

On the other hand, if we are too quick to attack what looks like heresy, but which is not, we can suddenly find ourselves in opposition to God, working to destroy men and women He has appointed to be instruments of ministry in His hands. In addition, if we mistakenly condemn ministers God has not condemned, we risk destroying not only them but their effective ministry as well."

"End-Time" Paranoia

The attention given to the message of Christ's return has also made many Christians alert to the fact that false prophets and teachers will arise to deceive many. This is a legitimate reason to be cautious and skeptical of certain teachings and supernatural experiences. However, this is not an excuse to attack one another in the body of Christ. Some Christians have made certain doctrinal assumptions about the end-times and then conclude that certain ministries will fall to evil influences. They then set out to prove their assumptions and attack credible ministries. The result of all this is that many Christians become caught up in an "end-time" paranoia, in which every Christian leader and ministry becomes suspect and trust among God's people is shattered.

Attack Against Revival

Many within the Christian church today are both excited and cautious about recent revivals. How much of it is of God and how much is just fabricated by emotion? Again, there are those who will attack all aspects of it, even though lives are changed, people are healed and delivered, and God is being glorified. No, not every experience or happening is valid and from God.

When revival occurred in America during the 1730s, known as the Great Awakening, there were a lot of unusual manifestations experienced by God's people. The famous preacher, Jonathan Edwards, defended this great move of God, while admitting that some of the experiences were questionable. Is it possible that we too must be open to the moving of God, though some manifestations and experiences will be of human fabrication?

God Is Grieved

God must be grieved because of the destructive

criticism that is going on among His children. He must be grieved that we have become suspicious and distrustful of one another and of ministries He has ordained. He must be grieved that the unity among His children that Jesus prayed for in John 17 is under attack by those who claim to be serving Him. He must be grieved that some of His children want to replace His command to "love one another" with a test for doctrinal purity. God must be grieved that His plan to bring His message of salvation to the world has been hindered by petty fights among His children.

Where Do You Stand?

Are you promoting destructive criticism among God's people? Are you listening to those who are and contributing to that which hurts the work of God? Do you find yourself becoming critical, exclusive in your thinking, and caught-up in a doctrinal "witch-hunt?" Are you promoting true Christian unity among believers or are you helping to divide God's people with suspicion and distrust? Are you a positive influence for Christ in your local church and with other Christian friends?

The Family of God

God has called us to be part of His family. He loves His family and wants us to love it too. Though it is not a perfect family, He has called us to respect and honor each member of it. Don't become a destructive critic of other Christians, Christian ministries, and of their spiritual experiences.

And the tongue is a fire, that very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. But no one can tame the tongue it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

James 3: 6, 8, 9, 10

Keeping Your Spiritual Balance by Avoiding Destructive Criticism.

Pastor Lynn Kern

KNOW THE TRUTH



"...AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE."

"John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us." But Jesus said, 'Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as a follower of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.'" (Mark 9:38-41)

Jesus Warns Against Exclusivism

The disciple John comes to Jesus with a criticism of someone who was casting out demons in Jesus name, but who was not one of the twelve disciples. Though John may have been concerned over this man's teachings and background, he probably was motivated by pride and jealousy. He had the mistaken idea that only the people in his group were qualified to do the work of God.

Jesus is quick to respond to John's attitude of "exclusivism". Exclusivism means to "exclude others from participating." As applied to the Christian faith, it means to exclude others from being acceptable in their work for God because they do not believe or perform ministry as the "exclusive" group or church does.

Jesus suggests three points of truth which must be considered if we are to keep our spiritual balance and avoid destructive criticism. First, Jesus makes an important observation. He says that "no one" who goes around doing a work in His name and performing miracles, will be likely to soon turn against Him. If they are lifting up the name of Jesus, demons are being cast out, Satan's kingdom is being robbed, and God is being glorified, then it is unlikely that this person or group is evil or harmful. In a sense, Jesus is saying that the person or group that is spiritually evil and harmful to God's kingdom will eventually show their true colors. See Matthew 7:15,16.

Second, Jesus says that "...*he who is not against us is for us.*" In other words, those who are doing a work for God, in the name of Jesus, can't be working for God and against God at the same time. It is true that in Christian work, people have misrepresented and harmed God's truths. However, it is also true that inspite of human error

and failure, God has powerfully preserved His truths and accomplished His purposes in the lives of His people.

Third, Jesus says that those who work for God and minister to you in His name shall receive a reward. The Lord does not reward deceivers and false teachers. There are people working for Him who do not believe the same as do other Christians; yet, they shall be rewarded because of their service to you and to Him.

A Fact of Christian Experience

Every Christian is called by God to grow-up spiritually in their Christian life. As we seek more knowledge from the Bible and open ourselves to supernatural experience with God, we begin to form truths as to what we believe. We are often influenced by pastors, evangelists, writers, radio and television ministers, teachers, and Christian friends as to what we should believe. We quickly discover that not all agree on what the Bible teaches or what are valid supernatural experiences from God. It seems a fact of Christian experience that as we attempt to learn more and grow in our Christian life, we encounter differing views about what to believe. Usually, most Christians accept one view or another and get on with their Christian life. Praise the Lord, God is faithful to those who seek Him and His work goes on inspite of the differences. There were differences in the early church and there will be differences today. See I Corinthians 1:10-13

Guard the Truth!

True Christianity is based upon truth, that plan and purpose which God has ordained for His people to believe and experience. Because God made allowances for our differences in what we believe and experience, that does not mean that we can believe anything. There are many cults, false religious systems, and individuals who use the name of Jesus, claim their teachings are from the Bible, and believe in the supernatural. Yet, they do not teach or practice the fundamental principles of Christ and His church. We are warned in the scriptures about such teachings. See II Timothy 4:3,4.

Within the realm of the Christian church today, there are those who have abandoned the message of Christ in favor of a message which is acceptable and "current" with society. These churches and

individuals teach humanism, secular psychology, and New Age philosophy. They have retained the outward appearance of Christianity, but have corrupted or forsok God's word.

Not God is not tolerant or permissive when it comes to people or groups who claim "...a form of godliness, but deny its power"(2 Timothy 3:5). He hates those who lead others into false teachings and deceptive ways. Satan is a deceiver and a father of lies. His goal is to lead people away from the real truth of Christianity in any way he can. We must guard the truth.

Danger: Poisoned Water!

In an attempt to guard the truth and root-out false teachings within Christianity, there are some who have over-reacted and have been attacking the ministry of fellow Christians. Like the disciple John, they have adopted an "exclusivism" in which they believe that they are God-appointed "watch-dogs" whose job it is to identify and attack those who do not believe as they do or who do not belong to the same group. They have poisoned the water from which many Christians drink. They have created a "destructive criticism" that has attempted to discredit and destroy both ministers and their ministries. It has made Christians suspicious and reluctant to trust reputable men and women of God in ministry today.

These are sincere Christians, wanting to defend the faith. However, they are mis-guided and their destructive behavior hurts the work of God. They have some basic characteristics: they are self-appointed; they are usually anti-Charismatic, anti-Pentecostal; they nit-pick on doctrinal issues rather than judge the overall work of the ministry; they have theological bias which promotes their conclusions about ministries and ministers; and they fail to be motivated by love to correct those in ministry who they believe have strayed from the truth.

Heresy Hunters, by James Spencer

"The nature of Christianity certainly requires us to be careful. No one argues with that. A certain amount of healthy skepticism is essential. Scripture warns us repeatedly about false prophets who will arise among us and introduce false doctrines and practices.