

## Message #90 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

### *“Religious Counterfeits”*

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Now, today I'd like to talk about religious counterfeits in the church. This is a touchy subject, but one which should be looked at if we intend to worship God in truth and according to his Holy Spirit and not according to some other spirit. There are many spirits in the world, just as the Apostle John explained in 1 John 4:1. Let's read that verse before we go any further, just to make certain we understand the implications. It says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." This verse implies two things. One, that there are spirits which will attempt to present themselves as being from God, but are actually evil. The deception can be rather strong at times, and it is only

by the Holy Spirit and by the word of God that we can discern between the true Spirit of God and false spirits. The second thing this verse implies is that these evil spirits can be presented by false prophets. Either way, we have deception, for if you do have a false prophet, then of course it is an evil spirit which is moving that person. So, either way, the evil spirits are at work whenever deception occurs.

The main thing we must do is to take the Apostle John's warning to heart, which he gives us in this verse, when he tells us not to believe every spirit. He tells us to try the spirits in order to make certain that what we hear and what we see are truly from God and not actually coming from Satan. This is excellent advice, but sadly, it is advice that is not well received in the churches today. In today's church there is more of a tendency to accept anything and everything that claims to be of the Holy Spirit, rather than to test the spirits first before accepting what is presented. The deception is great. But without trying the spirits so that you can discern which is good and which is evil, you will end up receiving both good things and bad things. Even though you are attending a Christian church, you will still be subject to evil influence if you don't test the spirits first to see which is which.

Now, most of my religious experience has been in Pentecostal churches. And I consider myself a Pentecostal Christian in one sense, but I must confess that I'm quite conservative concerning some of the accepted Pentecostal issues. And the reason for this is that I've seen and experienced many things in Pentecostal circles that were supposed to be manifestations of God but that did little more than cause confusion, greed for money and luxuries, or an emphasis on the church rather than on God. In fact, some of the things I've witnessed in Pentecostal churches have been downright evil. In these situations, few if any of the other Christians present recognized the evil. This is dangerous, in the sense of safety for the souls of people. Whenever deception occurs, the soul is in danger of being deceived to the point of overwhelming confusion, which is nothing more than mixing together truth and lies until such time as a person doesn't know what to believe. But whether I have accurately discerned the evil in churches or not is anybody's call, but for me it's important. However, if some of the things I've experienced in Pentecostal churches really are evil, then for certain there have been people who have been harmed by those things.

But then, you might think that anything that happens in church has to be God. And if that's what you think, then that's between you and God alone. But before you turn me off, let me share a few things with you which might give you something to think about along these lines.

Counterfeits have existed for thousands of years. And the power of the Devil and his demons is real, no matter what some people may say. If not, then Jesus would never have warned us against false prophets, and neither would the Bible have told us to test the spirits before accepting them. And, from another angle, think of the concept of healing that the Bible encourages Christians to expect. We know of course that healing took place in the days of Jesus, as well as in the early church through the disciples of that time. We also have evidence of true healing taking place in this current day, and not just an empty claim by those who shamelessly treat healing as if it were a carnival game booth. Many Christians can testify of being healed, either from personal prayer

or by prayer from other Christians. In the same sense, many Christians have experienced miracles, at least to some extent, and there are a few instances of significant miracles also happening, although many claims of the miraculous seem to be lacking evidence in support of those claims. However, just because some claims of healing or miracles cannot be substantiated does not mean that no healing or miracles have taken place. In today's church there seems to be a great move toward rejecting the moving of God's Holy Spirit and to rely solely on form and ritual. This may be caused, to a great extent, by the actions and words of false prophets and false teachers. However, this does not give Christians license to dismiss the Bible's authority when it speaks of gifts of the Holy Spirit. But then, my emphasis today is not on the evils of rejecting scripture because of fears perpetrated by false prophets and false teachers. My emphasis today is on the correct attitude of testing the spirits without rejecting what really is true.

Certainly, Satan has power. We only have to go to the book of Exodus to see some plain examples of it. In Exodus, chapter 7, we read of Moses and Aaron standing before Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. At this time Moses acted according to God's direction and performed miracles in order to convince the Egyptian king that the God who was commanding him to release the Children of Israel from their bondage was truly the Almighty God of heaven and earth. At this time Aaron threw down his staff, and the staff turned into a serpent. However, as we read further, we see that each of the magicians of Pharaoh's court threw his own staff down, and these rods also became serpents. Of course we know that the serpent which was formed from Aaron's rod ate up the serpents which had been formed from the magician's rods. But nevertheless, this clearly demonstrates that the magicians could indeed act powerfully, although they were not working their magic in the name of the God of heaven.

Also, in following verses, we read of these magicians turning water into blood, and also of calling up frogs onto the land. And again, this clearly demonstrates that Satan can do the miraculous too, although the works that are done according to magic are counterfeit works and not the true works of God. But because we can clearly recognize that Satan is able to counterfeit the works of God, is it any wonder that other areas of God's working are also counterfeited?

A long time ago, before I had cleaned my house of the television influence, I had seen in a television movie an actor and actress speak in tongues and prophesy. From my religious experience I was well equipped to recognize the form of these gifts, but quite frankly I was ignorant at that time that tongues or prophecy could be counterfeited. I thought that when a person spoke in tongues that it was automatically God speaking through them. Imagine my surprise when I saw a completely secular movie with non-Christian movie stars in a non-Christian setting, and heard them speaking what sounded exactly like the tongues and prophecy that I had many times heard in church. This was many years ago in the infancy of my Christian experience, and I've never forgotten it.

Now, this may sound like such a simple thing to you, but the implications are far reaching. And, rather than falling into the trap of outright rejection of tongues and prophecy just because they can be counterfeited is not sensible. The Bible makes it clear that tongues and prophecy, as well

as healing, miracles, etc., are gifts of the Holy Spirit. But notice that the magicians of Pharaoh's court could do the miraculous. We certainly wouldn't discount God's works of Miracles, or the miracles of Jesus, just because some magician can do the miraculous through the power of evil spirits.

We must, in no way, reject that which God ordains for us, but we must also recognize that although the gifts of the Holy Spirit really do exist, there is also the possibility of falsehood when spiritual manifestations occur. It is for this reason that we are told to test the spirits, and it is for this reason that we are warned against false prophets and false teachers. Not everything that takes place in a church service is from God.

Hello? Are you there? Did you hear what I said? Not everything that takes place in a church service is from God. The reason for this is that not every person in a church service is truly being led of the same Holy Spirit that you are. If you think that every prophecy you hear in church is true, then you are naive. In 1 Corinthians 14:29, Paul explains that when someone prophesies, the others are to judge. We're not to accept everything that is presented as prophecy, for if we do, then we will also be accepting false prophets right along with the true prophets. True prophecy is when God speaks to your heart. No prophecy should be accepted just on the word of the person speaking it, but must be confirmed by the Holy Spirit and by lining up with the Word of God. Without the additional testimony of the Holy Spirit in your heart, and also the testimony of God's word in your mind, that prophecy has no value. Many people make the mistake of accepting every word that comes along, whether it's from someone who prophesies in the audience or from someone in the pulpit. In some cases this can be extremely dangerous, such as in the case of Jim Jones, or in the case of the prophets on so-called Christian television which prophesy that you should send them money.

Because Christians are still locked into physical bodies of flesh and blood, it is our human nature to look at everything in a purely physical way. But as born-again spiritual beings through Jesus Christ, we have the ability to comprehend spiritual things because the Holy Spirit has been given to us to help us come to a knowing relationship with God himself. And because God has given us the Holy Spirit, we also have the responsibility to follow it. Because God is a Spirit, we must also worship him in spirit and not just from a physical form of religious rites and rituals. However, when we begin to truly operate in the spiritual realm, this is when we seem to get into difficulty. Our natural human tendency is to look at spiritual things from a purely physical or ritualistic perspective. And when we do begin to perceive things from a spiritual viewpoint, once again, our spiritual immaturity encourages a natural tendency to go to another extreme and completely accept anything which is presented as spirit. But, not everything you hear in church or on Christian television is truly the Holy Spirit of God.

As Christians, we must follow the direction of God's word in this and look at it properly, not altogether rejecting the spiritual, but rather looking at it carefully and discerning what is God and what isn't. And God gives us help for this through his Holy Spirit. One of the most important gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us is the gift of discerning of spirits. This gift is mentioned in 1

Corinthians 12:10. To discern spirits means to be able to recognize what kind of spirit is moving a person. God gives the gift of discerning of spirits to help us recognize what kind of spirit is at work, even though that spirit may be evil and masking itself as the Holy Spirit of God. Satan is a deceiver, and it is no wonder that evil spirits mask themselves as good. The Bible even refers to Satan as being able to present himself as an angel of light. In this same sense, false prophets never prophesy in the name of the devil, but of course they always prophesy using the name of God. God's Holy Spirit, through the gift of discerning of spirits, helps us to know when evil is present. However, if we don't use the gift of discernment, but just go ahead and accept every word which is presented as if coming from God, then how will we ever be able to recognize false prophets? The Bible doesn't warn us against false prophets and false teachers just so we can ignore the warnings. The Bible warns us against false prophets and false teachers because they really do exist!

As Christians, we are to test the spirits to make certain that what we are accepting is truly the Holy Spirit of God and not a clever deception. There are many things that present themselves to Christians in these days which appear on the surface to be good. But not all things which first appear as good are as they first seem to be. I'm sure you've all experienced a change of opinion after a significant amount of time has passed. We all experience insight which grows clearer with the passing of time. But the gift of discerning of spirits is helpful, especially for gaining that clearer insight quickly instead of finding out too late that what you thought was true was really a lie. No one likes to be deceived. No one wants to be naive. The gift of discerning of spirits will help you recognize the deceiving spirit before it can work its destruction in you. It is better to learn through the gift of discerning of spirits than to learn by experience. Experience may be the best teacher, but only because the lesson is so hard to learn. No one likes to learn the hard way, and no one wants to be hurt by Satan's deception. Yet, deception does exist, and it will not go away on it's own. We must be aware of evil and take measures to guard against it.

It is plain simple fact that Satan's deception is that which is hidden. Satan's lies are not blatant lies, but subtle. It isn't always easy to see the deception which is hidden behind a mask of truth. It's like the wolf in sheep's clothing, which is such a danger to the flock because it comes from within instead of from without. The evil spirits which work in the tavern down the street are not half as dangerous as those evil spirits which work in our churches. We are always on our guard for the evil that is out there in the world, but when the evil is right there among us, that's when we seem to have the most difficulty seeing it. Evil that is extremely wicked is quite easily recognized. But evil which is subtle can creep in and destroy without Christians even realizing that evil is present.

God gives us help in order for us to recognize evil when it is at work. The discerning of spirits is of major importance in combating evil. When you discern spirits, you are actually comparing your knowledge of the Holy Spirit with that spirit which is manifesting itself at the time. When you see the actions and hear the words of a person, you will then experience a feeling inside of you. You then compare this feeling with the feeling you get from the Holy Spirit. If the feeling inside you is the same as when the Holy Spirit is being manifested, then you know that the

person is being moved by God. But if that feeling inside you is contrary to the feeling you get from the Holy Spirit, then you know that the spirit in the person is not the Spirit of God. Also, the word of God, being the second witness which bears testimony to God, can be compared. If what the person is doing and saying is in agreement to what you understand the word of God to say, then you can receive that person. However, if that person is saying things and acting in a manner which is contrary to sound doctrine, then you can know this person is not being led by God.

It is these two witnesses of God which testify of Him in the earth: The Holy Spirit, and the Word of God which is manifested. Jesus was the Word of God. Not only did he speak the word of God, but he also lived the word of God. It was from the testimony of the life of Jesus that God's word is confirmed. And, it is by the testimony of the Holy Spirit that God's word is confirmed again. These two witnesses, one, Jesus Christ as the word of God, and two, the Holy Spirit, give testimony to the truth of God's word himself. God is to be believed when we have the testimony of these two witnesses in ourselves. However, if we refuse to compare the actions and words of people in church with the word of God and with his Holy Spirit, we open ourselves up to deception, and eventually this will lead to destruction.

The church has many counterfeits. The tavern down the street doesn't need counterfeits, for they have accepted wickedness as part of their lives. But we, as Christians, must watch carefully for the counterfeits. Without recognizing the false teaching or the false prophesy, Christians may find themselves living a form of religion which is not truly lined up with the word of God and with his Holy Spirit.