phil. 1:17). As in Micaiah's day every member of the church of Christ has the responsibility to make it his business to know

whether preachers or teachers invited to speak to the congregation or preachers and teachers to whom the young people are sent out to hear are faithful proclaimers of the word of God or not. Like Ahab we must cease to favor only those preachers who tell us what we want to hear.

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