

Spiritual Discernment for Pastors



By John Edmiston



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<https://eternityradio.org/spiritual-discernment-for-pastors.html>

1. Tests of Faith in the Book of 1 John

God bless you all, we are starting a new series today, it is on spiritual discernment; how we can discern truth from error and false from true, who are true believers and who are false believers and all the rest, and how we can protect our lives, our spirituality, our families and our churches from false teachers, false apostles and so on and so forth.

So, today is the first in the series, and we will be looking at some things in the little book of 1 John towards the back of your Bible.

So, before we get into our Bible reading and our lesson today, let's pray. Let's make this session, let's lift it up to the Lord. Father in Heaven, we ask for your wisdom, grace and anointing on today's session of Insights for Eternity, and we ask that your blessings will rest upon your word. Eyes will be open, ears will be opened and the glory of God will shine down upon this broadcast in Jesus' name. Amen

Okay, so, there are a number of tests of faith in the Book of 1 John, 1 John was written to a group of people who are being severely tested by false doctrine, and there was a lot of things going on. First of all, though, as we find in Revelation, there was a group called The Nicolaitans and the Nicolaitans believed in sex for salvation, which was rather weird and very wicked. And so we find out about that. There was a lot of hatred going on, and that was against the gospel. Hatred is always against the gospel, so that was happening, and also there was a group called Gnostics. Now the Gnostics believed in salvation through knowledge; that you needed to know certain secret spiritual things, if you were to get to heaven. And you did not actually contact God, you contacted a spirit who is above you who contacted a spirit above that spirit, and on through a great chain of these things called demi-urges until you finally got to the one true God. And this, uh, was a horrible belief. It persisted for hundreds of years and 1 John is mainly written against these Gnostics. But it is also written to help people know who are the true and false believers; who is a real Christian and who is a false Christian.

So, let's look at some of the tests, there are five tests, faith in Jesus, fellowship with the Saints, the presence of agape love, the presence of a righteous lifestyle, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. And there are three things that people had to believe about Jesus, and you want to write these down. Faith in Jesus requires that to believe that He has come in the flesh, that He is the Son of God and that He is the Christ.

So, these are the three beliefs that a Christian has to have about Jesus, that He has come in the flesh, He is the Son of God, and He is the Christ. And also, later on in we find Paul's writing, it says we have to believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead; that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He is risen from the dead. And that is Romans 10. So, there are five key beliefs about Jesus in the Bible. He has come in the flesh, He is the Son of God, that He is the Christ, that He is Lord, and that He has risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father. And, of course, that He is going to return in power and glory.

So, that is how we get to our basic creeds, our basic beliefs about Christianity, is we start listing, what are the essentials? What have you got to believe if you are to be saved, if you are to be a true and loving child of God? So, now let's start looking at this and we will start with, fairly obviously, why do we need any spiritual discernment at all? Why can't we just trust people? If you have lived any length of time, you

know that there are some people you cannot trust, and that includes in spiritual matters. You cannot trust everybody that is making a spiritual claim.

Let's look at I John chapter four verses 1 to 3. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into this world. So, we cannot believe every spiritual person or any spirit. So, if you have a dream, you have a spirit speaks to you in a dream. You do not need to believe that spirit. You need to test it, and the same with spiritual people. You do not need to believe every spiritual person that comes along. You need to test them. For there are many false prophets have gone out into the world.

And then I John 2, 18 and 19 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard, that the Antichrist is coming. So, now many anti-Christ's have come. Therefore, we know that this is the last hour. They went out from us but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that they might become plain that they all are not of us. So, he is talking about the Antichrist.

Of course, we know in Revelation that the Antichrist, it is the beast and the false prophet and all these things. That is the capital A Antichrist. But there are many little antichrists. Small a, antichrist. What does antichrist means? It means, instead of or against Christ. So, someone saying they are Christ when they are not Christ, claiming to be God when they are not God. Anti can mean instead of so this person is placed in someone's life instead of Jesus Christ. And we know at the end people have to take the mark of the beast, the 666, and this person will set up a big idol of himself, and he will place himself in people's hearts, minds and loyalty as if he was Christ. He will demand the allegiance that we should be giving to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, and everyone will have to bow down before this massive idol and accept the mark of the beast.

And also it means anti as in against. So, not only is he setting himself instead of Christ, he is setting up himself against Christ and against Christians. And we find the Antichrist persecutes Christians, is against Christians in every sense of the word and wants to destroy them, wants to destroy the church. And there are many, many martyrs in the last days.

And so, the Apostle John is saying when you see all these false teachers know that the end is coming; the end of that present age that was going on at that time, there was lots of persecution. And so these false teachers rejected the Gospel, as a result of rejecting the Gospel, they are divisive, and they go out from the established church. They reject the Apostle Paul and the apostles of that time, and the Apostle John. And they reject the apostolic leadership of Peter and Matthew and all the others. And they have gone out to set up their own organizations, set up their own churches. They have split off. They are angry, they are divisive. And they say, "No, no, no. We have got the superior doctrine. we are running around doing this, that, or the other, and we should be the ones that you follow and belong to." They want to take away disciples. Paul says, in Acts 20, they are wolves coming in among the sheep, wanting to take away disciples after themselves, for the ego hit, for the money and whatever else they can do with the people they drag behind them.

So, we need to be discerning, when you are listening to a preacher, check. Is this preacher really teaching from the Bible? Or they just got a big, strong personality and they are making up all these claims, and they are not true at all.

Now one of the things you can do is you can also test them against reality, because they often say things that are scientifically untrue or against common sense or financially untrue. And if a person is constantly saying things that are rubbish, that just are not true at all in any way, sense or form, you know they are a false teacher, that they enjoy lying. They enjoy deceiving people, and they do not care about what they say, as long as it has the intended results. And they make claims that cannot be substantiated.

For instance, let's look at what I mean by that. If I take out my ballpoint pen and say, "This is a ballpoint pen." Then the person I am talking to, you can pick it up and check it out and write with it and say, "Yes, that is a ballpoint pen." So, that is a claim that can be substantiated. It can be tested one way or the other. But a false teacher does not do that. They make a claim like this. I had a dream last night, and in that dream I went up to heaven and I was met by a flying pink elephant and the flying pink elephant told me that I am the Messiah, and therefore because I am the Messiah, you owe me 20% of your income.

So, you cannot test that this person had a dream last night. There is no way to check that out like you can check a ballpoint pen. There is no way to check that they went to heaven in their dream. There is no way to check that they met a flying pink elephant in heaven in their dream and that their flying pink elephant told them that they are the Messiah, How can you say that? Because they had this visionary experience that they can take 20% of your income. That is all made up. It is all fantastic stuff. It is all just a fantasy, a con to get your money out of your pocket.

And so that is something you have to watch out for these false teachers. They are full of lies, they are full of deception. They are greedy, they are immoral, and there are lots of them around out there on TV, on the Internet, on YouTube, wherever you have to be very careful about what you listen to on Facebook or whatever social media you use, you have to be wise and discerning. That is why, it says Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits. You have the right to test spiritual claims that are being made, and you should do that because it is absolutely essential for your spiritual health. That is why it is there in the Bible.

And so the next thing we want to look at in today is the claims about Jesus that we have to check out, in when someone talks about Jesus. Who are they talking about? Are they talking about the Jesus of the Bible or Jesus that they have made up in the image of themselves or their own culture? The first thing we have to do is we have to have faith in Jesus if we are going to be a true Christian. I think everyone listening to this broadcast believes that you should believe in Jesus, if you are going to be a true Christian.

Let's look at I John chapter five verses 10 to 12. We are in the book of I John throughout today's lesson. I John, chapter five verses 10 to 12, Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning His Son. And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

So, that is saying very clearly that you have got to believe in Jesus to have eternal life. If you do not have the Son, you do not have eternal life. And if you do have the Son, you do have eternal life. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. So, the atheists, the New Agers, the idol worshippers, people from religions that do not believe in Jesus Christ. They do not have eternal life. They may have some wisdom. They may be nice people. They may be friendly, but they lack eternal life because they have not believed in the Son of God, in Jesus Christ. And what God has said

about Jesus is that He is His beloved Son. That is the testimony. And if you do not believe that Jesus Christ is the beloved Son of God, then you are not saved, you do not have eternal life because you are making God out to be a liar.

God has said this is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. You need to believe that, you need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Otherwise, you do not have eternal life. And you are jabbing the creator in the eyes and saying that you do not believe what He has said about His only Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. And in I John, chapter three, verses 23 and 24. And this is His commandment that we believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ and love one another just as He has commanded us. Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God and God in him. And by this we know that He abides in us by the Spirit Whom He has given us.

So, what is this telling us? There are two things we have got to do as a Christian. Firstly, you have to believe in His Son Jesus Christ. Secondly, you have to love one another, because if you believe Jesus, what is Jesus telling you to do? He says, "Love one another as I have loved you. This is my commandment." So, if you believe in Jesus, you do not just believe that He existed. You also believe that you have to obey His commandment. His commandment is to love one another.

So, these are the two essential things of being a Christian. Firstly, believe in Jesus. Secondly, love one another, and then you will be a true Christian. And we will look at that in much greater depth in the next study as we do that. But in this study were just looking at what we have to believe in order to be a true and righteous Christian, and we have to believe in Jesus and we have to believe in Jesus' commandments, especially, the commandment to love one another.

Now, we have got three more things to get through in the next few minutes. And the next thing is, we have to believe that Jesus came in the flesh. This is I John chapter four, verses two and three, 1 John, chapter four, verses two and three. By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming, and now is in the world already.

So, the Gnostics did not believe that Jesus came in the flesh. Why didn't they believe that? They thought that flesh was bad and spirit was good. So God, Jesus could not have possibly come in the flesh. The flesh was just a disguise. It was not real human flesh. It was some kind of disguise. It was a trap for us to hide His divinity. And Jesus did not really come in a human body conceived of the Virgin Mary, et cetera, et cetera. And so that is what the Gnostics believed, they say "No, Jesus did not come in the flesh. He just came as a spirit and appeared to have a human body". And that is what we call Gnosticism. He appeared to have a human body, from the word *dokeo* to appear or to manifest. So, the Gnostics were Docetists, that Jesus only appeared to have human body, was not really a human body because human bodies are sinful, and Jesus could not have come in the appearance of sinful flesh.

Well, in fact, He did, that is confirmed in other places in the New Testament as well. So, one of the things we have to believe is Jesus is fully God and fully man. He was God, He is the fullness of deity in bodily form. Colossians two, verse nine. Colossians two verse nine says that Jesus is the fullness of deity in bodily form. He came in the flesh, and a lot of other religions will try and get rid of that because it is offensive to their belief system to think that the divine reality of God Almighty, could have come.

And he says every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist. So, if you are testing a demon, if someone is manifesting a demon or religious demon of some sort, and it is speaking in the spirit or speaking from that spirit, ask the spirit, "Do you confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?" And the spirit says "No, no, no, He did not. He did not." Then that is a false spirit. You can test the demon. You could test the spirit. The Holy Spirit does not mind being tested. So, if it is the Holy Spirit, you say, "Did, Jesus Christ come in the flesh?" the Holy Spirit will say, "Yes, Absolutely." And then you will know that that Spirit is speaking the truth. That is the Holy Spirit. And it is a valid spiritual experience that is happening there. So, you can test spiritual beings with the question, did Jesus Christ come in the flesh? And the evil spirits will always deny that, and the Holy Spirit will always affirm that.

So, that is I John, Chapter four, verses two and three. I will read it again. By this you know the Spirit of God. That is to find out if it is the Spirit of God. Let's check, is this the Spirit of God or not? Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. So, if the spirit is confessing that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, that is the Spirit of God. You got the right spirit there. And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. So, when you are testing the spirit and it says, "No, no, no, Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh." It is not from God. And not only is it a bad spirit is an Antichrist spirit. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. And we just look around at the circumstances of the world, we totally agree with that.

And the next test, spiritual test, that we need to have, "Is Jesus, the Son of God?" One John 4:15. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. So, if you are confessing that, it is not just you are ticking it on a piece of paper, "Yeah, Yeah. Jesus is the Son of God," you are confessing it out loud. You are saying, "this is what I believe." When you confess something, it is coming from your heart, not just from your head. You are saying, "This is my belief in life, that Jesus is the Son of God, I stand for this, I stand up and I confess out loud to my friends and family that Jesus is the Son of God, and I believe that with my whole being," that is what confessing there means. Homologeo, to speak it up with your whole being, and to really make it manifest, "I confess this. This is what I stand up. I hold my right hand up and I say, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God."

And so a person who can stand up and say that in the face of persecution, torture, ridicule, and they keep saying, "Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Son of God," that person is saved. That person is a believer because they are standing up and saying something publicly that just brings ridicule upon them from the world and from the devil, who is terrified of Jesus, the Son of God.

We know that we have a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, they are all one God. But they each represent a different aspect of God. So, it is like we have up and down, side to side, in and out, three dimensions of the one space. So, up and down, perhaps would be the Father, in and out might be the Holy Spirit. Side to side might be Jesus. So, we have three dimensions of God. We have three ways in which we move in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But we only have one God. And there is one God who is the creator of heavens and earth and all things in them. But He is a triune God, He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the same time. So, having a correct understanding of the Trinity, that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, He is not just another form of God, or He is not just a prophet. He is not just a teacher, He is not just a rabbi. He is the very only begotten Son of God. All things were made by Him and through Him and for Him. And He upholds all things by the word of His power.

So, He is the Son of God who inherits the universe, and He comes into that vast inheritance. And so you need to believe that. And you need to teach that in your teaching. And if you are a pastor make sure that you emphasize that Jesus is the Son of God and that your congregation knows that deeply and well.

The last thing we have to believe about Jesus is that Jesus is the Christ. It says here I John, chapter two verses 22 and 23, Who is the liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the Antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. So, what does it mean that Jesus is the Christ? It means He is the spiritually anointed one of God. Christ is the same word as Messiah, and it means anointed one, someone that has chrism, which is anointing, that He is the anointed one of God. And then He baptises in the Holy Ghost. He has the anointing, He dispenses the anointing. You are baptised in the Holy Ghost through the Son. Jesus has ascended into the heavenly realms, He sits at the right hand of the Father, He is the anointed of the Lord and He pours out the anointing upon us.

And He was the Christ. And that was revealed, first of all, to the woman at the well. She says, "I know the Messiah is coming," and Jesus says "I who speak to you am He." So, He revealed His Messiahship. He said He is the Messiah. He was the Messiah. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. He was crucified, dead and buried. And He was the redeemer of the world. We are saved through Him. And through Him we receive the Holy Spirit, which is the anointing. He is the anointed one. He passes the anointing onto us.

And so Jesus, being the Christ, is Lord and Christ. He is king of kings, Lord of Lords. He rules over our life and gives us commandments. But upon that also, He is the anointed one who passes on the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He places the Holy Spirit in us and upon us. So, when you become a Christian, Jesus, who is the Christ, who is at the right hand of the Father, imparts the Holy Ghost into you. And you produce the things of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness and self control.

You cannot get those things from the library. You cannot get those things in the supermarket. You cannot get them from a book or a bottle. Love, joy and peace have to be imparted into your life through the Holy Ghost. You cannot dig them out of the ground. All those things, like wisdom, have to be given to you from heaven and they are imparted through the Holy Spirit.

And so, Jesus is the Christ. He is the one who imparts the anointing. He also puts the anointing upon you, like He told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit had come upon them. They had already received the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives. We found that earlier in the Gospels. And now they wait in Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit comes upon them as tongues of fire to give them power in ministry and make them good at proclamation.

So, you need both. You need that relationship with Jesus where you confessed He is the Christ, He is the Messiah, He is the redeemer of Israel. He is the redeemer of your life. And He is the one who sets the Holy Spirit in you and upon you. And if the Holy Spirit is in you, then you are saved and you are going to heaven. But the Holy Spirit upon you is very important as well, so that you can do the work of God in power and strength. And it is very important that you know that aspect of Jesus being the Christ, Jesus being your Saviour, but also the one that puts the Holy Spirit upon you as a seal and as a deposit.

So, receive the Holy Ghost, receive the Holy Ghost in power and ask for the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon you. It promises in Luke 11:11 to 13 that God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. Ask for

more and more of the grace of God, and Jesus will be both Lord and Christ to you. And you will move in spiritual power because of Him.

Okay to summarise this in the next couple of minutes left in this broadcast, spiritual discernment is a very important part of your Christian life. You cannot just go around being gullible, because the naive proceed and they suffer for their mistakes. People get caught up in cults. People get caught up following prosperity gospel or tele-evangelists. They get deceived and they get ripped off. The price of spiritual deception is very great. It can include ruined relationships, poverty, and some people are even so far trapped that they end up going to hell because they believe the wrong things about God.

So, what are the five things that you have to test? And we will look at some of these later in the next broadcast, Faith in Jesus, that He has come in the flesh, that He is the Son of God. And that He is the Christ. And then we find out you have to believe in the Fellowship of the Saints. You have to manifest agape love. You have to have a righteous life, and you have to have the Holy Spirit. So, they are the things that you have to know and believe if you are to not fall into spiritual sin.

Do not think that you can worship idols, do juju or magic and be in a good relationship with God. You need to have a life that is spiritually pure, and you need to be able to discern right from wrong spiritually. And you need to ask God to open your eyes to know false from true, in the spiritual realms. God will give you the Holy Spirit. He will give you discernment and wisdom to know what is right and what is wrong.

I remember when I was a new Christian, I was given this tract by a cult group. I think it was Jehovah's Witnesses, and I immediately knew it was poisonous, that it was wrong. Holy Spirit said, "Throw that away right now," and I did, because God was telling to me and I knew something about it was creepy. Something was wrong, and I immediately threw it in the bin at the railway station. God will testify to you that, some teachings are false, and you will know it in your heart and your mind.

But also you need to switch your brain on. You just cannot throw your brain away when you are being a Christian, you need to test. And what are the tests about Jesus that we have gone through today? Firstly, you need to believe that Jesus has come in the flesh, that His flesh was real, that Jesus is fully God and Jesus is fully man. Next, you need to believe that Jesus has authority as the Son of God. He is the true Son of God. You need to believe in the Trinity and that Jesus is king of kings and Lord of Lords. He is going to return in power and that He is the Son of God. And thirdly, you need to believe that Jesus is the Christ. And He is the anointed messiah of the Jewish people and of all, that He brings salvation to us, and that He will impart the Holy Spirit into you as a deposit of your salvation. There are three things we are going to look at today. I hope you took some notes as we are going through this.

2. True and False Christians

We are going into our second episode of our series on spiritual discernment, and today we will be looking at the tests of a true and a false Christian. And the Bible talks about false brethren and people that are not true Christians at all. And how do we sort out the wheat from the tares?

Before we do that, let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your grace. We thank you for your purposes in our life. We thank you for your salvation that has come upon us. And now we want to listen to your word. We want to understand your word. So, please open our spiritual ears, open our spiritual eyes, that we may behold truth from your Bible, in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, here we are. There are four things in I John, the tests of a true believer. Last week we looked at the first of five actually, there are four today, but there was one last week, was true beliefs about Jesus Christ. You have to believe in Jesus and you have to believe certain things, such as He has come in the flesh, that He is Lord, that He is the son of God and that He is the Christ. But today we are going to look at four things that are characteristics of Christians that are their fruit. You know them by their fruit.

Well, there are four fruit that a Christian has to have. Firstly, they have to have fellowship with the saints. They have to hang out with other believers and like them, they have to have agape love. They have to have a righteous lifestyle, and then they have to have the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life.

So, let's just start looking at that, fellowship with the Saints. What do I mean by that? Let's look at I John, chapter two and verse 19. I John, chapter two and verse 19. They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they are all not us.

So, these Gnostics, the heretics that the Apostle John is talking about, these false teachers went out and created their own churches out of theological rebellion. They had a rebellious spirit, and they went off and planted their own churches because they had a different set of beliefs. And we find that with false teachers, they want to create their own church, their own denomination, their own way of seeing things. Some of them interpret the Bible differently, produced their own Bibles and so on and so forth.

And so we find that they go and have their own set of teachings different from the main teachings of Christianity. Now, where are the main teachings of Christianity? Of course, in the Bible, Old and New Testaments, especially the New Testament, that defines Christians versus Jews. The New Testament, and then what we call the universal creeds of the Christian Church. What are the universal creeds that all major denominations share? They are the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the formula of Chalcedon.

Now the Apostles Creed sets out the basics of who Jesus is. The Nicene Creed sets out the formulation of the Trinity and the formula of Chalcedon, or the Chalcedon creed sets out the two natures of Christ, as fully God and fully man. So, those three documents produced by the early church, and produced out of a lot of theological reflection, have been the standard tests of orthodoxy in the Christian world. So, you can just google them, look them up on the internet, the Apostles creed, the Nicene Creed and the creed of Chalcedon. And they were before other denominations existed, the Catholics, the Orthodox, all the rest. That was when there was just one form of Christianity. They were the doctrinal tests of it.

And when people go out and away from those basic creeds, away from the Bible, and they start inventing things like the Book of Mormon or a new translation of the Bible, they are going out from Christianity to establish their own religion. And that proves that they are not of us, because they do not want to fellowship with us. They do not want to love us. They do not want to be part of us anymore because they have had a dispute.

So, do you have to stay at the same church all the time? No, you can move churches. If you are in the church and the Sunday school is not up to standard for your children, you can go to a church with a better Sunday school. You are not leaving Christianity. You are not leaving beliefs about Christ. You are just saying that your kids need a Sunday school that can teach them properly, or something like that. If you go to a church and you moved house, you move from one city to another city. Of course, you can change church, find a church in the new city.

And so on, there are valid reasons for changing churches. But being bitter and angry is not one of them. So, if you have got disputes with your church, your pastor, go and sort that out. But do not move churches unless there is a really good reason for moving churches.

But the thing they are talking about here is not going out from a particular church, but going out from the beliefs of Christianity as a whole, so that these heretics have gone out from the New Testament. They have got out from the teachings of Jesus, were disputing basic things such as the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the formula of Chalcedon. And they had gone out from the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

I John, chapter four, verses 4 to 6, Little Children, you are from God and have overcome them. For He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world, therefore they speak from the world and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. So, the people who were the heretics, they were not listening to the Apostolic teaching, the teaching of Peter, James, John, Matthew and all the apostles. The teaching we have in the Bible such as the teaching of Paul, this apostolic teaching they were not listening to us.

Whoever knows God listens to us. If you know God, you will listen to the Bible, particularly the New Testament. And you will heed that and you will write it down. You will hide it in your heart. You will listen to the words of the apostles which we now have as Scripture. But whoever is not from God does not listen to us.

So, we find the world out there, the proud people of the world, they will not listen to the Bible. They will not open the Bible. They will not look at the Bible, because they are not of God. And they will not listen to the apostolic teaching, the teaching of the Apostle John and all the other apostles. They do not want to hear that, they want to throw that behind their back. And we find all these rebellious people, these people who are with all these modern movements, these social movements, they hate Christianity, They hate the Bible. They want to ban the Bible. They want to take the Bible out of schools, out of churches and out of nations. And if they could burn the Bible, they would burn the Bible. But the Bible has always withstood the challenges of society.

So, it also says, they are from the world, therefore they speak from the world and the world listens to them. So, these are the heretics that just talk about money and greed and sex and things like that. Who

say, "Oh, well, you know, the sexual teachings of the Bible do not matter at all. We are just going to throw them behind us. We are going to get rid of this, get rid of that." And the world says, "Oh, that is wonderful. We approve of you now," and that is a very dangerous thing to hear. You do not want the world's approval. You want to reach the world. You want to convict the world. You want to share the gospel with the world. But you do not want the approval of the world wholeheartedly, because that is what the false prophets had.

Jesus talks about that in the Book of Matthew, and so you do not want the same sort of approval that the false prophets had, and they were loved for all their smooth words and flattery and saying, "Oh, this is not sin. That is not sin. Just do not worry about it." And so those who are false listen to the world. And if their voice sounds worldly, if all their sermons are full of non-Christian illustrations, you know that they are listening to the world and not to the Bible. So, for they speak from the world and the world listens to them.

It says by this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. So, when we are looking at someone you have got to ask, is this person listening to the Bible, or is this person listening to the world? So, if they are listening to the world, they are from the world. They were from the world system that is controlled by the devil, but if they are listening to the Bible, then that person is probably from God. That person loves the Scriptures and hides them in their heart. Then that person is probably from God. And I was on the phone with someone this morning who absolutely loves the Scriptures, and it is a delight to talk to a person who is like that, and who is listening to the Bible and putting the world far behind her. And so you need to put the world behind you, the cross before you, and you want to listen to God's word and not all the nonsense and pride and vanity and fashion and money and greed of the world. You want to have Christian values, not worldly values.

So, a true Christian listens to God and listens to the Bible, and listens to the truth that the apostles wrote. A false Christian does not listen to the Bible, but instead listens to worldly values.

Okay, continuing with how do we know a true Christian from a false Christian? The next big test is the test of love. And we have got four Bible verses again, all from I John. And we will start with I John four and verse 16. So, we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. So, if we are full of agape love, we are not talking about human lust here, we are full of God's love. Then if we abide in God's love, we abide in God and God abides in him. And we know that the love of God in our hearts is a sign that we are a true believer. And going down a little bit in that first same chapter one, John four, verses 20 and 21. If anyone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, whoever loves God must also love his brother or sister. We will put that in there.

So, when you say, "I love the Lord, I love the Lord," but then you gossip about people, backstab people and hate people, then you are lying, because you do not know God properly, because God is love. And if you have the love of God in your heart, you are not going to do those things. So, a true Christian has a heart full of love towards their neighbour. They love their neighbour. They love their brother or sister in Christ. they are not going around being nasty and hateful.

A hateful lifestyle is the sign of a false believer, someone who is deluded about their faith. They hate people, and the hate of the devil fills their heart instead of the love of God. I John chapter two, verses

nine and 10, along the same lines. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no cause of stumbling. So, when you love your brother or sister, you abide in the light. But if you hate your brother or sister, you are still in the darkness.

You cannot be a true Christian and be full of hate for other people. That is a dark place to be. And if you have got grudges, if you have got resentments, if you are not forgiving people, you need to repent right now and get right with God, because love is the characteristic, it is the defining fact of the Christian life. You need to start participating in agape love, and you need to pray, Lord Jesus Christ, give me a loving heart. Help me to get rid of the darkness in my soul. Get rid of the envy, the hatred, the strife, the critical spirit. All the things that make people hate, the resentments, the hurts, everything in your heart that is causing you to hate people. You need to turn that over to the Lord Jesus Christ and repent of your hatred. Repent of the sin of hatred. So, that you can go out from the darkness into the light, out from all those resentments that have held you bondage for many, many years.

I John, chapter three, verses 14 and 15. We know that we have passed out of death into life. Why? Because we love the brothers and sisters. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. So, if your life, someone comes along and they are teaching the Bible, but they are full of hate, they are full of anger, they are full of rage, they truly hate people. Well, they do not have eternal life. They have religiosity instead, because everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life.

These preachers that are full of fundamentalism and hatred and rage, they are full of hate for people. Well, they have not got the gospel. They have got something else. And that something else is the spirit of the devil, the spirit of hatred and resentment and anger; and it says, We know we have passed out from death to life because we love the brothers and sisters. When you love your fellow Christians, when you love your pastor, when you love your elders, when you love the other people in your church you have passed out of death into life. But whoever does not love abides in death.

Wow, that is powerful, isn't it? Whoever does not love abides in death. If you do not love people, if you are selfish, if you are cold, if you cannot stand your pastor, your elders and your church members; if you cannot stand the people around you, if you are always getting mad at people, then you abide in death. And spiritual death has taken over and separated you from God and from other people. So, that spiritual death is separation from God and separation from one another. And if you do not love people, you are abiding in spiritual death. So, start loving people, start loving people around you in the Christian faith. Start loving your brothers and sisters, and forgetting about those small insults and slights and things that have happened to you that have turned you off your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Okay, next, after the lifestyle of love which we found is fundamentally important. You must love. You cannot hate. A true Christian loves, a false Christian hates. So, the next test of a true Christian is a righteous lifestyle. God wants us to live a righteous, straight and orderly life. And let's look at these verses in I John again, chapter two verses three, four, five and six. And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. How do you know that you know God? Because you are keeping God's commandments. Whoever says I know Him, but does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.

By this we may know that we are in Him, whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He, Jesus, walked.

So, if I say I am a Christian and I abide in Jesus Christ, then I have to behave like Jesus. I have to walk as Jesus walked. That walking means a lifestyle of righteousness, truth, abiding in God's word, carrying out God's commandments, giving God's commandments priority over my own needs, my own wants, my own desires, my own carnality. So, whoever says I know Him but does not keep His commandments is a liar. Someone says, I know God, I know God but then goes out and steals and commits adultery commits fornication, they are lying. They do not really know God because they are not even trying to obey God's commandments.

But whoever keeps His word, whoever keeps the word of God, studies it, says, "Oh, look, this is what the Bible says. I will keep God's word. I will walk with God. I will live a righteous life." That person is perfected in Christ because they are reverent to God's word. You have to be obedient. You have to obey the commandments of Jesus Christ. In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all those commandments in the New Testament. Go and obey them. Be in fear and trembling as you work out your salvation.

Next verse, I John, chapter two, same chapter verses 28 and 29. I John chapter 2:28 and 29. And now little children abide in Him so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practises righteousness has been born of Him. Practises righteousness means continually on a daily basis lives out a righteous, orderly, quiet and good life. So, someone who believes in Jesus and you look at their life and say, "Oh, that person is straight. That person is good. I can trust that person. That person does the right thing every single time. Their yes is yes. Their no is no. They have quiet integrity and discipline in their life." You say everyone who practises righteousness as their daily way of life is of God.

So, righteous lifestyle is a big, big sign that someone is a true believer. Obviously a wicked lifestyle is a sign that someone is a false believer, that they are just pretending to be a Christian. So, if you see someone and they say they are Christian and they are running a business, do they keep two sets of books? One for the tax man and one that is true. Do they take bribes? Do they give bribes? Is the business honest? Do they do good work for their customers or do they cheat and lie to their customers? Do they have the right weights and measures? Or do they cheat with the weights and the measures? You know that and the Christian, a true Christian, will be righteous.

I John three, 7 to 10, Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practises righteousness is righteous, as He, that is Jesus, is righteous. Whoever makes a practise of sinning is of the devil. For the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practise of sinning, for God's seed abides in him and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. Whoever does not practise righteousness is not of God. Nor is the one who does not love his brother.

So, here are the two tests, they say righteousness. Love your brother. If you do not love your brother, if you do not practise righteousness, you are not a true Christian. And this is one of the tests we can apply when someone wants to occupy a position in the Christian ministry. They think they are cool. They think they are Christian and you look at their lifestyle. Does this person consistently practise righteousness? Does this person love people and do good to them? Okay, then this person is very probably a true

Christian. We can give them a position in ministry or on the worship team, or let them be an usher. But if they are not, if their life is characterised by wickedness and unrighteous living and all kinds of fornication and greed, then they are probably not a true Christian. And we have to be very careful about letting them near even the Brethren.

So, here it says, Let no one deceive you, whoever practises righteousness is righteous as He is righteous. And it says, Let no one deceive you. There are some nice people out there. They are very good at flattery. They have got all sorts of showmanship. They have got all sorts of things that they do, and yet they are not telling you the truth. They are deceptive and they do not practise righteousness, they are just after your money. They are just after your approval, they are just after applause. So, whoever practises righteousness is righteous, whoever makes a practise of sinning is of the devil.

Some people are of the devil. Jesus called the Pharisees sons of the devil and murderers from the beginning, their hearts were so full of hate and rage. There are some people who are children of the devil. And those children of the devil are always sinning, they are always rebelling against God. They are always full of anger and rage, and they keep on sinning again and again and again. So, the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. So, God wants to destroy the sinful people and their practises.

No one of God makes a practise of sinning. Why is that? Because once God comes into your heart, comes into your mind, takes over your life, you do not want to sin any more. You might sin. You might stumble and fall and get hurt and say some bad words or this or that and the other. You might occasionally be tempted and fall into sin, but you hate it. You do not want to make a practise of it. You want to run back to God quickly and repent and be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

It says that in I John, chapter one, it talks about if we do sin, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ, the righteous, and His blood cleanses us from all iniquity. So, you can go back to Jesus and get put right. But the person who loves God does not want to keep on sinning. Why? Because he has been born of God. We have a new nature, were born again. We have been born of God, were not born of the devil, were born from heaven. And that is the way we want to go forward. So, a righteous life style is absolutely critical to being a Christian. You cannot go around and be a Christian burglar. You cannot go around and steal from people's houses and say, Hey, I am a great Christian but I just support myself from stealing. That is obviously a contradiction in terms. Your lifestyle has to be a righteous lifestyle.

The next, then last test for this little episode of Insights for Eternity is the Holy Spirit. Does the person have the Holy Spirit in their heart and in their life, and in their mind? The Holy Spirit is given to us as soon as we are born again. It dwells in us, and our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit wants to lead us to do holy things and to love one another and to obey Christ's commandments. That is what the Holy Spirit is there for, to give us power to love people, power to be righteous, power to carry out the works of God.

I John 3:24, Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God and God in him. So, he is talking about obeying the commandments of God. And by this we know that He abides in us by the Spirit whom He has given us. So, one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to testify to you that Christ is in you. Christ is in your heart and in your mind, and is making you able to carry out the commandments of Jesus Christ, because the flesh cannot carry out the commandments of Jesus Christ. It is not able to do so. It is all in rebellion against God.

So, the flesh and the spirit are at war with one another. And if Christ dwells in us, we will be able to carry out the commandments of God, we will be able to overcome the flesh, we will be able to overcome our lust. And we will know that Christ is in us because the Holy Spirit, our anointing, who is given us from God, the Holy Spirit will testify to you that you are a son of God, and make it evident to you. And it will be evident to others through your obedience to the commandments of Jesus Christ. People will say, this person has a different spirit. They actually want to be righteous. They actually want to be good and they do not want to indulge their flesh all day and all night. They are not watching these things or doing these things. This person is different. They are following the commandments of Jesus Christ.

And the next thing about the Holy Spirit, I John, chapter four, verses 12 and 13. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. So, it says God is love and God wants to abide in you, He wants to dwell in you. He wants to make His home in you, He wants to be perfected in you. And how do we know that God abides in us? Because the Holy Spirit will testify to us that Christ is present, that God is dwelling in us and through us.

And so the love we have for one another, it does not come from our own flesh. It comes from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit who produces love in us. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness and self control. And you want to draw on the Holy Spirit in your life. If you are lacking a spiritual quality, just go to God and say I believe I am receiving the spiritual qualities I need right now to be obedient to you. You can say I believe I am receiving the love of God for my friends and family. Or, I believe I am receiving peace from God in the midst of my circumstances. You just believe, receive and pray for the things that you need from the heavenly realms. And God will be with you and God will bless you. And God will strengthen you. And this is what a true Christian does. The true Christian is full of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is filling them with the fruit of the spirit, enabling them to obey the commandments of Jesus Christ, allowing them to be righteous, allowing them to love one another.

Okay, let's go back through the four tests that we have gone through today. Just a little bit of revision here. Number one test of a true or a false Christian. A true Christian has fellowship with the saints and stays in the true doctrine of the church, being the New Testament, the Apostles' creed, the Nicene Creed and the formula of Chalcedon. They stay within the traditional teaching of the church, do not go out setting up other churches and denominations. But they stay with the Bible and they do not add anything to the Bible. And they like and love their Christian brothers and sisters. They have fellowship with the saints.

Number two characteristic of a true Christian is the true Christian has agape love. They love their brothers and sisters. They love their pastors, their elders, their church. They love the people that God has placed them with and they have agape love in their heart. And whoever loves abides in God. Whoever does not love abides in death. So, we have to love, he who hates abides in death. But he who loves abides in eternal life. You really need to have a choice in your life between living by hate and living by love. And you are a true Christian if you decide to live by agape love.

Number three test is a righteous lifestyle. A false Christian has a wicked lifestyle. A true Christian has a righteous lifestyle. A true Christian does not just keep on sinning. They repent. They get their act together, they go on forward. So, one of the tests of a true Christian is a righteous lifestyle, but the test of a false Christian is a consistently false and wicked lifestyle.

And finally, the presence of the Holy Spirit. A true Christian has the presence of the Holy Spirit. They have the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, meekness and self control, they are present. But the false Christian does not have the fruit of the spirit. They just have religious language. And we know we abide in God, if we have His Spirit.

Fellowship with the saints. Agape love. Righteous lifestyle. The presence of the Holy Spirit. These are the test of a true Christian believer. I hope you have taken some notes.

3. What Is Spiritual Deception?

We are continuing our series on spiritual deception and spiritual discernment, particularly for those in the ministry. And today we will be looking at the topic of spiritual deception, how we can figure out where we are being conned by false prophets, false teachers, false pastors and all the rest. So, tune in for this fascinating topic. And before we do that, let's pray, Father in heaven, we pray that you will anoint your word with power and wisdom and grace. Open our spiritual eyes and spiritual ears that we might understand wonders from your holy word.

Okay, The first passage we are going to look at today is from Matthew, chapter seven, verses 15 to 23. And it says, beware of false prophets. That is something we have got to do. We have got to be very cautious. They are around. We have got to be on our guard against them. Okay, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognise them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognise them by their fruits.

And I kind of disagree with the translation of diseased and healthy. It says, any bad tree. It is an evil tree. They are talking about onerous evil trees. And there are evil trees planted in the garden of God that were planted there by the devil. The evil weed. Evil tares planted among God's wheat. There are people that are just plain nasty, toxic and controlling. And how do we discern them? We discern them by their fruits.

What is the outcome? What do they do to people? Do they make them work for them for free? Do they take control of their mind, their heart and their family? Do they control everything about people's lives? If someone says, Oh, no, when you join our church, you have to no longer see your relatives. Or when you join our church, you have to cut off all those associations. If you join our church, you have to stop this. Stop this. Stop that. And they control your feelings, your emotions, your behaviour, your access to information.

If they start controlling every aspect of your life and you suddenly see the pastor has got this big flashy car or this fancy Rolex watch or things like that, and the congregation are not doing well at all. The congregation are just hoping that God sends them a blessing. No blessing is arriving, and people's lives are all messed up. The pastor is running around with strange women, and doing this and doing that, or behaving in obscene ways, or doing strange things with the parishioners, then you know that is bad fruits.

What are the good fruits? Love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, self control. They are the good fruits, And if the pastor is showing those, or the congregation is showing those, and they are all growing together, then that is good. That is a healthy church. They love one another. They love the Bible. They love the Lord.

But if the congregation has all sorts of strange things going on and it is fanatical and it is bizarre, then you can say, Oh, dear, this does not smell right. This does not look good. Something strange and evil is going on here. These poor people, they are being exploited, they are being trapped. And because the pastor, the preacher, the false prophet, the Apostle, whoever is actually just devouring them, he is

taking their money. He is taking the relationships. He might be sleeping with some women or even with men in the congregation, and we know, oh, this is wrong. This is not a good thing.

So, you have got to look and say, What is the outcome? What is the fruit? Is this working or is this really just strange? And you have some pastors behave in strange ways. They ride around on the back of their parishioners. Or they all have bodyguards, or they have strange things happening during the services, and you think this does not sound right? This is not what the God of Order would do. So, you have got to look. What is the fruit? What is their life? What is the behaviour? What is the outcome? Do they have any criminal associations? Are they involved with corrupt and dangerous people, are they involved with corrupt politicians? What is going on? Are they greedy? Just be careful. Be careful about the people that you listen to.

The next Bible verses, a continuation of that, Matthew, chapter seven. It says not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. So, here these people running around doing mighty miracles and prophesying and doing all these signs and wonders. But actually they are from the devil. And in the next broadcast will learn all about that, the false miracles in the end times.

Now I am charismatic, Pentecostal. I do believe in speaking in tongues, I do believe in exorcism. I do believe in healing. I do believe in miracles, but I also believe there are counterfeits out there. There are occult counterfeits to these things, and there are some people doing mighty works, but they are not proclaiming the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ at all. They are fake, they are full of lawlessness, and their lives are full of sexual fornication. Or their lives are full of greed and adultery or they are sensual. They drag people into the sensuality of the things they do. They are very worldly in the way they live, they are not sanctified. They are not set apart. They are not living the holy life that we expect of Christian believers, and which is outlined by particularly by the apostle Paul, and his expectations of people, to live a holy and blameless life in the love of God.

So, if the person is doing all these signs and wonders and miracles, but they are not living a holy life, they are living anything but a holy life. Then you need to be very, very suspicious of what they are saying and what they are doing. So, look at these false miracle workers, and we will do a lot more on that in the last one. Are they really adding up? Are they really doing the right thing, the right way? And it says here that the one God wants is the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

What is the will of God? Back in the last series, on the one another commands, love one another. Forgive one another. Encourage one another. Instruct one another. That is the will of God. God's will is that you love your neighbour as yourself. And if you are unloving, if you are angry, if you are bitter, okay, that is outside of the will of God.

And it is outside of the will of God for these people to be greedy, and to be exploiting the congregation. So, you have got to look at them. He said, the Lord Jesus Christ called some workers of iniquity. These false apostles, false prophets, et cetera. They are not doing God's will. They are doing their own will, and they are doing the will of the devil. They are tricking people and they are exploiting people.

So, you have got to be very careful about who you listen to. You have got to watch them, and maybe they are a fake. Maybe they are doing fake miracles, even. Maybe they are using juju or magic or the occult to do these things instead of being really plugged into God. They are not talking about Jesus. They are not talking about Holiness. They are not talking about the Bible. They are doing fake miracles, so we have to be very cautious.

And the next Bible verse we are looking at is Matthew 24. And it starts off, and Jesus answered them. See that no one leads you astray. Whoa, that is powerful. Who was He talking to here? He is talking to the 12. He is talking to the apostles. He is saying, Do not be led astray. And He is talking to the top people in the Christian Church, because deception can lay hold of any of us, all of us. Spiritual deception is very powerful. The devil is very cunning. He wants to lead you astray from the faith.

So, here in the end times dialogue here, this thing of Matthew 24 and Matthew 25. He is up there and He is on the Mount of Olives and He is talking to the disciples directly about what the end times are going to be like, and many false prophets and false Christs will appear. And He is warning even the apostles. He is warning the apostles not to be led astray.

Lets look at this fascinating passage, do not be led astray. And Jesus answered them. And He says, See that no one leads you astray for many will come in My name and say I am the Christ, and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars....

And just lets pause there, many astray, you go back to the last one in Matthew, it says many will come to me on that day. "Lord Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?" This is a lot of people. The word many in both of these verses means a majority. A large number, an overwhelming number of people will come and say, "Lord, Lord, didn't we do these miracles in your name?" in this case, and in Matthew 24 they will be saying, "Oh, but we believe this person. We believe that," they will lead astray many. Not just one or two people. Many people, maybe even a majority of the Christian world will be led astray by the end times deceptions, and we are seeing this with the prosperity gospel in Africa and around the world. It is leading many astray, false signs, false wonders, greed and sensuality. Many Christians are being led away from the purity of the faith, and not just one or two.

It is very compelling. It plays to our deepest instincts, needs for survival. Many, many people are being led astray. It says, saying I am the Christ and they will lead many astray, and you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. And at the moment Russia, Ukraine, China, Taiwan, all the rest they are all boiling away. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pangs. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.

So, there is going to be a huge apostasy, this word many means the majority, the majority of the Christian Church, will abandon Christ to fall away and betray one another and hate one another because of social pressure. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. Many, many, many fall away, many false prophets, many led astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will go cold because sin kills love. But the one who endures to the end will be saved, and this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. And

then the end will come. And so we are close to the gospel being proclaimed to all nations. We have been working at it for 2000 years, and the Gospel has gone out to a large chunk of the world.

But let's go back to this deception. The level of deception is going to come in these last times. Many get led astray, many false prophets arrive. Many betray one another and hate one another, and many are judged on judgement day, and in the previous verse it says, will be cast into the lake of fire, saying, Depart from me, you workers of iniquity.

This is not a small problem. It is a big problem. Spiritual deception is a huge problem that is affecting the church now, and will affect the church even more as we head into the tribulation. As we head into the end times, as we head towards the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil is at work. He is very hard at work, sending out demons to deceive people, and cause the church all sorts of trouble. And one of the big problems in this thing and the previous thing is the spirit of lawlessness. The spirit of lawlessness wants us to rebel against the commandments of God, particularly in the sexual area. It says, no, you do not need to do that. You do not need to wait till marriage. You just go ahead and have sex now. You go have sex with your neighbour, or go have sex with this person or that person. And it leads people into fornication, into adultery and all kinds of sexual lifestyles that God hates.

And people want sexual freedom. They want to just sleep with whoever they want. It is part of base, sinful human nature, and they want to be greedy and they want to accumulate things to themselves. And they want to be selfish. And eventually the love of many will grow cold. Their love comes to nothing. They become selfish, hardhearted, cold people. And we see a lot of that in the United States here, where love has just vanished. And parents hate children and children hate parents, and brothers hate sisters and sisters hate brothers. The love of many has grown cold because they are pursuing their own destiny. They are pursuing their own way through life. They have been deceived of the devil.

And spirits of lawlessness are raging through the United States at the moment, people do not want to obey God. They do not want to obey their parents. They do not want to obey society. They want to have their own way, no matter what. And if you point out something sensible for them to do, like we are in the middle of Covid, wear a mask, get vaccinated, they say, "No, no, no, I will not do that." And they have got all these excuses why they want to be lawless and they want to be running around doing their own thing.

And recently I went into a little store. I am out in a rural area, went into a little gun store here. And in that gun store, they had all these rebel flags, these Confederate flags, and all these angry looking men going around buying guns. And they refused to serve me because I was wearing a mask. And I was because we are in the middle of Covid here and I am older. And they refused to serve me, and they were obviously very angry, lawless people accumulating weapons for themselves, in the spirit of lawlessness. The spirit of lawlessness had got hold of them. They had no intention of ever obeying the government. They were going to resist the government. They were full of lawlessness. And they were very, it was very scary. I was not there for very long, but they were obviously not loving people. They were obviously very angry people because the spirit of lawlessness had laid hold of them.

And the spirit of lawlessness takes many forms. You will find that people with extreme sexual lifestyles, they want to go and pursue their extreme sexual lifestyles, they will hate Christians. They will hate anything to do with God. I am going to do this my way, and the spirit of lawlessness rebels against every kind of commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ, even the most reasonable ones. And it puts stinginess. It

puts anger. It puts rebellion. And this spirit of lawlessness is creeping in everywhere, into spiritual deception, into churches everywhere. And Satan is trying to drag believers out of the Holy Spirit, out of sanctification, and into all kinds of sin. Financial sin, sexual sin, aggression, murder, rape, all kinds of things. The devil is trying to say, "All these things are okay because you have got to have it your way." And that is the spread of lawlessness, and it is very, very dangerous.

Okay, let's go along a little bit further in Matthew, chapter 24. Let's have a look at what it says here. Then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ or there He is, do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. And remember, He is talking to the apostles here. See, I have told you beforehand, so if they say to you, "Look, He is in the wilderness," do not go out. If they say, "Look, He is in the inner rooms." Do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the East and shines as far as the West. So will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

And so, what Jesus is saying is that the end times will be very sudden. They will be very bright, they will not be all, "You have to go over here or over there." They will be obvious. And all these false Christs, these false messiahs and false prophets, they make false claims about themselves. "Aha. Over here. That is where the new Messiah is, He is in Timbuktu. He is in Jakarta, He is in New York," wherever, and they make claims that you have got to go to this Ashram. You have got to go to this person. You have got to join this community and follow this false Christ and this false messiah. And people get sucked into these false religions and you cannot budge them out of it. They get, they get very much dragged into it.

I have got a dear friend at the moment who seems to be sucked into one particular group in Texas. And you cannot persuade this person that this group is wrong and if you start doing it, they do not even see it. They have been spiritually deceived by a group that is not following the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, when someone says the Messiah is here, or the great teacher is there, or the prophet is over there, do not believe them. Wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and stick with the Bible. Go to the Lord and say, "Lord, show me from your Bible whether this is true or whether this is false." And God will show you who the false teachers are. The Holy Spirit will tell you, if you have a as a new Christian, you picked up something from the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons, and the Holy Spirit was almost like an electric shock says "Put that down. That is no good. That is junk. Do not deal with that." And the Holy Spirit will warn you of these people, and you have to listen to God, and you have to run away from sin, and you have to run away from deception.

And deception is powerful. It says to lead astray, even if possible, the elect. So, these false signs, these false wonders, which we will talk about in the next broadcast, will be so powerful, the deception will be so great, and the pressure of 666 and the mark of the beast and everything will be so great. Remember the Book of Revelation, one of the three, you have the beast and the false prophet. And the false prophet goes around getting people to, you have the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. So, the dragon empowers the beast. And the false prophet, is the one that points to the beast. It says that this is the real Messiah. This is Go and worship him. Go and worship the image of the beast, which is set up in Babylon, or whatever Babylon is like back then, or rather ahead. And the false prophet gets everyone to take the mark of the beast. The 666 and the beast is forcing everyone to take the mark there. And revelation 14, it says that you go to hell. You burn in a lake of fire, if you take the mark of the beast, you must not do that.

But the deception will be so powerful. It is small and great, and everybody is forced into this mark of the beast. It will be a powerful deception. We will have to resist it, and it will even threaten mature Christians. It will threaten the elect. But the elect will survive because God will send angels to help them to resist the mark of the beast and resist these powerful end times deceptions.

So, you have to be prepared for powerful pressure, persecution, deception, lies, false miracles. And you have to go and say, Lord, is this of you? Lord, is this of you? And let's go to the last verse. We are going to be looking at today a verse about false apostles, and we will come back to it a couple of times in this series. Two Corinthians Chapter 11 verses 13 to 15, for such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So, it is no surprise that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

And so you have these very deceptive people going out even as false apostles, not just false teachers, but they are going out there creating movements after themselves in their name, just like apostles do. But these are satanic movements, they are deceptive movements, they are apostles, but they are not apostles. They are not apostles of Christ. They say they are of Christ, but in fact they are of the devil. And it says, and no wonder for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So, when the devil appears, he does not appear to people with a horn and tail. He appears to them as enlightenment. He appears to them as an angel of light.

And we know that one major religion was founded by someone who an angel of light appeared to and started dictating things to. This person wrote it down, and a major religion was established as a result. And many people have claimed like that angel has appeared to them with golden tablets or this or that. And then, no sign of the golden tablets, no sign of the angel. But these people were deceived. Angels can appear, but they are false angels, remember there are fallen angels and true angels.

But the devil disguises himself as an angel of light or a means of enlightenment, he says. You are enlightened now. You do not need to follow all these commandments in the Bible. You are enlightened. You can go off and you can commit adultery. Or you can be greedy. You can learn the ways of the world and become richer. You can cheat people and lie to people, they are all suckers. And he will to give you a false feeling of enlightenment. Because now you are beyond law. You are beyond all those rules and regulations, and the devil will lead you astray into all sorts of sin and lawlessness and licentiousness.

And that is what the devil does. He disguises himself as an angel of light and to lead people astray. So, this powerful spiritual deception going on, and you could be vulnerable. You can be emotionally tired, worn out. You can feel that your marriage or your business is failing. That life is not good. And just when you are feeling that God has abandoned you, then the devil will turn up with a proposition, an evil proposition. It might be a proposition to commit adultery. It might be to cheat, to lie, it might be to join a religious group that is fake, and the devil will pick you off in your moment of weakness, which is why you need to stay in Christian fellowship.

So, what are we learning today? What are we learning from these five major Bible passages? What we are learning is that we have to be super careful about our walk with God. We have to beware of false teachers. We have to be aware of people who are wolves in sheep's clothing. Outwardly, they look great, but inwardly, their motivation is ravenous. They want to devour the believers. And we saw the

wolves in sheep's clothing in Matthew chapter seven. And we said, Okay, we have to look at their fruit, whether they are good fruit or bad fruit.

And the next thing is, continuing down there in Matthew seven, is the workers of iniquity, the people who do false miracles. But they get cast into hell. They are using the name of God in vain because their lives are wicked and they are deceiving people, and they are doing false prophecy and false exorcism and things like that, because they are not doing the will of the Father. They are religious, but they are rebellious against the will of God. Religious but rebellious.

The next part in Matthew 24, as we get into that discourse, it says, see that no one leads you astray. It is your responsibility to not be led astray. You have got to switch your brain on. You have got to switch your mind on, see that no one lead you astray. For many will come in my name saying "I am the Christ," and they will lead many astray. Remember this passage? Many astray, many hate, many become cold in their love, and et cetera, et cetera. It tells us he who endures to the end will be saved. So, our job is to be wary. Do not be led astray, and then to endure to the end.

And we have got to realise that Satan is not playing a small game. He is playing a big game. He wants to take every single human being, including the elect, down to hell with him. He wants to take every human being down with him into the lake of fire. Do not be gullible. Do not be sucked into that lake of fire by the devil.

So, you have got to endure. You have got to wait for the tribulation and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. And God will rescue you from these deceptions. God will send His angels to help you, He will send the Holy Spirit to help you, so you are not consumed by these overwhelming deceptions.

Next passage, continuing in Matthew 24. As He says, Do not believe it. Therefore, if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ or there He is." Do not believe it. Be skeptical. Do not believe everyone. God tells you, do not believe it. Do not believe it. Do not believe it. Look, watch, be careful. Do not believe every single person who claims this or claims that. Be wise. Beware of men. Beware of trickery. And Jesus will come. He will be very obvious, very evident on the last day.

And finally, we had that warning about false apostles. There are people out there pretending to be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, pretending to be holy, pretending to be good, giving themselves big titles, calling themselves bishops, archbishops, apostles, prophets, whatever the more titles, the more suspicious. And they are calling themselves these mighty things and setting up what appeared to be mighty ministries. There is a smell about it. There is something wrong. They are actually servants of Satan, actually serving an angel of light, which is not a true angel of light. It is a false angel of light. It is the devil disguised in that angel of light, and they are disguising themselves as workers of righteousness when they do not do anything righteous at all, they just talk and talk and talk and talk. And they make up big stories and make up big claims and say they have been to heaven, or this or that or the other.

And always the end is that you can do what you like. You can sin as much as you like, because the devil wants you to believe that you can just keep on sinning. And that is not what Jesus says at all. He does not want you to be a worker of iniquity. He does not want the spirit of lawlessness to lay hold of your life. You must walk righteous in the Lord Jesus Christ. Stay close to Jesus, believe in Jesus, love one another, be filled with the Holy Spirit, work works of righteousness in the earth and do the good works that God has appointed beforehand for you to do.

Remember the tests that we saw in I John, the test of faith in Jesus, that He came in the flesh, that He is risen from the dead, and all those kind of tests, that He is the son of God, but also the three tests of love, righteousness and the Holy Spirit. Are people walking in love? Are they walking in righteousness or in wickedness? And do they have the presence of the Holy Spirit or of another spirit, a spirit of iniquity? So, they are the tests that you need to apply when you are looking at someone on YouTube or someone who is coming to your church. And next week we will look a lot more at the issue of false miracles in the end times and the powerful deception that will take over the earth.

4. False Miracles in The End Times

We are working through our series on spiritual discernment for pastors and Christian workers, and we are looking at how to distinguish true from false. And today's session will be about false miracles in the end times, and I will explain that to you as we go along, and how that can happen. Before we get into today's lesson, today's teaching, you need to grab your pens and your notebooks and your Bible. So, I think it would be great to take some notes, and also just let us pray. Father in heaven, we ask your blessing on today's broadcast. We ask that you will spiritually protect this broadcast as it goes out, that it will be clear to all who listen. It will open hearts and minds, and help pastors all over the world to discern between true and false. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay. What are the false miracles in the end times, and how do they happen? First, before we even get to that, we have to decide what is false. What does false mean in spiritual terms? Well, false in spiritual terms refers to false spiritual systems such as idolatry, witchcraft, magic, divination, juju, horoscopes, all those kind of things, they are false. Because they point away from Christ to the false powers that Satan instituted when he fell from heaven.

And so, before we can even understand what the word false means, I am going to have to give you a bit of biblical spiritual history. As we all know, Satan rebelled against God, and was cast out of heaven with a third of His angels. He was a worship leader in heaven, but he also engaged in much false trade and dishonesty. And that is what it says in Ezekiel 28. He was cast out because of his treachery, his dishonesty, his shrewd dealings, and he was basically ripping off heaven, it seems. He was in the abundance of his trade, so he has always been into money, into trade, into wheeling, into dealing, into greed, into conniving. Ever since the beginning, he has been a liar, and he is the son of lies. He is the father of lies, a murderer since the beginning.

So, that is what he is up to. He is up to doing evil, no good things. And he took a third of the angels with him, and he was cast from the third heaven out into the second heaven. And that is where he set up the religious systems of the world. The idols such as Zeus and Asteroth and all the idols we hear about in the Bible, the false systems, of Thor in the movies, that all those things that they had, and have been worshipped around the world. They were set up, and they were a copy of the things in heaven but without the true power. So, we know that there is a temple in heaven and all these kinds of things. Well, he copied that system, and so it was like the Jewish system, but completely different.

So, the Jewish system had a temple, so Satan invented a temple, and the Jewish system had priests. So, Satan set up priests of Zeus and Asteroth and Baal and all the rest. So, he copied the Jewish system. And there were sacrifices. So, the devil had sacrifices to give power, and ceremonies, but his sacrifices were of human beings. There were children going through the fire. There were abominations done, and all sorts of sexual immorality as well, especially in the Greek temples, and the temples of Baal there would be all sorts of prostitutes running around and having sex with the worshippers. And they led people into abominations. They led people into terrible levels of sin and destruction of their personal lives.

And so these systems continued, and the gospel went around the world and many of these systems were destroyed. And eventually Satan's spiritual systems are going to collapse. And that is going to happen when Michael wins the battle against the angels of Satan in the second heaven, and Satan is cast down to earth. We find that in Revelation 12. But there was a significant defeat at the cross. So, at the

cross, Satan was cast out from the second heaven to the first heaven. And at the moment he is in the first heaven, and he is the prince of the power of the air, according to Ephesians. So, I think it is in Ephesians, chapter two verse one. He is called the Prince of the Power of the Air.

So, he is leading the rebellion. He is causing people to be hostile in mind and nature towards God. He is getting into the world systems, the media, Hollywood, and is causing people to have minds that are hostile towards God, and leading people into sin and rebellion. So that people are imprisoned by demonic spirits into false ways of thinking. And every high thought and rebellious thought against God has a demonic origin, could be in Freemasons. It can be in a religious cult. It could be Jehovah's Witnesses. Could be Mormons. It can be all sorts of New Age junk. It is all raised up by the devil against God. He wants to deceive us.

Why does Satan want to deceive the nations? Why does he wanted to deceive the kings? He deceives the kings in different ways. He deceives them with glory and money and power. The kings say, this is the way to wealth, this is the way to get elected. This is the way to get this and that, I have to go and make a sacrifice in the forest to this man or to this God or whatever. And so they get into one of Satan's systems, and Satan temporarily promotes them and then destroys them. So, in their lust for money, power, sex, people make a deal with the devil and fall into his power. Now it works for a little while. But then they are destroyed, they end up in the lake of fire prepared for the devil and all his angels.

Now, the ultimate thing that the devil wants is to win the battle of Armageddon. He is going to go to war against God. He is going to go to war against the return of Jesus Christ. He thinks he is going to stop the return of Jesus Christ. And at the Battle of Armageddon, he goes to war against God. He persecutes the saints. He wipes out the Christians on the face of the earth. So, there are none left. By the time of the Battle of Armageddon, they have all been raptured or killed, and by that time there are no Christians left on the earth, the Saints are there at the glorious throne.

And we get to the battle of Armageddon and we get to the final plagues in Revelation 16, and we are all done. We are all out of the way, and he thinks he has won the game. He thinks he has got it all sewn up. And there is no way that the true worship of God will ever be established on Earth. Earth is his. His Antichrist is in place. This beast, his false prophet are in place, and they control everything. They have got the 666 system going. Everything is working like a machine to keep things under the complete control of the devil. And anyone who argues with the beast is killed. Anyone who does not worship his image is killed. The system is absolutely totalitarian, and he is deceiving the world. He gets these people to accept the mark of the beast. If they do, they are thrown into the lake of fire when they die, and they are tormented forever and ever.

So, it is the aim of the devil to set up this totalitarian system, which he will rule over the whole world and annihilate all the Christians, stop the true worship of God, stop the worship of Jesus, so this earth will totally belong to him. But it is not going to work. Because Jesus is going to return and wipe him out and cast him into the lake of fire. His time will be short, but the devil wants to deceive everyone, and one way he deceives everybody is with false miracles. And three frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. And these three frogs go throughout the earth, performing false miracles to deceive, especially the leaders of the world, into believing that the Beast is the true leader of the world, that he has divine power. And particularly the false prophet sets this system up. So, false miracles in the end times, they are a very important way that the devil takes control of the world. And one of the main ways that the devil takes control of the world, and it is seen again and again, in

Revelation and nine times throughout the Bible, that these false miracles are seen as the way the devil finally deceives everyone into obeying him.

So, this is a very important study and you need to start looking at the verses. We will get into the verses now. Matthew 7:21 to 23. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But the one who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven. On that day, that is the day of judgement, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." So, what is going on here? What is a worker of Lawlessness? A worker of lawlessness is someone that does evil and encourages other people to do evil. So, these false teachers, these false people are encouraging people to worship idols, follow the beast, commit sexual immorality, be greedy, and disobey the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, they appear to be doing miracles. They appear to be casting out demons, but in fact they are false. Why are they false? Because they are leading people towards falsehood. They are leading people towards idols, witchcraft, idolatry and especially towards the worship of the dragon, who is now part of the system of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet.

So, the image of the beast has been worshipped, which is really empowered by the dragon. And so it is the worship of Satan. They are leading people towards the worship of Satan through false miracles. And those people, there will be many of them. It says a very large number. The word many often means a majority. A huge number will be there on the day of judgement, saying, I did all these miracles and Jesus will say, "No, I never knew you, you were never of me. You worked lawlessness. You disobeyed my commands. You had spiritual power. But it was false spiritual power."

Is there such a thing as false spiritual power? Well, two Corinthians 11 tells us about false Christs, false apostles, and a false holy spirit. So, yes, Satan imitates whatever is done in the heavenly realms. And yet he does it in a way that leads people away from the true Jesus Christ, away from being born again, away from living holy. In Matthew 24, verse 24, this is what it says: for false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. So, here in the book of Matthew, Jesus is saying, there will be false Christs. There will be false prophets, and they will do great signs and wonders to deceive the Christian Church, not only the Christian Church, but the leaders of the world and the people of the world, to go and worship the image of the beast. And there will be tremendous pressure on people, saying, that that person has got to be of God, because they are doing these great signs and wonders. But the great signs and wonders will not point to Jesus.

So, they will be false signs and wonders. They might happen. The person might be healed, so the money might be provided, or a great miracle might happen. A mountain even might be moved, and it talks about fire coming down from heaven in the presence of all, great and mighty signs and wonders. But they are false because they are pointing to the devil. They are asking people to obey occult instructions. And so these signs and wonders will be pointing away from Jesus instead of to Jesus, and so they will be ultimately false. They will be pointing towards Babylon towards the world system, towards the image of the beast and everything else. So, you have got to beware.

Now are there true signs and wonders? Absolutely. And the Bible is full of true signs and wonders, but it also warns us about false signs and wonders. Mark 13:22 is a bit the same, for false Christs, and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect. Here the same thing that the devil is trying to deceive the church.

Okay, now let's go to two Thessalonians 2:8 to 12. It is a bit longer passage, and it gives us an idea of the context. Two Thessalonians 2:8 to 12, and then the lawless one will be revealed, that is the Antichrist, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion so that they may believe what is false in order they may be condemned, who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Look at that. You see, people do not love the truth, they had pleasure in unrighteousness. In other words, they are having pleasure in drugs and sexual immorality, and cheating and lying, and stealing from widows and being con artists and everything else. These people have pleasure in doing wrong things. And so Satan comes along with these false miracles, signs and wonders and deceives them and drags them off. And later they are cast into hell for receiving the mark of the beast, receiving the 666, and they are tormented forever and ever. That is a terrible, terrible fate. But this is a strong delusion.

So, false signs, false wonders, false miracles, they trick these people who love to sin. So, people love to sin. They will follow after spiritual leaders that allow them to sin and encourage them to sin, and say, "Oh, sin is okay, just drop some money in the plate along here. And by the way, to confirm that I am a true spiritual leader, here is a false sign and the false wonder just to keep you gullible suckers in line."

So, the coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders. It will be a time of display of phenomenal spiritual power. So, spiritual power is not necessarily a sign of God Himself. It can be a sign of the devil turning up with magic and juju and all sorts of tricks. So, the devil is reserving a lot of his power for the end times for this final battle of Armageddon that he has to win to have control of this planet. And so he is getting more and more spiritual power as more and more people sin, as more and more evil is done in the world, more and more wickedness in high places. He is gathering the power he needs to do the false signs and wonders, so he can deceive the people of God and destroy them. So, the coming of Satan will not just be with red demons running around with horns and a spear. It will be in false signs and wonders. It will pretend to be Christianity. But it will be false Christianity and it will be idolatry. And we have got to be very, very careful of these false signs and wonders in the end times.

Now what happens in the end? This lawless one is slain with the breath of His mouth and brought to nothing by the appearance of His coming. So, Jesus comes. He comes in glory and power, and suddenly the Antichrist is nothing, he is a nobody. He has dominated the world. He has taken it over. He is killing people left, right and centre, he is absolutely terrifying. Then Jesus appears and he becomes nothing. He is slain, he is destroyed. All his power is temporary. We do not need to be afraid of it. We need to worship God. We need to walk in righteousness. We need to walk in truth. And even if we are slain, even if we are martyred, even if we go up to be at the heavenly throne and wear the white robes, that is fine. Because Jesus is coming back, and when Jesus comes back, we will come back with Him, and rule and reign with Him for 1000 years. But the Antichrist and those who follow him will be cast into the pit, cast into the lake of fire, and they will be destroyed forever and ever. So, do not be one of them.

Let's look at Revelation. Now we will get to the Book of Revelation, Chapter 13, 11 to 15. Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first

beast whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people. And by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on Earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast. So, the image of the beast might even speak, and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

Okay, this is the false prophet who has horns of a lamb but speaks like a dragon, and has tremendous authority. And its job is to make people worship the beast and to bow down to the image of the beast. And it has so much power that it can even cause fire to fall from heaven. Now, in the history of the Christian Church, no one calls down fire from heaven. It is not something we do. And when the disciples said they wanted to call down fire from heaven, Jesus rebuked them and said, You do not know what spirit ye are of. So, we are not to kill people in the name of God. We are not to call down fire from heaven and zap this city or that in the name of God, that is a demonic thing. When people say they can run around calling down fire from heaven, they have that kind of authority that belongs to the Antichrist. That is the wrong spirit. Were not to act like that.

So, great signs and wonders will come forth from the false prophet. Of course, the false prophet eventually ends up in the lake of fire. And so these great signs deceive people, and this false prophet has one job and that is to make people worship the image of the beast, which, of course, is a representative of Satan. Now the power is given to it to come alive, to breathe. That sounds a lot like some perverse form of deep artificial intelligence or robotics or something like that. I do not know. I am just speculating, but it also has a spiritual dimension. This image will be very massive, very dark. It will have a spiritual presence about it that is awesome and terrible, and people will just automatically fall down before it, hypnotized by the great power. And if someone does not worship the image of the beast, they will be killed on the spot. This will be a terrifying end times regime, and we are to flee at the sight of it. We are to trust ourselves to God at that time.

Let's go on to Revelation chapter 16, verses 13 and 14, and I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like frogs. For they had demonic spirits, performing signs to go abroad to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

So, they are demonic spirits, performing signs, so demons can perform signs. They can perform signs and wonders. And we see this in some places where there is very deep magic. There was a person in India who can make it rain and other such things. These were demons performing signs. Now, in the end times the demons will seem to be given extra power, more power than they have now, and they will go out.

And their job is not just to deceive everybody. That was the false prophet. These three frogs go out to the leaders of the Earth to trick them, to follow the beast so and give their power the beast so that they prepare all the leaders of the world. The rich people, the billionaires, the people that we would call kings now, though very few kings are left. They take the leaders of the world and they deceive them and say, Okay, let's get ready. Let's get their nuclear weapons ready. Let's get this ready. Let's get that ready, for the battle against the Lord Jesus Christ. They want to get every part of this world ready for the battle of the great day of God Almighty.

They know the battle is coming. They know God is going to come with Jesus Christ. They know that they are going to have to resist Jesus. But it is going to be a military battle, and they are going to have to have every king on Earth and they are going to surround Jerusalem. They are going to do this, and they are going to do that. And they are going to say we are going to wipe out Christians, we are going to wipe out especially Jewish Christians from the face of the Earth. They are going to erase any trace of the Bible. They will erase any trace of God, of the Jews, of the Christians, of the prophecies of the Bible, so this world could be taken over by evil, greedy people running all the things that they do in Babylon.

So, they want evil, greedy, wicked people. And they think, "When this is all done, the devil is going to give me charge of this, that and the other, and my dynasty, my family, will run the Earth for 1000 years, 2000 years. Our family will run the Earth." And they will be thinking of themselves, their glory and their power. They will look at these false miracles done by these demonic frogs, and they will be hypnotized. They will say, "Goodness, this is so powerful. Well, we want to be part of this." And these are demons performing signs and wonders. So, it is not just God that can do signs and wonders. There is also demonic power out there, and it can do this, and it can destroy you.

It can destroy your family, which is why you do not want to have idols in your house, or you do not want to have magic books in your house. You do not want to have negative things in your house that are going to attract demons to your house or your property. You want to be free of that. You want to burn all that rubbish. You want to have nothing around you that the demons can act through. So, you want to be free of all demonic activity in your house, in your mind and in your heart.

The final verse we will be looking at is, and the beast was captured and with it the false prophet who, in his presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. The two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur.

So, these people are captured and they are destroyed. And they are thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. So, where did the false miracles lead? The false miracles are false because they deceive those who receive the mark of the beast. And those with the mark of the beast we find in Revelation 14 are cast into the lake of fire and tormented forever and ever. So, why are the miracles false? Because they lead to falsehood. They lead to hell. They lead straight to the lake of fire. And those who accept these false miracles are the ones that are destroyed eternally, forever and ever.

So, that leads us to the question, how can we tell a false miracle from a true miracle? Well, a true miracle glorifies God, the creator God of Heaven and Earth, and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and leads people towards holiness and obedience. If someone is doing miracles, but there is no call to holiness, to obedience or to faith in Jesus Christ, then we have to doubt that person. They can do miracles, and they can even ask people to pray a prayer. But praying a prayer is not the same as exhorting them to live holy, to live truthfully, and to walk in an in-corrup lifestyle, to walk in righteousness, so that they they are holy sexually, they are holy with their money, they are holy in the way they live their life, they are disciplined. They obey the commandments of Jesus Christ. They are gentle, kind, good and loving, and they are walking in the Spirit.

So, someone that is doing miracles should also preach holiness like the old fashioned Pentecostals did, and said, "We do not want you to get drunk. We do not want you to sleep with your boyfriend or your girlfriend. We do not want you to commit adultery. We do not want you to go into alternative sexual

lifestyles. We do not want you to worship idols. We do not want you to cheat and lie. We want you to work well at your work. We want you to be an honest, upright human being." That is a true miracle worker. Jesus did miracles, but He taught the sermon on the mount. He taught to turn the other cheek, to forgive people, to love your neighbour. So, a true miracle worker will turn you around and tell you, repent of your sins, repent of every sin in your life and go and love your neighbour, and go and do righteous things, because that is what God wants. They will point you towards the will of God. So, someone doing true miracles ought to preach holiness. If they do not preach holiness, be very skeptical about them and look at their lifestyle.

So, a false miracle worker will often have a false lifestyle. They will be very rich and greedy. They will sleep around with worship leaders and people like that. They will have eyes full of lust for the young girls in the congregation, or, even worse, that they will have other kinds of relationships, which we will not talk about here because they are too immoral to mention. And they will dwell in the midst of greed and perversion. Their mouths will be full of cursing and iniquity. They will always be attacking this person or that person in ministry, and there will be no righteousness in their souls whatsoever.

So, the false miracle worker will work with the activities of Satan. And they will point, not towards Christ, not towards holiness, not towards righteousness, not towards integrity, but they will point to lawlessness and iniquity. They will tell you it is okay to sin. God loves you anyway. Keep on doing this sin or that sin or whatever you want to sin. And we will not mention them too much here. But they will tell you to remain sinful. They will tell you that it is just okay and they will put whitewash over your wounds. They will encourage you to worship idols. They will say it is OK to experiment with ouija boards and alternative spirituality. They will tell you it is okay to go to the witch doctor, or to get involved in divination, or to look at chicken entrails, or to sacrifice chickens and goats to idols. They will tell you that all these things are okay, and they are not okay. They are wicked. They are lawless. They will live an unrestrained life.

They will do miracles by the power of demons, and those demons will inhabit them and they will give them an unusual appearance. Often, these people will have an unusual appearance. Bulging eyes, this kind of things. They will be hypnotic, and they will take away people's willpower. A genuine person, a genuine Christian, will leave you with your willpower. They will not try and manipulate you at all. They will let you make your own decisions in your life, because God always frees the will, and God always helps you to make up your own mind. But the manipulative people, the false miracle workers will always use high pressure tactics. They will push you for an extra offering. They will ask for huge amounts of money, like \$1000. They will tell wild stories and work up your emotions and use loud music and all kinds of things, and beating drums to overcome your mind and give you no chance to think.

So, you have just got to go along with their spiritual performance, and they will take you captive. And they will take you captive financially. They will take you captive in sin. They will take you captive in your mind and your heart so that you cannot think freely or question them at all. They will never allow questions. They will never allow any so called rebellion against their so called spiritual authority. Because they are false apostles, false Christs, false teachers of every kind. And you must not believe them.

So, when you see miracles, especially in this day and age, ask "Is this a false prophet? Was this a true prophet? Is this a false miracle worker or a true miracle worker?" Always compare them with Scripture. Always compare them with Christ. Always compare them with true apostles like Paul, who are prepared

to sacrifice for the gospel and suffer for the gospel, and not just run around in a Mercedes Benz. So, that is our little session on false miracles in the end times.

5. How Cults Manipulate People

We are working through our series on spiritual discernment. And today's topic is how cults convert people. Before we dive into today's topic. Let's pray, Father in heaven, we thank you for your grace upon our lives and we ask that your word and your truth will go forth with power today and we will be able to understand what you have prepared for us to hear. We pray this in Jesus' excellent name. Amen.

Well, we are going to look at some things that have come from studies of cults over the years. We will see maybe a little bit of the Bible, but a lot of the ways that people have studied how cults work, how cults draw people in and destroy them with manipulation, and how these cults set out to scam their members and take away their money or even use them sexually or even, in the end, kill them.

So, there are some terrible cults out there, and the book you might want to get if you are really going to get into this area is Steve Hassan's book *Combating Cult Mind Control*, *Combating Cult Mind Control*. And you see, it is not just the mind control it is spirit control. These cults use evil spirits, to take over the minds and the hearts of people. They make themselves vulnerable to the control of various evil spirits, wrong doctrines and false teachings. And the people become like zombies. They become controlled by wrong thoughts, wrong emotions and wrong behaviours. And they surrender themselves to be controlled by an evil person or by an evil organisation.

And the number one thing that cults do is they talk about submission to leadership. Leaders tend to be absolute. They call themselves apostles, prophets or Popes or huge titles like that, and they want to take control of people's lives, and you have to submit to the human leader. And that is one sign of a cult. And in some cults, they say that the leader is God or a representative of God, or God's representative on Earth, or especially anointed apostle. And the leader is a strong, controlling, manipulative person who demands submission even when things change, they say. Okay, these were the rules yesterday, but now these are the rules today. Submit to the new rules. And they can change the theology and they can make unreasonable demands of the people that belong to that particular organisation, saying they have to do this or that. And the more extreme that demands, the more power that the leader feels.

And the leader creates what we call a polarised world view. That means everyone inside the organisation is good and everyone outside the organisation is bad. So, they will say there is no other way to heaven except through Organisation X and everyone outside our organisation is worldly, bad, heretical, has the wrong doctrine, and so on and so forth. So, the good people are in and the bad people are out. And they create a wall around this organisation so that people are terribly afraid. I mean, a mental wall, a spiritual wall, so once someone is in they are afraid to leave Organisation X, or Church X, because to leave the organisation is to leave God and to leave salvation, and if they leave the organisation, they will be going to hell. At least that is what the organisation teaches. And that is a very controlling thing. You have got to stay in our church or our organisation or you will be doomed to eternal torment. And that is a terribly tough teaching. So, that is a polarised world view. The group is all that is good, and everything outside the group is bad.

Next thing that cults do is feeling over thought, feeling over thought. They say the emotions, intuitions, mystical insights are promoted as more important than rational conclusions. You are not allowed to logically question everything, you have to feel. You have to believe, you have to belong, your emotions, which are generated by the group, by the group leader, by the manipulative techniques, they become

absolute and thinking is actively discouraged. Critical thinking, reflective thinking even watching TV, reading books, that is actively discouraged, and emotion has to be everything, especially emotions of loyalty to the group, or loyalty to the group leader.

Fourthly, we find out about manipulation of feelings. Techniques are designed to stimulate emotions or create tension and release the tension, usually employing group dynamics. That is a manipulative psychology to influence the responses. And so they carefully think about how they are going to arrange the meetings, and how loud the music is going to be, and how intense it is going to be, and how repetitive it is going to be, so that people are lulled into a strong emotional state, a trance-like state, by which they could easily be controlled.

Denigration of critical thinking. We mentioned a bit about this earlier. This is point 5 of how cults convert people, denigration of critical thinking. They can go so far as to characterise any independent thought as selfish and rational use of intellect as evil. When I first became a Christian, I came out of doing some research in chemistry, and some people would say to me, belonging to these extreme groups, "You cannot be a Christian because you are a scientist." Now that is completely untrue. If you have got a good mind, you are supposed to use your good mind. You are supposed to be able to question doctrine. You are supposed to be able to look at the Bible verses for yourself. And when they say, "We control the Bible, you should not read the Bible. We will tell you what the Bible says. You should not think about the Bible. You are just to follow us. You are just to follow the leader." Then you know that you are in the wrong kind of group, and you need to get out. And you need to be able to use your mind, because critical thinking is something that God has given you. God has given you a sharp mind to be able to think, to write, to teach and to come to certain conclusions about life. So, if you are free and Christ sets you free, then you should be free to think, because Christ sets you free indeed. So, the cults, they denigrate critical thinking. They denigrate intelligent people. They just want sheep. They just want complete followers.

And the point 6, that salvation or fulfilment can only be realised in the group. So, it might be a secular group. It might not talk about salvation, but it will say, "the only way you will ever get rich is through us, or the only way that you will find happiness in life is through us." Or in the religious group, "the only way you will get to heaven is through us." So, salvation or fulfilment can only be found in the group. And that is the only way that you can be satisfied in life is by joining organisation X, group X, Church X or so on. And so this is a way that they manipulate the followers into staying in the group and terrifies them.

The next one is quite important, point 7. The end justifies the means. The end justifies the means. As cults keep on going, they become more and more criminal in nature. And so they start telling lies, and they say, Well, we have got to tell lies to the unbelievers. We have got to trick them into joining our group, because that is the only way they can be saved. So, they will say, Come to our group, we are going to have a potluck or something and they make it like it is just a fun time. But then they start now, manipulating them and telling stories to them and making promises which are not fulfilled, and the people who think they are just going to a potluck end up being pushed and shoved to join the group, and they take control of their victims in this way. So, there are lies on top of lies, on top of lies, on top of trickery. Often financial manipulation, getting people to put the group in their will, or to give the group lots of money, or sign over their bank accounts to the group.

So, the ends justifies the means. Anything that makes the group more powerful is good, and anything that diminishes the power of the group is bad. And so and we find any action or behaviour is justifiable,

as long as it furthers the group's goal. So, even in some cases murder, where some groups have killed people who have defected from the group, and they start telling the truth about the cult, and they get bumped off by a cult members. And that is seen as the right thing to do because they are just defending the group from the person that is telling the police about them, or something like that.

And and the group leader becomes absolute truth, and he becomes over all man made laws. So, he will say, "Well, I am such and such a prophet, so I can have 17 wives," and that might be illegal in that particular country. But he says, "No, I am prophet so and so, and if I want to have 17 wives, I will have 17 wives." Or they will dodge tax laws and other laws like that. And they will flagrantly break the laws of the country, especially regarding sexual immorality, money, power and politics, sometimes. Sometimes they will even interfere with the politics of the country they belong to.

And point 8, about how cults convert people, is the group is over the individual. You cannot be yourself. You have to conform to the group. The group's concerns supersede an individuals goals or the individual's needs, aspirations and concerns. Conformity is the key. People are rewarded for towing the line, for getting along with the cult or the group. And so they are told, "You gotta do this, you have got to do that and you have got to do it this time and in this way." And so the cult takes control of people by making them subservient to the group.

So, the next thing is point 9, warnings of severe or supernatural sanctions. So, the group creates an atmosphere of fear that says, if you criticise the group, if you disobey the leader, if you ever leave the group, something bad will happen to you. So, they say, If you leave Church 52 or let's call that the cult Church 52 I do not think there is any such church, but let's just make up a name. Church 52. If you leave Church 52 you will go to hell or you will be under a curse. This will happen to your family. This will happen to you. You will never find happiness. There is some terrible consequence that happens if you leave, and they make this very lurid. They make it very clear that terrible things will happen to anyone who defects from the group or even criticises the group. This can go so far, even if they have a negative or critical thought of the group leader, if it is shown in any way the facial expressions on their face, then terrible punishment can come down on them. And this conformity is always expected in every aspect of their life.

And point 10. They expect the new believer of the group, cult 52 or whatever to sever their ties with their past, their family, their friends, their goals and their interests. So, they are expected to just throw away everything from the past. You have a new life, you have a new family. Forget about your mother, your father, your brothers, your sisters, your aunts and your uncles. We, the cult 52, or whatever this cult group is, that group becomes the new family, and they completely take over the life of the new believer in their false doctrine. And so they claim the role of the family. Now, if anyone says to you join our family, our new family, and put away your old family, then that is dangerous.

Now a lot of churches want to be welcoming. They want to be a spiritual family and brothers and sisters. But they do not replace your physical family. They do not replace your mother or your father, your brothers or your sisters. They would encourage you to be kind to them, to be gracious to them and be a good family member, and to respect your parents. A good church does not tell you to leave your parents. A good church will tell you to respect and honour and bless your parents, and be there for them at all times. And so this idea that you have to leave everything to join this church or this organisation, and put it all behind and sacrifice it all for the organisation. It sounds very biblical, perhaps a little bit at first, and some Bible verses can be used out of context to back that up. We do have to sacrifice

everything for believing in Jesus, but we do not sacrifice everything to belong to a particular local church or to a group or a cult.

And point 11 of the points we are going through now, is that they use lawyers. These groups use something that we technically call, this technical word for this is barratrim, abuse of barratry, they use barristers and lawyers to keep people in line. Some cults use cult lawyers to sue ex cult members and critics, often using fabricated evidence and causing financial stress by repeated trivial lawsuits. The cult's aim is not so much to win the lawsuit, though they often do, as to harass and intimidate their critics into silence. So, these larger cults will have extensive legal teams that will go after people that criticise the cults. And we will find this and some do not just have legal teams. Some have paramilitary teams, they have gunmen there, people like that, and that is not terribly common. But in some places there will be a terrorist element to the cult.

So, there are some of the techniques and pressure points that cults used to keep people in control. And if you see that happening around you, you need to run away from that group. If people are psychologically manipulating you, telling you you cannot think, trying to get your emotions worked up, then that is not healthy. God wants you to be in a healthy church. He wants you to be in a healthy organisation. He does not want you going to a place that has this charismatic leader that wants to take over your life, and take over all the aspects of your life.

So, there are two things that cults do to suck people in. Firstly, they pick on people's emotional vulnerability. And so they look for people that are going through a divorce or grieving or been through a lot of abuse. Or they are unemployed, they have a job or career change. They are moving away from home or going to college, there was illness or death of a loved one. They find someone who is vulnerable and struggling in life. They play to their feelings and their minds.

And so, and the other thing they do is not only did they look for vulnerable people, they look for vulnerable people and they hold them in this particular location for 2, 3, 4 days or a week, they brainwash them. They have a brainwashing session. "Come away to our weekend, come to our camp, come here." And so they have an intensive weekend or intensive week where they really just bombard the person with a lot of emotions, a lot of love, a lot of things. So, the person thinks this is the most wonderful group ever. I have got to join them. They love me so much, but it is a trick. It is called love bombing, and they get the emotional, vulnerable person. They bombard them with strong emotional messages. And the person cracks, the person does not realise they are being emotionally manipulated. And they join the group.

And they thought reform, mind control. These are other words for what they have done. And so I am not going to name any groups because won radio here and I could get sued, because some of these more powerful groups have these weekends away or a week away where they completely take control of the person. They dig in to their emotions, their mind and their thought, and they really pull them into the group by taking them away from their family, away from their normal context, out to the countryside or somewhere to a retreat centre. And they just bombard them with stuff until they collapse. The defences collapse, and they come into the cult that way.

Okay. Another saying that cults do is they try and make a person cognitively dissonant and then resolve that. That is a psychological word, and that these people find themselves trapped in a way where they try and take over the person's behaviour by intense involvement. They try and control a person's

behaviour. They try and control a person's emotions. They try thought indoctrination, so extended teaching sessions, memorisation of cult doctrine, auditing sessions, getting into a person's mind and heart all the time, trying to find out what is going on. Very powerful counselling that is not actually counselling, but it is actually manipulation.

So, there are four key areas that the cults try and control to get rid of any cognitive dissonance, to get rid of any signs of protest in a person's heart or mind. And these four areas are behaviour, emotions, thought and information. They try and control a person's behaviour by making them do all these tasks for the church or the cult, and the behaviour is closely supervised, its carefully prescribed. You are doing this at this time and this at another time, and that is controlling behaviour.

Number two area that they control is emotions. The new recruit is often love bombed, greeted enthusiastically told they are very special, made to feel wonderful. However, it does not last and the emotions are sent on a roller coaster up and down. You are accepted, you are rejected, you are accepted, rejected, until people's emotions are totally under control of the cult leader or the persons that work for the cult leader who are working on the new recruit. So, they really manipulate the person's emotions.

Thirdly, the third area they get into is the person's thought. They indoctrinate them. They make the memorise the stuff, they try and thought control. You have got to think this. You cannot think that, that is a bad thought. This is a good thought. And so thought control of the person. So, their thought life becomes completely bombarded by these long education and indoctrination sessions. And people are not allowed to read for themselves. They are not allowed to watch TV, not allowed to watch certain movies, not allowed to go on the Internet. And this thought control is absolute and total, and it really does take over the people's minds, so that if they try and watch TV, they feel very guilty. Or they will try and watch a movie and sneak out to watch a movie. They feel very guilty because they are having the wrong thoughts. They are thinking things that are not approved by the group.

Then they try and control the information in order to control the other things. They isolate people from their peers from their previous friends and family, people that might argue with them. TV, they ban TV, they ban radio, they ban newspapers, they ban the Internet. They carefully control any associations or thoughts. They say, "Oh no, you cannot use social media. You cannot do this. You cannot do that." So, to keep people in the cult and unable to question what the cult leader says day and night. So, these combined factors, the manipulation of behaviour, emotions, thought and information make it very likely that if the new recruits stays in the cult for any length of time, they will become to believe in it utterly and completely.

Okay, there are some other things that they do. They focus on felt, needs and defects with exaggerated promises of fulfilment. They try and say, "Oh, you are feeling lonely. You will be accepted here, and you will be loved as you have never been loved before," et cetera. Rigid control of time and activities. They often schedule people to do this and do that. And there are a lot of emotionally draining activities, leaving little time for reflection, questioning and privacy.

Information control, which we have touched on. Language manipulation, they have new words and new language, and you have got to learn the code words or you are out of the group. Discouraging critical, rational thought and questions which I covered earlier. Instruction and repetition in trance induction techniques. Now trance induction or trance state, you know what a trance state is, when you go kind of

a zombie state, you cannot think you are just moving into that. And a trance, when people go into a trance, it is very easy to control the hearts, minds and thoughts and to implant evil spirits into them as well. So, these include progressive relaxation, chanting, hypnosis. And some people are very good at hypnosis, meditation, trance states, guided imagery or visualisation so that people visualise things and that the cult tells them to get into a trance state that way. Deep breathing exercises, all of which make a person highly suggestible. So, they want to get the person into a state where they can use the power of suggestion to take over their hearts and minds.

And so the person becomes unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality. And they live in a fantasy world as portrayed by the cult, where they are serving the cult leader who is God, a prophet or whatever. And the cult leader is everything in their fantasies. Life revolves around the group, around the cult leader, around the mission of the cult and things like that.

And so, there are even things like using various psycho-pathological techniques called Relax, relaxation induced anxiety and things like that we do not have time to go into. But they are playing with people's psychological states through trance and hypnosis, and you have got to be careful of any group that uses trance, hypnosis, guided meditation and things like that. They have a small place in someone's life. But when they start using them as weapons to take over the person, take over the personality and subject them to mind control, then that is a really, really bad thing. You have to stay away from that stuff.

Confession sessions where they put someone in a chair, and they make them confess all their past sins to the leader, old secret sins or thoughts or temptations. And they use these confessions to blackmail the people and emotionally bond the people to themselves, and it is depersonalisation. It strips away the person's sense of self, and it is a forced submission to the group. Forced confessions of all the things that have gone on in life, and getting back into their complexes and their childhoods, their feelings. That is often a very evil thing, and you should never be asked to do that. You should be able to keep your private life private. And of course, they use guilt and fear to control people in the group, that if you do a little thing wrong, you feel guilty or you are afraid, or you feel you are going to be punished all the time.

And the next thing is a very big one. Number nine in this particular list, control of sexuality intimacy within the cult. You can only marry people who are believers in Leader X, or in some cases, the women have to have sex with Leader X, and that is fairly rare. But they may extend to marriage decisions. Sexual relations, forced promiscuity in some cults, group sex in some new age therapy groups. Child sex, adultery, polygamy in some groups where they have a lot of polygamy and free sex going on. And there was a group called Branch Davidians here in the USA, it is now extinct, was very much into that. So, there is a lot of control of sexuality, and the person is made to feel sexually bonded to members of the group in one way or the other. So, it is very, very hard for them to escape or to feel guilty because of their sexual behaviour within the group.

And the next thing is excessive financial obligations. They do not just want tithes. They were double tithes. They want triple tithes. They want financial sacrifice, and the leader will often be living in a huge mansion or a house while the members are working like slaves in some thing. And it is called living in a Commune. But the communal living is for the ordinary members, and the higher up members are getting very wealthy indeed, off all this manipulation.

Now can a normal church with good doctrine get like this? Yes, if it is got the wrong leader. But, however, good doctrine generally is a good sign of a good group, because a bad group tends to have bad

doctrine. So, we need to be very careful about all the things we have been talking about. We need to be very careful about these things, and we need to be able to spot when a group is manipulating us, and it is very hard to tell when we are being manipulated.

We need to be very alert and Jesus says, be alert, be watchful for the wolves are coming in sheep's clothing. And this is how the wolves behave they try and manipulate you. They try and control information, behaviour, emotions and things like that. They try and control your thinking. They try and take over your life entirely and try and take over your associations with your friends and your family, they try and take over your finances and your sexuality. And they say our group is the only group that is going to get you to heaven. But if you wander outside our group, you are going to be lost and go to hell.

And okay, if you go completely away from Jesus? If you reject Jesus, then of course you would go to hell. But not if you walk out of a church building belonging to denomination A or B or C. It is not your church building that saves you, it is through your relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and that is not through a person. There is only one mediator between God and man, and that is Christ Jesus. So, it is not the bishop who saves you, the archbishop who saves you, the apostle, a prophet or a group leader who saves you. They are just servants of yours to help you to find salvation. And if they take over your life, if they demand excessive amounts of loyalty, if they demand that you follow them and no one else, that you listen to them and no one else, that they try and say you cannot read any books but our books, you cannot think anyway but our way of thinking, then you are in a very dangerous group and you need to exit as soon as possible.

And if this is being done to you, if you see it around you, you must resist it. And you must try and get your friends and family out of these controlling groups because they will be destroyed. They will be plundered by these wolves in sheep's clothing. They look great. They sound great. They have got terrific personalities. They have often got a great big idea or vision they want to sell to the world. They are very compelling, but they are ultimately capturing people's souls. They are taking people captive to their will, to their control. They want power over people. And they figured out how to get it, they have often studied other cult groups. And they make excessive demands on their people to control them and bring them into the cult.

It says in Acts 20 they wanted to get disciples to follow them instead of following the Lord Jesus Christ. So, it becomes an ego thing for the cult leaders and the leaders of the cult to take in people and to make them totally pliable under the hands of their psychological techniques. So, you need to be very, very careful. If you want more information on this, you can go to globalchristians.org/cults. There is an e-book there that tells you all about cults and how to deal with them. Globalchristians.org/cults. And that will help you to understand the dynamics that are going on here.

6. Conspiracy Theories

We have got a fascinating topic for you today, and that is conspiracies. Conspiracy theories, should we believe them? And what does the Bible tell us about conspiracies and conspiracy theories? So, this is a really fascinating topic. Tune in, get your pens, bibles and notebooks ready, because we here at Insights for Eternity teach those who teach others. So, before we get into the Bible, let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your grace and your peace upon our lives. We ask now that your word will go forth with power today, it will change hearts and lives and minds, and bring security, grace and peace to our hearts, in Jesus name. Amen.

Okay, the passage we are going to be looking at is Isaiah chapter eight, verses 9 to 15, in the English Standard Version, which I have got in front of me. Isaiah chapter eight, verses 9 to 15. Be broken, you peoples and be shattered. Give ear all you far countries. Strap on your armour and be shattered. Strap on your armour and be shattered. Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us. For the Lord God spoke thus to me, with His strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, do not call a conspiracy all this people calls a conspiracy. And do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of Hosts, Him you shall honour as holy. Let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread. And He will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken. They shall be snared and taken.

So, here God is telling Isaiah, do not get into conspiracy theories. Let God be your fear and let God be your dread. Do not get into all the politics, all the conspiracy theories, because they can drive you crazy. Every week there is a new conspiracy theory, about the Jews, or about the Communists, or about this or about that or about the virus, and this, that and the other, there is always a conspiracy theory. And it is always got a whole bunch of YouTube videos and things behind it. We are not to be like that, we are not to have a spirit of fear over our life. We are not to be in fear and dread of human beings.

People should not terrify us. Instead, we should have faith in the living God, who sent Jesus to save us and deliver us from our sins. For God gave us Jesus Christ. Will He not with Him also give us all things? Romans eight, Verse 32. And nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Nothing in heaven on Earth or under the Earth can separate us. Neither height nor depth, nor any other created thing is going to separate us from the love of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. So, the conspiracies of men and of women, of organisations, of countries, of places, the big banks and all those kind of conspiracies, they cannot separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ, your Saviour. God has everything under control. He will sanctify you. He will make you blameless and pure. And He will take you into heaven to be with Himself.

The conspiracies of this world are conducted as part of the present evil age. We live in the present evil age. And this present evil age is run by the god of this age. That is the devil, that is Satan, That is Lucifer, the dragon of old. He is the god of this age. The small g god, he is not the creator God of the heavens and the earth. He has a time limit. And that time limit is this age. And when this age wraps up, he will be cast into the lake of fire. So, that is what the book of revelations is about, the final days of this age when it is all wrapped up and all the conspiracies come to nothing. They come, they conspire against God, they do the 666 thing. They control the money system. Eventually they get to the battle of Armageddon. What happens to them? They are completely defeated by God Himself. And they are cast into the lake

of fire. And that is the end of them. The beast, the false prophet, the dragon, they are all in their due times in their due places, they are cast down by God. And that is their fate.

The conspirators, the bad people, the kings of this Earth that are deceived by the devil. That is what is behind all these conspiracies, is the deception of the devil. The devil deceives all these people in the banks, in the governments, in the military, all these people that are part of the conspiracy theories. They are being deceived by Satan to rebel against God and to persecute the righteous. Should we be afraid? No, not at all. God does not want you to be afraid of all the things going on in this world. God does not want you terrified every time you turn on the news, or you look at Facebook, or you go to YouTube or you go to the Internet. God does not want you living in fear and believing all these crazy conspiracy theories all over the place, and some of them are completely crazy.

So, let's look at some points here. I have got 14 points that I am going to try and get through during this broadcast. And the number one point is, God does not want you believing all the conspiracies. He says, Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear nor be in dread. We are not to be afraid like the people of the world. The people of the world have no hope. They do not know Christ. They do not know the power of God. They do not know the sovereign hand of God. They do not know that God is provident and good, and He brings things to their conclusion in their right time.

They do not know that about God. And so they do not fear God. They do not walk with God. They are looking after their own interests. They are worried about their own bank accounts, their houses, their children, their country, whatever. And they are not concerned about the things of holiness or of truth or of the Lord God Almighty. And so they have no hope. Their hope is in their possessions. Their hope is in their country. It is in the land. It is in the animals, whatever they have, that is where their hope is. And so when the conspiracy comes along they are trembling, their knees are knocking. They look at the armies. They look at the big banks, they look at the inflation. They look at what happens with the coronavirus, and they are trembling in fear and dread because of the circumstances that are unfolding around us all the time.

And you are not to be like that. You are not to be afraid of the circumstances. Your fear and your trust should be in the Lord God Almighty who has said that He loves you, who has already saved you, who has died on the cross for you, and who is going to rescue you from sin, death and hell and give you eternal life in God. That is the one that you should fear and you should dread. And you should not be afraid of all these conspiracies. They will, in the end, amount to nothing.

It says here at the at the start of it, it says, Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. That is in verse 10. Isaiah eight verse 10, Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak a word, but it will not stand. So, these people can have their agreements. They can speak pompous words on television or on the Internet. They can have their plans. That might be Russian plans. It might be Chinese plans. It might be plans of this nation or that. They can have their plans. They can have their schemes. It might be a political party in your country where you are listening. Oh, these people have got these plans and they are going to do this and they are going to do that. And they are going to crush us as the Christians.

Well, they can have all the plans they like, but God is with us. Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak a word, but it will not stand. For why, for God is with us. God is with the believers. God is with the Christians. No matter what happens to you, you will be delivered from sin, death and hell. And

you will spend eternity with God in heaven. and none of the conspiracies on Earth can affect your salvation. They might affect your finances. They might affect your health. They might affect your ability to be promoted. They might affect your ability to have church services when they shut down for this reason or that. But they cannot affect your salvation because you are saved by the sovereign hand of God and nothing can snatch you out of His hand. Not even all the politics in the world can snatch you out of the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the good shepherd. He has laid down His life for the sheep, and nothing can snatch you out of the hand of Jesus and out of the hand of God, the Father, who has predestined you for salvation. So, you need to have confidence in God. And so Verse 10 take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak all the words they like, but they will not stand.

Next thing it says, we find out what happens to the conspirators. They will be broken, be shattered. The conspiracies will be broken. That is in verse nine. Strap on your armour and be shattered, or strap on your armour and be destroyed. And so the conspiracies will be broken. They can put on all the armour and by that we mean weapons or strategies or the things we have, the armour of God. And of course, we have the armour of light. But also there is an armour of darkness, and the huge armour that, countries spend their money on, whether they be nuclear bombs or missiles and warships or planes. Take all those weapons in the world. But they will be broken by that armour of God. They will be broken by the power of God.

All the demons in the world, the devil, the false prophet, the beast, all those people, they have their weapons. They have their systems of control. But their systems of control, their systems of generating fear in people and making them submit, because the devil's kingdom is a kingdom of fear. So, he wants guns. He wants all these things that people will submit to him, and that they will be living in fear all the time, because he is coming up with these new weapons all the time. That is the devil's role, is to build more and more weapons. We find in the millennium that the spear will be broken, The sword will be broken. They will be turned into pruning hooks and ploughshares. And people will learn war no more.

God is not interested in the whole world being at war all the time like it is now. As I speak, Russia has invaded Ukraine. War seems to be around the corner all the time. We are in dread of World War Three. We are in dread of nuclear war and all the conspiracies that are behind that. The devil loves his weapons. But God loves His creation. He loves the trees, He loves the stars, He loves His animals, and He loves you and me, whom He has created for His glory and His purpose.

So, all these weapons, they can put them on. But those weapons will be shattered and destroyed. They will not do the conspirators any good because God is with the people of God. God is with you. God is for you. And if God is for you, none can stand against you. That is point 3 of the 14 points we are going with today. God is with you. He is with the people of God, and their plans will not stand because God is with us. And in verse eleven, it says, for the Lord spoke thus to me with His strong hand upon me and warned me not to walk in the way of this people. Saying, do not call a conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy. God powerfully warned Isaiah not to get into conspiracy theories. He said, Isaiah, that is not for you. You are a prophet of the living God. You are to fear God, you are to dread God. Do not go into this spirit of fear.

We are not to dwell in fear, but in faith, that is point 5. Point four was God powerfully warns us against believing conspiracy theories. It is not for the people of faith. It is not for the people of heaven. It is not for people whose minds are to be set on things above. It is not for people who are saved and belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ and who are new creatures in a new creation. We are not to get into believing

conspiracy theories. We may hear about them. We may know about them. Yes, the conspiracies do exist. I am not denying that people get together to do evil and wicked things. The Bible says that, there are lots of times in the Bible where the Bible refers to people getting together to do evil and wicked things, just like the Tower of Babel, which they built together. They were in unity, and God disrupted that conspiracy to build a tower up to heaven, the people to make their own name. God disrupted that.

And God disrupted every major conspiracy since. He has disrupted Communist conspiracies and He has disrupted all sorts of conspiracies from all sorts of different sectors, I am sure He has disrupted capitalist greedy conspiracies as well. From every side of the world. Conspiracy A is involved against conspiracy B, and they fight each other and they tear each other to pieces, and their plans come to nothing. But the Christian is not to dwell in fear but in faith, to believe in the Lord God Almighty who is on our side, who has sacrificed Jesus for us and who wants our eyes to be fixed in hope on God and on the salvation that is prepared for us.

Okay, so and it says, But the Lord of Hosts, Him you shall honour as holy. Let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread. God is to be the one that we fear. And I do not mean fear by knocking our knees. But we are to walk in awesome respect of a holy God. You and I are to be in fear and trembling, to walk in awesome respect of a holy God. God is not some joke. He is not a cartoon figure with a long beard. God Almighty is the creator of Heaven and Earth, and we are to obey His commandments, and we are to obey them meticulously, we are to obey them with integrity and truth. And God is to be our fear, God is to be our dread, we are to walk as if the commandments of God were the most important things in the world. We are to fear God more than we fear the bank, more than we fear the military, more than we fear the police, more than we fear our own country, God is to be our fear and our dread.

So, that is the point 6 of the 14, you and I are to have our eyes on heaven, not on earth. If we look at the circumstances of earth we will be discouraged. But if we look up to heaven, we will be encouraged. So, we are not to look at all the things going on in the news, on the Internet, on YouTube, on the gossip going around in your local newspaper. Do not look at all those things. Do not get drawn into all the conflict and all the plans of people. Instead focus on sharing the gospel, bringing in the kingdom of God, being Christ-like, loving one another. Blessing your family, praying over your family There the things that you are to focus on, not on the fearful things in the news.

Okay, point 7. God will trap the conspirators in their conspiracies. Be broken, you peoples and be shattered at the start, but verse 15, and many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken. They shall be snared and taken. They are going to be snared. They are going to be taken. They are planning to trap us, but they will be trapped in their own traps. They will be snared in their own snares. God will make sure that the people who are doing all these evil things are eventually trapped in their own plans and purposes. And that they are taken out from their plans. Their plans are not fulfilled. Their plans do not have any hope. They will not reach fulfilment. They might get a little way along the way. They might seem to be just about to take over the world. In the end, the Antichrist will take over the world. But in the end, they will be snared and taken. And even the Antichrist, in the end, is snared and taken and thrown into the pit, or thrown into the lake of fire. So, these people will come to a bad and sticky and terrible end.

So, the plans that they made for the righteous will happen to them. That is point 8. What they plan to destroy us with, that is going to happen to the wicked people behind all these conspiracies, these rich

and powerful people who are tied up with the occult and with the devil and with the sons of disobedience.

Okay, so what are some practical applications in my last 10 or 11 minutes I have got here? Firstly, do not get your information from social media. Instead, rely on Scripture. Do not just listen to all the gossip that is going around, all the videos, all the articles, all the photos or this is this, and this is the Rosicrucians, or that is the Freemasons. Or that is the big banks. Or that is the Federal Reserve or whatever conspiracy that you have got. They seem to always have the same people involved in all these conspiracies. And that is not the thing you should dwell on. Your mind is to be set on things above, not on things of this earth.

And if you get into all that stuff, it generates a spirit of fear, a spirit of unbelief, a spirit of dread in you, which will eventually rob you of your Christian faith and your joy. Because instead of being joyful, you will be thinking, Oh, they are doing this now, oh they are doing that now. I have got to watch this video, it is really important. Stop watching those videos. Start reading the Bible, start loving your family, do something different. You do not need that information. It is not important information. It is distracting information. It is spiritually toxic information, and a lot of it is not true.

But when you see a video like that, pray through it and discern the spirit on the video before believing it. Does this video have a spirit of fear? Is this a video full of gossip? Is this video a video that seems to be capturing up your mind and your heart so that it is generating wrong emotions in you, emotions that you should not have. There is a question, is it manipulating you? Is it using all sorts of propaganda images to drag you into believing in that conspiracy and being afraid and reacting against it? Is it producing reactivity in you, or is it producing faith in you? Faith is not reactive, it is proactive. It gets out there and does things. So, discern the spirit on it.

And that is point 10. Point nine is do not get your information from Social Media. Point 10 is pray through things and discern the spirit and nature of the video or the social media thing. And it is very important to listen carefully and say, Does this have the ring of truth about it? Or has this got the ring of fear and lies and paranoia about it?

Point 11 is verify the so called facts that these people tell you. They will tell you all sorts of things, wild and outrageous things, anti-scientific and untrue things. And you go back and say, Oh, look, that is not so. This person made that claim. It is not so at all. And they often set dates that Jesus is going to return, or this will happen in September, or there, the stock market is gonna crash in October or whatever, and when it does not happen, then you can doubt them. You can say, you predicted the stock market would crash in October, but it did not crash. And you are wrong and your conspiracy is wrong.

And you need to confront people who do that. You need to look and say, Are their facts true? Are they reliable? And you check them out, and often they are just making up stuff on the spot, or they are jumping around using symbols. They say, Oh, look at the American \$1 bill. This symbol means this, this symbol means that, and therefore it is.... And I read a book many years ago that looked at the American dollar bill, to say the world will end in 2012. Well, that was 10 years ago, and the world has not ended in 2012.

And all the things that extrapolate from the American \$1 bill, I think we can forget about them. They are just imaginative interpretations of the symbols on the dollar bill, and some of that imagination may have

a little bit of credibility to it, but a lot does not. It is just speculation that people are getting into to make a world that fits into their own head.

That is what conspiracy theorists do. They think they can understand the currents of politics in our age. No, you cannot. God is in charge and God cannot be understood by the human mind. And He is bringing plans and purposes to bear. Just think of the return of Israel. No one thought that that would happen. After they were sent to the gas chambers in World War Two, no one thought that Israel would ever rise from what happened in Germany. No one ever thought that it would be a nation like it is today, but God brought His plans and purposes to bear, despite the evil conspiracy of the Nazi regime to wipe out all the Jews.

That was the what the Nazis wanted. They had a conspiracy to do that. But what happened? It failed. And now the nation of Israel has been established because God is with His people. And that was a big conspiracy, was a huge conspiracy. It caused World War Two. But eventually the Nazis, the conspirators, they were defeated by the hand of God, by the Allies, by lots of people sacrificing their lives. But they were defeated, especially after they went in and tried to attack Russia. So, we we know that God has got ways and means of dealing with the evil and wicked people. And we need to check out the facts, and we do not need to be afraid of these conspiracies, all these plans.

The next thing, point 12, God's prophecies do not cause the righteous to be afraid. Rather, God's prophecies will make us bold. When someone stands up and says, I am a prophet of God, and then they go on and on and on about a conspiracy theory about this, that and the other, how this is all going to happen, so the church is knocking its knees. Well, do not believe that person. That person may be claiming to be a prophet of God. They may be claiming to know the future, but all they are creating is fear.

Now God does not create fear in the hearts of the saints, except for fear of sin. No, this kind of fear of the future that these people are creating is not of God. The false prophets create false emotions, and false emotion is fear, false evidence appearing real. That is a way you can take F E A R, false evidence appearing real. And the people that are running around talking about the end times and many things like that, they are creating fear, terror and panic in the hearts of the men and women of God. We are not to believe them.

A true prophet will tell you that God is in charge of your life. That no matter what happens, no matter what you go through, God is with you and He will take you out the other side and you will be saved. You will be there at the resurrection. They will emphasize the hope of the resurrection that no matter what happens to you, that neither height nor depth nor any other created thing can take you out of the love of God, and God will resurrect you on that day, and it will be death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? You will stand before God holy and pure and perfect.

So, even if a terrible conspiracy comes along and kills you and kills your family, you are still victorious, because of the cross of Jesus Christ. You will still rise from the dead. You will still be in God's presence. There is no need to abandon the Christian faith just because of some powerful evil group of people has decided to take over your country or your life or your house or your finances. Know the prophets of God will help you to be bold and to be strong.

Point 13 as we are coming up, is be aware of conspiracy theories that tell you to buy or tell you to invest. Often these people are talking about conspiracy, say this is going to happen to the economy. Go and buy gold from my friend Billy Bob, and Billy Bob gives them a kick back on the gold that gets bought through that radio programme or TV programme. Or they will say, Oh, you have to buy this survival kit from my TV show or my YouTube channel. Here is a special knife, your special survival food, and they are telling you to buy things. They are making up the conspiracy theory as a way of marketing their lousy product. And often the products are lousy and unreliable and terrible, and you cannot get your money back. I know people who bought those things and it is junk.

So, if they are telling you to buy or they are telling you to invest here, invest in this product over here, it will protect your money when the economy collapses, et cetera, et cetera. Well, you have got to ask, what is the interest in selling that investment? What is the interest in doing that? Obviously, the conspiracy theories, they are a marketing ploy for the thing that they want to invest in. And that marketing ploy is a terrible one, creating fear in the people of God. So, the people of God shell out money to the scammers that are pushing the conspiracy theory.

And a lot of these conspiracy people are scammers. The big ones, the big ones pushing the big conspiracy theories. They are scammers, and they are trying to rip you off because they know people are gullible. They want to know what the future holds. And the future holds the love of God. The future does not hold the victory of Satan. Satan has a little victory for a little while, and then he is got rid of. So, do not believe conspiracy theories that ask you to buy something or to invest in something or to put your money in a certain place at a certain time.

And then, lastly, point 14. beware of conspiracy theories with a strong political flavour. If it says the Republicans are good or the Democrats are bad or this is the right way to go over here, and it aligns with a political party in your country, no matter what it is, if it is strongly pushing a political flavour, then the conspiracy theory is then a political tool to keep someone in power or to put someone in power. It is a fearful thing, to get people to vote a certain way, to push them over the edge, and to get them to vote for a certain candidate or a certain party.

In that case, the conspiracy theory is what we call propaganda. It is trying to push a piece of legislation or a political party or a political candidate or win a presidential election. So, they make up a story. They make up a fear filled story to get you to vote a certain way or to do this a certain way, or to adopt a certain position regarding this, that and the other. If you do not do this, everything will come to an end because of X conspiracy theory. In that case, you are just being manipulated. People are using the conspiracy theory to generate fear to manipulate you towards some kind of political end. Do not fall for that. Do not fall for the conspiracy theory.

Let's go back and revise what Isaiah said here and verses 11 and 12. Isaiah, chapter eight, verse 11 and 12, we will end with this. For the Lord spoke thus to me with His strong hand upon me and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy. And do not fear what they fear nor be in dread. But the Lord of Hosts, Him you shall honour as holy. Let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread.

7. Three Cult Dimensions

Today we are about to do number seven in our series on spiritual discernment. And today's topic is the three marks of cults and crazy thinking. We are going to look at the strange psychology of cults and how people get totally messed up when they join a cult. And the way you can tell if a group is a cult or not. Before we do that, let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you that you give us discernment and wisdom. Now we ask that you will open our spiritual eyes and open our spiritual ears to understand your word and the dynamics of the spiritual life. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, I am going to talk to you about three ways, three dimensions of strange thinking, the strange thinking that goes on in cults, in paranoid groups, in conspiracy theories, and the three things that will mark out a church that has gone off the rails, so you can avoid it and so you can find a better church or a better group to belong to. So, here are the three things, and they are like three dimensions up, down, in and out, side to side. First one is wisdom versus folly or wisdom versus idiosyncratic thinking. The next dimension is unconditional love agape love on one end and on the other end, paranoia and all that kind of crazy conspiracy theory. The third dimension is mercy, which is concern for outsiders and people versus cruelty, such as the oppression of people inside the church and outside the church.

So, we are going to talk about these three things. The difference between wisdom and folly, unconditional love and paranoia, and mercy and cruelty. We will be talking about those three dimensions and three aspects and why that is really important. Jesus talks about them in his terms as well. Talking about the Pharisees, he noticed that they were cruel. They were paranoid, and they were often very foolish in the way they conducted themselves. So, we will find that people that are spiritually negative are high on the negative ends of these dimensions, and the people who are spiritually positive are positive on the positive sides of these three dimensions of spirituality.

Now let's start with, have a look at the love-hate dimension, the unconditional love versus paranoid thinking. Now, if someone is healthy spiritually, they are able to love other people. They are able to love their enemies. They are not preoccupied by their enemies. They are not defensive. They are not always going off on some crazy tangent. They are able to love people and love a very wide range of people, not just themselves and their family, but people across the street, people across the world even, people of a different skin colour, different race, different tribe, different personality type. They are able to love a lot of people, and they give unconditional love to others. They give unconditional, positive regard to other people and see them as they are, they see them as human beings. They are welcoming and they are hospitable.

They are not selfish at all. They are not cold and they are not paranoid. They are the kind of people that you would love as the next door neighbour, the kind of people that make you feel good on contact. But it is not just to recruit you into something, they genuinely like you. They genuinely like people, and have this unconditional, positive regard for others. They do good for other people. They are kind to them. And so, the person that is healthy spiritually, obeys Jesus' commandment to love your neighbour as yourself, and that is a very serious thing for them. And they are not defensive. They are not paranoid. They are people that truly want to see the best for the other person.

Now what is the other extreme? The other extreme is paranoid defensive mindset. Here the people are living inside a mental fortress. They have lots and lots of enemies. That person over there is a bad

person because of this, and that person over there is a bad person because of this. They watch this YouTube video and it confirms this that and the other. And here in the USA, these kind of people that collect guns and they have got weapons all over the place. That person over there, their next door neighbour is a bad person. They are afraid of everyone. They are afraid of the government. They are afraid of people of the opposite political party. They are afraid of people who do not believe exactly the same as what they do. And often they are proud and they are haughty. They are difficult to deal with. They are not welcoming people at all. In fact, they are quite hostile.

And I met some when I first came here, and fortunately, most Americans are not like this. But they give me a sort of interview for 45 minutes asking me all these different questions about my doctrine and my politics before they would even consider befriending me, because they are so afraid of meeting someone who has a different point of view. They are not welcoming. They are not hospitable. They are not embracing of other people. They are deeply suspicious of everyone else. And in Africa, these people might be seeing witchcraft everywhere. Everywhere they go, there is a witch or a wizard or juju being worked on them, and so they are full of fear, they are full of paranoia about other people.

And they generally look upon other people as evil. They do not see the good in other people. They see the faults. They see the character flaws in other people. They see everything that is wrong in the church instead of everything that is right in the church. They are not affirming people to be around at all. And they are hostile towards people of other countries, other nations, other tribes and other different points of view. These people live in a constant state of fear and suspicion.

Now, when you join a group when you go to a church and all it is talking about is end times prophecy and the Antichrist and the various conspiracy theories that go around about the Federal Reserve or this or that, or the conspiracy theories about coronavirus, or whatever the conspiracy theory is about, you can know that these people are going off the rails. Because God has not given us a spirit of fear but a spirit of power, love and a sound mind. Let's go through that verse again. That is, I think, two Timothy one, verse seven. For God has not given you a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. So, a healthy church has a mind of power, a mind of love and a mind of sound thinking. And that is the opposite of what happens with these people, that they have a spirit of fear over their whole life. And they are wrapped up in fearing this, fearing that and fearing the other.

And when you see the presence of large amounts of fear, when people are constantly living in a state of fear, suspicion and paranoia, you know that is a group to avoid. That is a preacher to avoid. That is a teacher to avoid, because they are going in the wrong direction, spiritually. The right direction, spiritually, is the direction of agape love, of caring about others, of embracing others, or for seeing the value in other people, or seeing the good and saying this soul needs Jesus, people need the Lord. That is the kind of people that we want to be around, the people who have unconditional love for everyone else around: the drunks, the drug addicts, the different people, people of other viewpoints, people of other races. People who can do that and love other people, they are in the right they are doing the right thing, they are the good Samaritans.

But the people who are constantly afraid, who are constantly trying to be in survival mode all the time. They say, I am a survivor. I am a survivalist, and they are constantly thinking about how to deal with burglars or terrorists or this or that. I am not saying that you should not take precautions against burglars. Of course, we have to take precautions against burglars and thieves and all the rest in engaging the proper amount of self defence. But we should not be preoccupied by it. It should not be what we are

thinking about day and night. And people are, all they are thinking about is their own self defence, and all these conspiracy theories day and night. Then they are in the wrong place spiritually, they are under a spirit of fear. And that is a bad group. That is a bad preacher. That is a bad teacher to go under. You do not want to be around those people. You want to be around the people that are pushing you towards love and mercy, a life of righteousness, justice and truth. And you can put away all that fear from you.

So, Jesus was not a paranoid person. He did not give into fear and suspicion all the time. He was the least paranoid person who has ever lived. Yet He understood the hearts of men and women, and knew what was in them. But He would plunge himself into the crowd. He would go to Jerusalem. He would confront the Pharisees. He was not crawling away, hiding away in fear, accumulating swords and shields and body armour and all the rest. No, the spirit of Jesus was a spirit of love, compassion, and He was reaching out to the people around with him, concerned about souls to be saved. And that is the sign of a healthy person. When they are interested in evangelism and social justice and helping the people who are down and out, and providing education for poor people. That is a lot healthier. When churches are reaching out, they are loving people in the neighbourhood, they are doing good, then that is a healthy church for you to be involved in.

Now the next dimension that we are going to be talking about is the dimension of wisdom versus foolishness, or another way to look at that dimension is embracing truth wherever it is found versus idiosyncratic reality. But what do I mean by that? Well, a wise person, a godly person, will search for truth wherever it can be found, in the Bible, in science, in mathematics, wherever they can find truth, in history. They will say, "This is true. This is good. I will learn this." And they will value every scrap of knowledge they get. They will tuck it away in their heart and their mind and say, "Oh, that is really interesting. That is great." And they will be interested in everything from the Book of Ephesians to how butterflies are formed in the chrysalis. They will be interested in every aspect of God's universe and God's word.

They will be interested in people, they will be interested in their next door neighbour. They will be interested in the whole world and getting to know the truth, and the truth they will get from multiple, multiple sources. But of course, the main truth for them is the truth of Jesus Christ. The truth of God, The truth of Scripture. That is the core. But around that core truth of the Bible, they have integrated many other things, and they love wisdom. They love truth. They like being intelligent. They like reading. They like hearing from people with interesting points of view, and they are not afraid of hearing someone with something that is a bit different. They are confident enough that they can analyse it and figure out whether it is right or wrong.

On the opposite extreme, people who have what we call idiosyncratic reality, they make up their own truth. And they say, Well, I went up to heaven and I heard an angel say this, and there is no way you can test that. They have just come up with their own version of truth. They say, "Oh, well, we are going to throw this out the window and we are going to throw theology out the window. We are going to throw science out the window and maths out the window."

And they will say all sorts of strange things. They will say that the Earth is flat or they will say that all of the medicine of the doctors is just witchcraft and magic. And they will be suspicious of everyone and everything. Just a lot like we saw before. And they develop their own version of truth, which is crazy. And they only associate with other people who have their own crazy version of the world. And they get very angry at people who have a conventional view of the world.

So, for instance, they will believe in conspiracy theories, they will believe in mysticism. They will believe in dreams and visions, and they will not believe in what is right in front of their nose. And whenever you question them, they will say, "But God told me," and it is pretty obvious that God has not told them to do that at all, that they have just got an emotional thing, a need for self importance within them and because they are afraid of knowledge they are afraid of having to do hard thinking they do not want to have their viewpoint questioned, "God told me," is their response to everything.

And you can say, "Well, that is a really foolish way of approaching that problem. Maybe here is a wiser way to do it." "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. You just take your worldly knowledge." They will call everything worldly knowledge, even if it is not, even if it is biblical knowledge. They will accuse all other forms of knowledge, and say, "But God told me to do it this way instead of that way." And I have seen people trying to organise events that way, and they end up in a hopeless muddle because they ignore common wisdom. They ignore common sense. They will not read books. They will say books are bad for you, and they will twist your mind away from God. The only book you need is the Bible, until they write a book of their own, and then it will be the Bible plus their book. This is the book that you need.

So, they will criticise everything, and everything that contradicts with the way they think. They are not open to new knowledge. They are closed to new knowledge. They have made up their mind, and they have decided that they have got their own peculiar way of dealing with truth or reality. And so they often bombard people on the Internet with with messages and pictures that are all in capital letters that are lurid. It is all red and yellow and they are very loud looking pictures, and they are claiming this and they are claiming that. And instead of being wise, they are just loud. They replaced wisdom with volume, and they yell at people and say, "This is right!" And they pound the pulpit and they engage in a kind of knowledge that, here is a long word for you, it is not intersubjectively testable.

How is that long word for the week? Well, intersubjectively testable, in a subject, means lots of people can test the knowledge. So, if I was to give you a ballpoint pen and say this is a ballpoint pen, you can take it. You can look at it, you can write with it, and everyone can say, "Yeah, we have tested this out. This is a ballpoint pen." And they can use it, and you can write a letter with it or something, and make a shopping list, and that is very clearly a ballpoint pen. And you can test that out. So, that is okay. That is a claim I can make. It can be tested out by other people, so that is a valid claim.

However, if I said to you that I went up into heaven last night in a dream and I met a flying pink elephant, and the flying pink elephant told me I was a prophet and because I am prophesying to you now, you owe me \$500 for the prophecy. I am just making this up on the spot. Now if I said that, how can I prove that I went up into heaven last night in a dream? I cannot prove that at all. I am just making that claim that is not testable by anyone else. How can I prove that I met a flying pink elephant in my dream? No. You cannot test that. No one else can test that. That is a claim I am making that has no way of being tested and proved or disproved. And then that the flying pink elephant told me I was a prophet. How can I prove or disprove that? No, I cannot. You cannot. No one can. It is untestable. It is not intersubjectively testable. There is no way of designing an experiment that can test my knowledge, or my claim rather, there is no way of designing experiments to test my claim that I had a dream, went up to heaven, met a flying pink elephant and the flying pink elephant told me I am a prophet.

And so that kind of nonsense, those kind of wild claims about visits to heaven and so on, when their knowledge consists entirely of subjective dreams and visions puffed up in their minds by visions they have seen, that is in Colossians chapter two, Paul warns us about those kind of people who are not

basing their knowledge on truth, on the Scripture. They have left and departed from Christ and gone off into their own subjective spiritual world. It sounds great, but it does not work. It is a dysfunctional kind of knowledge that does not work. It seems to hang together because all the little bits and pieces seem to hang together because one prophet sounds, a false prophet, sounds like the next false prophet. They all seem to agree with each other, but it is not true.

They are saying all kinds of things about Russia, America or whatever. But after a while it looks all the same old rubbish. You know, it does not work. It does not come true. So, you need to have a look at these people and say, This is not testable. You cannot test whether these people are saying the truth or not, and so you do not have to believe it. You can put it to one side, and sometimes the whole of a person's knowledge consists of these kind of YouTube videos, and their world is a fantasy world. We should not be living in a fantasy world. We should be living in the true world of true people, that is around us every day.

And there is a little bit of a danger that we have is, with all the entertainment, we can enter into a fantasy world, the way you talk about the Marvel universe or the Star Wars universe, or Lord of the Rings universe, or so on and so on. And people get wrapped up in these fantasy worlds that do not exist, and their knowledge is now knowledge of a fantasy of a Hollywood thing. It is not true knowledge, it is not knowledge of the real world, it is not going to lead to salvation it is not going to lead to them being able to lead a better and more functional life. It is just details of a fantasy world that does not exist. It is idiosyncratic knowledge.

So, also, one of the marks of someone that has gone off the rails is they use a lot of strange jargon. They use words that are made up words that they use for their fantasy world, that is full of self-generated terms to sound important. But actually what they are learning is it is just what agrees with their worldview, agrees with the way they think in the first place. So, that is the problem with that kind of knowledge. It is strange, it is bizarre, it is eccentric knowledge, and it does not work. And if you go to a church and it is full of people that are full of this eccentric, mystical knowledge, run away, because it gets very confusing and it is very dysfunctional, and those people often end up in in very strange lifestyles, and you do not want to get trapped into that.

Now the third dimension we are talking about today, in terms of discerning cults and false religion, and where you should go to church and where you should not go to church, the kind of people you should and should not listen to when it comes to Bible teaching, is the whole idea of mercy versus cruelty. Now, when you see these extreme cults like the Branch Davidians or the David Koresh cult or some of these other cults, the one that went down to Guiana and they took cyanide and 900 people died, the Jim Jones cult. These kind of cults end up engaging in cruel behaviour, whereas a Christian, a true born again Bible believing Christian, will engage in merciful behaviour.

They will, a true Christian group, will do something like they will help the poor and needy, or they will build an orphanage. They will do things that are full of kindness and graciousness. They will visit you when you are sick. They will bring over some nice food for you, when you are down and depressed, they will give you a boost in life. And they will be kind to you. And the groups that are kind, that are good, that show a lot of mercy to other people, they are spiritually healthy. But the groups that have become narrow and cruel and dominating, they are the groups to run away from.

Especially if you listen to a pastor and the pastor is always talking about how important that person is and how dominating they are, and you listen to them and say, "Wow, this person sounds like a big bully." Well, a Christian pastor, a truly Christian pastor, should never sound like a great big bully. A pastor should not be beating the sheep. You do not lord it over the sheep. It says that very clearly in I Peter, chapter five, he tells them not as lording over the flock.

No, we are not to lord it over the flock ever. We are to be servant leaders of the body of Christ. We are to serve the people, we are to tend the sheep, we are to heal their wounds, we are to lead them to good pastures and good water. That is our job, as shepherds of the flock, we are there to make sure that the flock is healthy and happy, the flock being the people of God that we are tending to. We are to be full of mercy and kindness towards the people of God. And when you listen to a pastor and think, "Oh, that pastor is a big bully." That person's pastor is always yelling at his church, that pastor is always making up reasons to make the church feel bad, well, that is the wrong kind of pastor.

So, let's look at some of the aspects of mercy versus cruelty, and I will go to one that is very controversial, as you will get some groups that tell parents to throw away the medicine, to not get the operation for the child, not to trust doctors. And so they will say, Okay, throw away all of your child's diabetes medicine or something like that, get rid of all the insulin, and we are just going to believe in Jesus. We are just going to trust in God. And what happens is the child dies of medical neglect, because the pastor has unintentionally or intentionally been cruel, and so a very unwise and stupid thing for the parents to throw away the medicine, to toss out the insulin, that is wrong. That is cruel to the child to take away the child's medical treatment just so the pastor or leader can afflict their beliefs on them.

Now that happened to me as a young Christian, I am a very mild epileptic. I do not have seizures very often. I am on medication for them, and that is something I have just had to live with. I have been prayed about. It has got better, but it has not gone away entirely yet, though it has been a very, very long time. Well, this person said, told me just to believe in Jesus and throw away my medicine. I did that and three or four days later I had a massive seizure, which really messed me up. And it was in the bathtub, and I ripped the fittings out of the bathtub and became very bruised. I actually ripped the taps out of the wall, the faucets out of the wall on the bath. And I nearly died from bad Christian advice as a new believer.

A wise person would have said, "Keep on your medication, keep on your anti-epilepsy medication that kept my seizures under control," and that would have been a much wiser and better thing to do. But this person was a friend, a young friend of mine who was very enthusiastic about the Lord. I was a very new Christian. She was a very much more mature Christian. She told me to do this, and I nearly died as a result of this inadequate medical advice. Never do that. Never tell anyone to throw away their medication and just trust Jesus. Instead, you should pray for them. And when they are healed, when you have got obvious evidence that they are healed, then you can get rid of the medication. When the doctor says you do not need this anymore, then you can get rid of the medication. Listen to the doctor. So, that is something where cults can be cruel. They ask people to throw away their medication.

In cults and strange religious groups there is often a lack of community help. The cult is not interested in the wider community. They do not have a feeding programme, they do not have this. They might have one to recruit members for the cult, but that is it. It is there as an advertising device, and they are not interested in showing compassion to the poor and needy, or helping out the community in a wider way. They exist for themselves alone.

And the cult has a cruel and insular mentality. Furthermore, along this way, a very strict cult will say, "You have to break away from your family. You cannot talk to your parents anymore because they do not like us." And so they want to break off relationships with the family. They want to control the relationships, and they want to control the information that comes in to people.

So, here we are. We have talked about this before. I will say it again, the cults want to control your access to relationships, information, emotions and behaviour. There are cruel, sadistic cults. They will say, "No, you cannot see your family. You have got to be totally under our control all the time." And so the cults often have a way of cruelly depriving the person of key relationships. And Jesus, on the other hand, was a person who wanted you to reconcile with your family, wanted you to be in relationship with your family all the time.

So, a healthy church, a healthy one, will be involved in programmes of compassion and kindness. And the pastor will be a kind, good person, a humble person who is meek and humble, and blesses that the church and is a servant leader. Whereas the pastor who is dominating, and is constantly making demands and telling people to do ridiculous things, such as break up with their family or throw away their medicine, or do this or do that, and comes across as a harsh, dominating person, that is not the person to go into. If you are seeing any signs of cruelty, sadism, domination, manipulation and control, that is not the way we want to go there at all. We want a church that is full of mercy and good fruits. That is the sign of God's wisdom in James 3:18. It is reasonable, it is merciful, it is full of good fruit, and so that is something you want to look through.

Now let's go over those three dimensions again before we wind up with today's programme. What is the first dimension that we are looking at here is unconditional love versus paranoid thinking? Is the church loving or is it full of strange, paranoid thinking and conspiracy theories? Dimension number two is wisdom and folly. Do people in the church genuinely pursue a wide range of wisdom and knowledge, from a wide range of sources, both Bible and science and everything else. And they are knowledgeable, wise and functional people. Or are they foolish people, who have just their own knowledge, only accept other people like them, who think the same exact way that they do. And the third dimension is mercy and cruelty. Is the church merciful, kind, gracious and good to other people? Is it supportive of the poor and needy? Is it kind to those who are less fortunate in life, or is it cruel? Does it cut people off from their families? Does it rebuke people? Does it dominate people? Does it scare people? Does it frighten people in some way? Does it ask people to throw away their medication? Does it make unusual and crazy demands on people. So, they are the three dimensions we are talking about.

One last thing, just going through them, unconditional love versus paranoia. Wisdom versus folly. Mercy vs Cruelty.

8. Commercial Cults

Now we are doing Episode eight of our series on spiritual discernment, helping you to know True from False in the world of religion. And as we go into today's session, it is about commercial cults. In other words, organisations that make money into a god, and they worship money instead of God, and they form organisations that trap people into greed. Before we do that, before we get into this interesting topic of commercial cults, let us pray. Father in heaven, we ask you bless your word to our hearts and minds today. We ask that we will understand what is going on in the world around us, that you will give us discernment, open our spiritual ears, open our spiritual eyes. Give us grace and peace as we listen to this broadcast, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, so let's start with a Scripture in I Timothy 6, verses 8 to 10. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

So, you know, in the sermon on the Mount, Jesus says you cannot serve God and Mammon, because you will either love one and hate the other, or hate one and love the other, because you cannot serve two masters. Well, here, money becomes people's master. And then the love of money becomes the root of all kinds of evils and treachery. You see that when someone dies and their will is contested, the whole family may fight over the inheritance. They fight over that money and it becomes a root, the love of money, the love of all that cash, becomes the root of all kinds of evil, betrayal and nastiness that goes on inside a family.

So, the love of money causes all sorts of pain and greed in politics and everything else like that. We look around the world, we see the love of money causing people to do bad thing after bad thing. Because money is such an immediate reward. We like that, we like the power. Who does not like a \$100 bill? Who does not want to have some money? Okay, we all want money. We need to pay for the light, keep the lights on, do this broadcast, everything else like that. But you should not love money. It should not be the main motive of your life. You should love the Lord.

And so, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. And we will be talking about that today, how people wander away from Christianity and into these things that I am going to call commercial cults.

And let's go back to that scripture that says people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. So, these people, they want to get rich, and so they come along and someone gives them a "too good to be true" business opportunity, selling this, selling that, selling the other. And it is a scam. It is a con. Instead of them being able to make money from it, they lose money. They lose lots of money. They have got to pay for this seminar, paying for that tape, pay for this book, pay for this course to make money, and it gets more and more and more expensive. And they think, "One day I am going to make a lot of money from this." But it never happens. They have been caught up in a commercial cult.

And now there are different kinds of cults that we have been talking about in this series. Well, obviously, religious cults, therapy and self awareness cults, which we have not covered yet. Political cults, commercial cults, which is what we are talking about now, new age cults and satanic ritual abuse cults which we will cover in the in the future.

So, we are talking about commercial cults. And most of my experience there is in the Australian context, with a particularly aggressive group that I will just call Business X, and I will not say what the business is. But it is often in the business of selling soap and household products and things like that, and they are always trying to persuade people to buy these household products. And they use a technique called multilevel marketing. The people above you are called your up line, the people underneath you in the multilevel marketing are called your down line, and they report to you, and a bit of their profits goes up to you. So, the more people you have in your down line, the more money you can make. Now, some of these multilevel marketing businesses are respectable, a few of them, but most of them are just going to exploit you. They are going to take you in. They are going to make you work very hard. And in the end, you think, "I did not really make as much money out of that as I thought I was going to do."

So, how can you tell? How can you tell when one of these con artists, these business opportunities that are not business opportunities, how can you tell when they are not on the up and up? How can you tell when they are doing bad things? Have you got a pen and paper? Write this down. Start writing these points down. Number one, they are less than direct in naming their organisation or product. So, you say, "Do you belong to X organisation?" "Oh, well, I am just giving a business opportunity," and they do not tell you the name of it, because a lot of these organisations have a bad reputation. If they will not name the organisation, they will not tell you the product. They will just tell you how good it is going to be, then that is a sign that it is a dishonest organisation.

Next, point two, if the meetings of the organisation have a religious fervour and seem more like a church service than a business meeting, they are trying to pump you up, they are trying to motivate you. They are trying to get you to believe in Organisation X or believe in the product. Now the only person you should believe in is the Lord God Almighty and his Son, Jesus Christ. We do not go around believing in a political leader, a commercial leader or a product. We can say this is a decent product. I would like to sell it. Okay, if you are a salesman, sure. So, sell your motor cars. Sell this, sell that, that is an obvious tangible product that you can sell. But these organisations tend to sell rather dubious things, and they have got to get their people to believe in the product, the company and everything else. And it becomes like a motivational meeting, and you need to be suspicious of that, if their meetings have a religious fervour.

Thirdly, if a clearly defined and intrusive hierarchy is part of the deal, particularly if they are to be unquestioningly obeyed. And some of these organisations the up line, that is the bosses, so you say you are a salesman with them, and that is the up line, and they will start saying, "Oh, you have got to do this. You have got to change your attitude. You have got to change your thinking." And they will intrude on every part of your life, including your diet, your personal life, your ability to attend church. They will demand that you go out and sell the product during church services or something like that. You approach all your Christian friends with product X. No! Your up line should stay out of your life. Related to work, okay, but they want to intrude in your life and everything else, and that is a sign of a cult. They are trying to take control of your mind, your emotions, your information and your behaviour. And so they are wanting to take control often of your relationships as well. So, if they are trying to exert these

huge levels of control, then you need to run away, if they have got an intrusive administrative layer, they ask too much of you, a hierarchy.

The next point, point four, is if they start encroaching on your time far more than it was originally said. So, they said, "You can do this business in 10 hours a week, and you will make so much money," and eventually they are asking you to work 70 hours a week on the business because you need to put in more effort, et cetera, et cetera. Then you know that you have been scammed. You thought this would be a great sideline, but it is not a sideline at all. It is that they are demanding that you work harder and harder, because they are getting a percentage of your profits and they are greedy. And they are trying to push you harder and harder so they can get more and more money out of you, because you are the cow and they are milking the cow. You are the one making the sales, and they are getting the profits off you.

Okay, next point, point 5, if little extras that you need to be a success keep on being introduced and they often start adding up financially. So, if they say if you are going to be a success in the sales of Product X, you have got to go to this seminar, and the seminar is really expensive. It is in a big hotel. You are gonna pay big money to go to the seminar, and it is going to make you a great salesman, and then the next thing they say, "Oh, you have got to buy this book." That is an expensive book, and you got to buy that book as well. And next is one thing after the other. You are forking over money to learn sales techniques, and this and that to go to the next level, and on and on and on it goes. And you are being sucked in to this product. And often the marketing terms are really dishonest. They are really bad. And you are paying out more in motivational things and training, than you are actually getting back in profit and revenue from the stuff that you are selling. And that is the sign that it is a scam.

Next thing, I think point 6 we are up to, and they tell you not to associate with certain people, branding them as negative or as losers. They say, "You have got to surround yourself with positive people," and positive people mysteriously turn out to be just the people associated with their organisation. And they break you off from your friends, your family from everyone else who might warn you about Product X or Company X, and what they are up to in the marketplace, and that their product really is not that good. And they might say, "Oh, that person over there, they are a loser. They used to be with us, but they left us, and now they are speaking negative things about us." Well go over to that person and say, "Hey, why? Why did you leave them?" And they will tell you. "Okay, so it is a scam," and they say "Yes, it was a scam, and it cost me so much money." Okay. So, be careful about them if they are trying to control your relationships and who you can and cannot associate with and hear from and things like that.

Next point 7. The advice they give oversteps the mark of normal business advice and deals with issues that would normally be regarded as personal. So, in this case, they are, instead of just advising you normal business advice, they start advising you about your marriage and how to raise your children. They get into very personal advice. And this is actually a form of control. Because you start surrendering information about your personal life, of your spiritual life, your family and medical issues, and they are getting into you. They are getting into your soul. They are getting into your head, they are getting into your heart by advising you and pretending to counsel you on these things. They are starting to take control, and they are taking away your independence. They are taking away your ability to think for yourself.

And so if they are doing that, it is a control freak mechanism. It is a way of bringing you deeper and deeper into the group. So, you are hesitant to leave because you shared so much of your life and your heart with them. They have got now a lot of information on you. And they are using that against you. So,

be very careful if they start giving you "advice" that is not related to the business at all, but it is a way of drawing you into the group and making you a part of their cult.

The next thing point 8, the feeling that you are being surrounded by these people and that your normal friendships are diminishing as a result of involvement with the group. The group tells you to lie to your friends in order to recruit them. Now that is a big, bad sign. They are telling them to lie to their friends or even to exaggerate your earnings, to get people involved. Or if acceptance or rejection of friendship is dependent on purchasing the product or being involved in the business, then leave fast. They say, "Well, you cannot be my friend if you do not buy this product." Well, what kind of friendship is that? That is terrible. That is an exploitative, that is a manipulative thing. You might not have much money this week. It might be a tough week for you. Why do you have to buy their silly product? That is a sign that they are trying to drag you in and get more and more and more money out of you. Like I said before you are selling their product, but you are really the cow to be milked, and they are just trying to get as much milk out of the cow as possible.

And so if they are restricting your friendships or making friendships depending on commercial transactions, that is a good sign that you need to be headed away from a group like that, particularly if they are asking you to tell lies to your friends. "Oh, go tell your friend that they can make a tonne of money out of this group. Oh go tell your friend that the products are awesome, go tell your friends" this that or the other and they are just pushing you to tell fibs all the time. Well do not do that. Do not go anywhere near people that are asking you to lie to your friends in order to recruit them into the commercial cult.

It is a business, it is posing as a business. But actually it is a little religion. It is a money worshipping religion. It is not worshipping Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. It is worshipping the unholy dollar. It is worshipping whatever money you have got, the Kenyan shilling or whatever, it is worshipping the money instead of Jesus Christ. And they are involved in unethical behaviour.

And then the last point here, and I think this is point 9, stand back and ask, What are these people living for? If the answer is money and the business, if people are just living for money and the business then the business has them, they do not have the business. You will probably end up in the same mess if you join them, then ask the question about intensity. Is this a normal intensity to live at? Or has this group made some sort of time-consuming life dominating fetish out of the company? Are they making the company into the be all and end all of their life? And if it is just a business and then it is not the be all and end all of life, your family should be, your religion should be, your church and your friends should be, not some company that sells soap or makeup or any other thing, and whatever it is selling, or vacuum cleaners or whatever. It is trying to push you into selling to your next-door neighbor, do not get involved in that stuff. Be very, very careful, because these groups can take over your life.

Now, one thing that you want to look at is the issue of what we call the cult personality. Now the cult personality is a fake personality, that is put up over the top of the real personality of the person. And it is a fake smiley, smiley, very nice personality that is always positive, and it is "fake it till you make it." Have you heard that phrase before? "Fake it until you make it." That is what a lot of these commercial cults say. So, they are going to be positive all the time. They are going to be super positive all the time.

And so they have got this mask on, this smiley face on all the time. Whenever you see them, they are upbeat and they are positive and they never have a down day. Not to you, of course, they are having

down days, but that is hidden away in the real personality, and so when you meet them, they are always attractive. They are always smiling. They are always really upbeat. No matter if their life is falling apart, they will tell you that everything is fine and terrific and so on. And so these attractive, positive, always smiling people, after a while, it gets suspicious and you go, "I do not think this is real. I do not think, no one is like this all the time." They do not have genuineness. They do not have authenticity. They do not have the ring of truth about them. You realise that you are dealing with a fake person, a person that has adopted another personality on top of their real personality.

And so they have got this fake mask on all day and all night, and it is built by the group. The commercial cult helps them to reinforce the fake personality, and they think their fake personality is their real personality. Well, they think that and they are deluded into this new way of thinking. They think it is positive thinking, but it is actually just acting. They have got another self. It is an acted out self. It is a fake self. It is like a theatrical self that goes on top of the real self. And so that is not what you want. You do not want to be fake. You want to be authentic. You want to be real. You want to be the person that God has designed you to be.

Okay. And this guy, this lady who was involved in the Jonestown cult gives you gives a great description of the fake cult personality. "When you meet the friendliest people you have ever known to introduce you to the most loving group of people you have ever encountered. And you find the leader to be the most inspired, caring, compassionate and understanding person you have ever met. And then you learn that the cause of the group is something you have never dared hope could be accomplished. And all of this sounds too good to be true. It probably is too good to be true. Do not give up your education, your hopes and ambitions to follow a rainbow." And the person who said that was called Jenny Mills and she was part of the People's Temple, and she was assassinated for criticising them. She was eventually killed, she left the group and they killed her. That is how evil this People's Temple, Jim Jones cult was. But she said if you meet a group that is too good to be true, they probably are. They are full of people with these fake personalities.

So, here is another thing, the "fake it till you make it" thing. A guy called Phil Kearns writes about this. "I remember the telephone call I received from a woman in Salem, Oregon. She was calling me about my book on the Jonestown tragedy. I was new in the business X business, this multilevel business, having been in it only a week. 'I hope that I am not disturbing you, Mr Kearns. I have got your telephone number from your publisher in Plainsfield, New Jersey. I read your book on the Peoples Temple, and I just wanted to give you my condolences on the loss of your mother and sister in Jonestown.' And towards the end of a telephone conversation, she asked, 'By the way, are you aware of the business X business?' 'Yes,' I replied. But I did not tell her I was in the business." And it goes on to say, "you know that every time I go to one of the meetings that reminds me so much of your book, all the chanting and the way they malign and twist the Holy Scriptures for gain. I feel that this business is a cult. I think you need to tell the world about that company." And eventually he did.

And so there are a lot of groups out there that use cult dynamics in order to sell stuff to people, and to keep the salesman in line all the time, because the whole idea is to have as many salesmen as possible, and to get as much money out of those salesman going up to the top of the organisation, while the bottom of the organisation tends to starve or do very poorly financially.

So, there are a few more extracts here from real life folks on the Internet. "My wife and I are attempting to cope with our close friends in this business X, this multilevel marketing. I am not going to use any

name of any business. Originally, the idea was to become financially secure, and in doing so, provide free time to visit friends such as us. Now all they can talk about are their friends in the business, and we cannot knock them for their motive for providing for themselves. But it all becomes all consuming the point that anything not associated with Business X is not worth investing time in."

See, these people got brainwashed. They have got brainwashed by this fake business, by this commercial cult, and now all they can think about is the business, because their brain has been taken over, their emotions, the control of information, controlling relationships has totally taken over their lives.

And let's have a look at another one. "My husband and I tried business X, it sounded sure fire, but it turned out to be too cultish. The set up for ordering, and seven hours in training took incredibly too much time. Busy normal people with other parts of their lives could not abide such day long affairs every month. Besides the stuff that was pushed for training emphasised glorifying your up line, who often was not smarter than you. We did not make money despite spending a lot of time, and we did try hard. The clincher was the pseudo religious tone and sometimes outright Christian preaching of the seminars. We are not Christian." That is just a testimony on the Internet. "And there is no reason for us to be in such a business if it is not nonsectarian. But Business X folks do not discuss things like that. My advice. Try it. You won't like it." So, here are these testimonies from people.

And here is another one. It is a bit amusing. This is back in the eighties or nineties, when people still had cassette tapes. Many of us now do not have them. My generation does. But this is an older testimony. "A coworker of mine, who was a gung-ho business X rep for several years. One day we were talking about my collection of Grateful Dead tapes, which is a rock band, which numbers over 450. And this guy says, 'Go ahead, take your cheap shots.' And she said," that is the business person said, "Well, I'm catching up to you. I've got 250 business X tapes. The only difference is you do not make any money off yours." And she was taking a shot at the guy with the music tapes. "Well, there are lots of other differences, but I ignored them, and I asked her to add up how much she had spent on all those tapes, seminars and various other business X materials and compare to a business X income. The next day she came in rather solemn looking, and after some prying on my part, she eventually admitted that she had taken my challenge and had discovered that she had lost a great deal of money due to involvement with Business X. Just how much, she wouldn't say. But she allowed how it was a lot more than the cost of my tape collection."

So, that is how it goes. So, what happens? You get into these businesses, they sound too good to be true. They ask you to do all this training, they give all this money to your up line in the business, and soon they are ripping you off and you are losing money instead of making money. Well, what does the Bible say about this? It says. As I said at the beginning, the love of money is the root of all evil. We cannot love money and love God at the same time.

Now let's go to the Book of Revelation. You all know about the 666 on people's hands. What does the 666 allow people to do? To buy or to sell, to use money. So, without the 666 people cannot buy or sell, they are either in the market or in the kingdom. And that is the ultimate challenge. Are you going to be in God's kingdom and unable to buy or sell? Or you are going to be in Satan's kingdom, the Kingdom of Darkness and able to engage in the business? And that will be the ultimate commercial cult, Babylon.

The Babylon in Revelation will be the ultimate commercial cult. It talks about Babylon, they are selling all these people and souls and goods, and all the trade that goes on in the Babylonian system, chapter 17, 18 and 19 of the Book of Revelation. They are talking about how "Babylon, Babylon has fallen," and how it was glorious, how it was rich, how people were making so much money, and how the merchants of the earth were really, really into this commercial Babylon.

It is basically a gigantic commercial cult worshipping the beast, and keeping people in the cult is this mark of the beast, and you cannot buy or sell without it, unless you are part of this great organisation that worships money, right? That is part of the thing is financial control of people's lives. That is part of the end time scenario that Satan introduces.

So, in the end, the final choice of Christians will have to make about the mark of the Beast, if you take the mark of the Beast you burn in sulphur forever and ever. So, we know that, we know that there is eternal torment for those that deny Christ and take the mark of the Beast, and the mark of the Beast is all about buying and selling. That is all about money. It is all about business, but it is toxic business.

Of course, you can run your own business. You can have your own store. And that is fine, to be a farmer and to buy and sell now. But in the end times that will not be the case. You will not be able to do that. You will have to be a Satan worshipper in order to engage in any sort of commerce whatsoever. And so ultimately this stuff about commercial cults will apply in the end time, it will be part of the end time scenario that that we are facing. And the ultimate choice will be between God and Mammon, between God and money. And that is a very hard choice to make.

Judas made the wrong choice. He took the 30 pieces of silver and betrayed Jesus, his Lord and Saviour. We find the Demas wandered away into the world. We find that an Ananias and Sapphira got greedy about the price of their land and kept back some for themselves and did not tell the church about it. And they lied to the Holy Spirit. They lied to Peter the Apostle, and they ended up dead. The challenge between God and money is there all the time. We find Gehazi, the servant of Elishah, and he went and he wanted some clothes and this and that from Naman the Syrian, and Naman the Syrian was very happy to give them to him. But the leprosy of Naman cleaved to Gehazi to the end of his days. There is a challenge there. We have to be very careful about who we serve. Yes, you can have money. Yes, you can buy and sell. Yes, you can have a business. But God has to be first.

And if you are into a group that is all about up lines and selling and dealing slightly dishonestly with people, and tricking people into joining this business, then run away from this multilevel marketing stuff. It can be very persuasive. It can be very all involved, and if you have got friends and family in it, pray for them, pray that they get out of it, talk to them about it and say, Is this really working for you? What are you getting out of this? This is a disaster. It is taking over your life. You are not the same person that you used to be. You want them worshipping the Lord, not worshipping a business or a profit or a leader that is promising them all kinds of money.

And these kind of scams are very dangerous for Christians, they are very dangerous for the church, because people get into churches, they worm their way into churches in order to find more salespeople, to find people for their down line. They want other people to join them in the business, because they are going to make money off the people they recruit, and the more people that have under them, the richer they are going to be. So, be very careful about commercial cults and your church. If you are a pastor, you do not need to ban multilevel marketing in the church. And you need to be cautious because

it takes away people's loyalty from the Lord. And people striving to become rich pierce themselves with many a pang and wander away from the faith. So, that is today's interesting topic, talking about commercial cults.

9. The Occult

Today we are continuing with our series on spiritual discernment for pastors, Christians and Christian leaders. And today's topic will be "What is wrong with exploring the other side? What is wrong with getting involved in the occult?" And there are a lot of Bible verses on that, and we are going to go deep into God's word today about this fascinating topic. So, hang on there, get your pens, your Bibles and your notebooks, because here, at Insights for Eternity, we teach those who teach others. So, today's topic is the occult. What is wrong with exploring the other side? And we are going to say, there is a lot wrong with it, and so please get your notebooks out.

Before we do that, let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for the glory of God that hovers over the nations. We thank you that you are at work in the world. We thank you for the gospel that goes out to all nations all the time, and that you have sent your messages throughout this world to proclaim your word. We now ask that we will be strengthening them, that we will be blessing them, that your word will go forth in this broadcast and help people to help others. And we ask that you will bless this broadcast, that you will keep us spiritually safe, that this broadcast will be covered by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there will be no negative consequences from it, because you are our protector. You are our God. So, Lord, we ask that your blessing, 100% blessing, will be over this broadcast in Jesus' name, amen.

So, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He is the only true path to spiritual things. But we get fascinated with other ways. We get fascinated with aliens, ouija boards and all sorts of things. But Jesus says I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father, but by Me. So, no other religion is true, and no other idol is true, and no other way of being a spiritual person is true. Participating in the occult is very dangerous, not just because of what may or may not occur and inviting spirits into your life, et cetera. But because it brings down God's anger on you and your children for up to three or four generations. And in Exodus 20 verses four and five it says, you shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth, you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the 3rd and 4th generations of those who hate me.

And what is hating God? Hating God is turning to idols and other systems. If you turn away from God to some idol, some shaman, some village form of witchcraft, the Bible says you are hating God because you are turning to another lover. You are loving things other than God. And God is a jealous God. And he does not take that. He does not take this other worship that is going on. When Israel was about to go into the promised land, Moses gave these warnings against being involved with idols, images or occult practises. And you will find it in Deuteronomy seven verses 23 to 26. I will repeat that, Deuteronomy seven verses 23 to 26. But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, deliver the enemies over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed. And he will deliver their kings into your hand. And you will destroy their name from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you till you have destroyed them. You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire. You shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves lest you be snared by it. For it is abomination to the Lord your God. You shall not bring in an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it, you shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing.

I will tell you a story. We had a relative whose husband brought an idol into the house. The idol was a kind of African idol with very red lips of a woman. And that same week he committed adultery and destroyed the marriage. The spirit in the idol was a sensual spirit and the sensual spirit, the seductive spirit, got into this man. And that same week was the end of it. He ran off with a very inappropriate woman who worked in a bar and all that kind of thing. And this sensual idol had a spiritual power that destroyed that marriage. Later on, when my wife and I went into that house, we noticed this idol. We ask the questions about it, and I prayed over that idol with anointing oil. I put the anointing oil on the top of the idol And as I prayed, the idol went grey and the lips that were bright red went grey as well, and all the power went out of the idol. We cast the demon out of that idol. And that idol was a cursed thing, and it brought a curse to that house. And that man is still estranged from his wife and family to this day. It led to a divorce and lots of painful economic circumstances.

Do not bring an idol into your house, because those idols have spirits dwelling in them that afflict pain, damage and destruction. Because Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy. We notice the penalty for bringing an object of occult worship into one's house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it, for it is an accursed thing. Idols carry the curse of God on them, and so do ouija boards, tarot cards, things used in satanic rituals, crystal balls, magic books, divination instruments, et cetera. When these things are present in your home, alcoholism, mental illness, chronic diseases and even suicide will soon follow. You must get that kind of stuff out of your house. You must do what they did in acts 19, and burn all the instruments of divination and idols. Idols are to be destroyed. You are not to covet the silver or gold on them, but you are to burn them and utterly destroy them.

And you are not to get your cards done. You are not to have your palm read. You are not to do your horoscope. Leviticus 20 and verse six says this, And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits to prostitute himself with them, I will set my face against that person and cut him off from his people. Okay, so when you turn to medium, spiritist, people doing divination, horoscopes and such things, it is so serious that it resulted in God's wrath falling in a particularly severe form, being being banished forever from Israel, being cut off from the people of God, loss of salvation. So, when you turn away to these spirits, you are going outside the people of God, you are cut off from the people of God. Your name is erased from the names of those who are in the Book of life, those who belong to the people of God. Because you have turned after things that are wicked and terrible, you must repent. You must get rid of that stuff right now.

Here are some verses about the occult in the Old Testament and New, we do not have time to get through them all, but we will try and get 10 or 12 of them. There are many, many, many verses. So, let's look at one from Leviticus 19:26 to 31. You shall not eat anything with the blood, that is in a ritual sacrifice. Nor shall you practise divination or soothsaying. You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. That is for ritual purposes. Of course you can shave without too much trouble. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead nor any tattoo any marks on you. I am the Lord. Do not prostitute your daughter to cause it to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry and the land become full of wickedness. You shall keep My service and reverence My sanctuary. I am the Lord. Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits. Do not seek after them to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.

These are practises, back in the Old Testament, that brought the wrath of God. And so you are not to get tattoo marks for the dead. You are not to consult mediums and familiar spirits. You are not to go

anywhere near idols. And you are not to practise divination or soothsaying. And Leviticus 20 verse six. And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits to prostitute himself with them, I will set my face against that person and cut him off from his people. Deuteronomy seven, verse five. But thus you shall deal with them. You shall destroy their altars and break down their sacred pillars and cut down their wooden images and burn their carved images with fire.

So what, how are we to deal with them? We are to utterly destroy all these occultic objects. And so you must destroy them. And it says in Deuteronomy 7:25 you shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire. Put them in the fire. Deuteronomy 18 verses 10 to 14. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or daughter pass through the fire, or one who practises witchcraft or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations, the Lord your God drives them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God, for these nations which you will dispossess listen to soothsayers and diviners. But as to you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.

So, well, what is it saying there, it is saying quite clearly, and quite bluntly, that the involvement in a soothsayers and divination caused these nations to fall before Israel. It was an unholy practise, and the unholy practise led them to become losers. They lost the war. They were defeated. They were cast out of the land because God brought Joshua and the people in to destroy those people for those practises. Because those practises were an offence to the Lord God Almighty. Because there is only one God. He is the creator of heaven and earth. And there is no sun god, moon god, god of the trees, et cetera. There is only one God. There is no Baal, no Asteroth, all these false gods like Zeus and the ones you see in the movies, Thor and all those gods, they are just made up gods, made up by men. They have no truth to them whatsoever. And you need to know that, you need to know there is only one true living God, the great creator God and his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And you are not to worship anything else at any other time.

So, we find that in Old Testament history, this resulted in tremendous wrath against Israel. So that, when they did get into all this stuff, when they eventually did get into all the idols, they were kicked out of the land for doing so. It brought on the siege of Jerusalem, it brought down the Assyrians and Babylonians. Tremendous judgement came upon Israel. So, it was kicked out of the land and occupied and never really got the land back, except for briefly under the Maccabees, until the modern day. So, Israel was cast out for its idolatry.

And so we find here in II Kings 17:17, the explanation of why God's wrath came upon Israel, and they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practise witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger. And God became angry and brought these other nations against them to destroy them for their idolatry and their witchcraft. And then it says here, And he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. He practised soothsaying, he used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger. That is II Chronicles 33 verse six.

So, people who do these things provoked God to anger. And I am sure if you are listening to this broadcast, you do not want to make God angry. So, if you do not want God angry against you to destroy you or your family for three or four generations, if you do not want God to cast you out of the land, if you do not want diseases, madness, insanity and addictions over your house, then you need to get rid of

every form of divination, soothsaying, all this kind of crazy stuff that is going on. You need to put away charms. You need to put away bracelets. You need to put away amulets. You need to get rid of all the juju in your house and in your yard because that provokes God to wrath.

Some people think they will sell their house easier if they plant a statue of Joseph upside down in the backyard. That kind of nonsense is an offence to God. If you want to sell your house, pray to God, give him praise and thanksgiving and believe in Him. So, and it is also the false prophets. It says, Isaiah eight verse 19. And when they say to you, seek those who are mediums and wizards who whisper and mutter, should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? Certainly not. That is why you are not to ask advice from ancestors. You are not to pray to the ancestors, because we are not to seek the dead on behalf of the living. It is there in Isaiah, chapter eight and verse 19.

Jeremiah 14 and 14. The prophets prophesy lies in my name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them. They prophesied to you a false vision, a divination, a worthless thing, the deceit of their heart. So, there are people out there who are false prophets that are not speaking from the Lord. They are speaking from their own heart and their own mind. They are not speaking to you truth in any way, shape or form. And they will try and get into churches by saying they are a prophet. But when you listen to them, you think these people are speaking from the flesh and not from the spirit.

And it says, Therefore, do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers or your sorcerers, who speak to you saying you shall not serve the King of Babylon. And this is typical of false prophets. They say, Oh, it is all going to be good, a new thing is going to happen in your life. Everything that is going to be breakthrough. And they do not tell you that your sins are going to have consequences. And here Jeremiah was saying, "Yes, Jerusalem is going to be occupied by the King of Babylon. Israel is going to go into exile. This is going to happen and these sorcerers and diviners who speak lies to you, they are telling you false things. They are just getting up your hope to get a donation from you."

So, Ezekiel 12:24, For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the House of Israel. So, these people who give you visions and divinations, they do so to flatter you, to boost your ego. They do not tell you to repent. They do not tell you about the sins in your life. They do not tell you to get straight before God. They just give you a flattering divination. And there are a lot of other verses like that.

Here in Ezekiel 13:18, it says, Thus says the Lord God, woe to the women who sew magic charms on their sleeves and make veils for the heads of people of every height to hunt souls. Will you hunt the souls of my people and keep yourselves alive? So, all those charms, all those things you use for love potions, or for money, or to get a promotion; and the women make these things and they sew them onto your clothing so you will have spiritual power, here it says in Ezekiel 13 verse 18, do not ever engage in those kinds of practises.

Ezekiel 13 and verse 20. Therefore, says the Lord God, behold, I am against your magic charms by which you hunt souls like birds. I will tear them from your arms and let the souls go, the souls you hunt like birds. And so in Ezekiel 13:23. Therefore, you shall no longer envision futility nor practise divination, for I will deliver my people out of your hand, and you shall know I am the Lord.

And here in Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament: And I will come near you for judgement. I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien because they do not fear me. For He will come swiftly in judgement against the sorcerers and those who practise magic.

Well, what do we say? You might say, Oh, that is just the Old Testament, Pastor John. What about the New? Well, we find it in Acts Chapter 19:19. It continues the narrative, and of course, we we know that the Bible always tells us to flee from idols. Here in Acts 19:19. There was a great revival in Ephesus, after the sons of Sceva could not cast out the demons. Seven sons of Sceva could not do it. But Paul, but Paul's people could. They saw there is a spiritual authority in Paul. Acts 19:19. Also, many of those who had practised magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all, and they counted up the value of them, and it totaled 50,000 pieces of silver.

A piece of silver was a day's wage. So, 50,000 days' wages. So, say a day's wage in America is about \$100. So, that is about \$5 million here, in American value. And I do not know what that is, in the value of the country you are in, but it is a lot of money. So, 50,000 pieces of silver, all this stuff they just burned it. They did not keep it, they took all the value of these enormously valuable manuscripts of occult, and they just destroyed them.

Revelation 21 verse 18 we are getting towards the back of the Bible now. But the cowardly and unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars. Now the liar is here, someone who is telling lies about God, false doctrine and things, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

And further on in that chapter, Revelation 22:15. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters and whoever loves and practises a lie. So, the sorcerers and the idolaters are outside they are cast into darkness, they are cast into the lake of fire. The spiritual consequences of idolatry of sorcery are condemnation. They have been cast out from the presence of God. They are thrown into a lake of fire. They are destroyed eternally, and they dwell in eternal torment. So, you do not want that, so you do not want to worship idols. You do not want to keep idols in your house. You do not want to get involved in sorcery or magic charms or anything like that. That is a wicked, evil and terrible thing to be involved in. And you must repent of that.

So, let's look at what we what we should do as Christians as we are heading towards the end of this broadcast, a little under 10 minutes left. What shall we do as a Christian? The early church used to have a part of the baptismal formula, before they got baptised they had have to say this: I renounce all the works of the devil, and you need to do that. You need to renounce the works of the devil. And you have to have someone to go through and pray over you for all demonic influence in your life to be gone. You have to say I renounce all the works of the devil. I renounce all idols. I renounce all witchcraft. I renounce all magic charms. I will have no part of that in my life. And those becoming Christians were required to destroy any idols or charms or magic books that they own because these sins, idolatry, witchcraft and magic are abominations, they are very offensive to God. They are listed among the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19 to 21, and those who do such things have no inheritance in the kingdom of God. We need to get rid of them, and we need to get rid of them for good.

Okay, so what do we do? We do a personal inventory about your involvement and your family's involvement in the occult. And for instance, if your grandmother could tell fortunes, or an uncle who

was into real magic, black magic, or were your parents members of an organisation such as the Spiritualist Church? Remember, these curses can go down to the 3rd and 4th generations, and you need to break these curses. According to Galatians, 3:10 to 14, you need to break the curses through the cross of Jesus Christ. You need to claim the ancestral curses are broken through the cross of Jesus Christ.

And you need to confess all the sin in your family to God as well as your own sin, and say that you are no longer a participant. You reject the work of the devil. You reject your family's involvement in the occult, while still loving the members of your family. I am not asking you to reject your family. I am just saying that you confess to God that their involvement in the occult was wrong and it was evil, and you do not want anything with it.

The next step that that you will want to do is you want to destroy everything that is associated with the occult. And that can include precious things like a jade Buddha, or temple wind chimes or tarot cards or magic books. Demon masks, certain music that is full of occult lyrics, or things with pentagrams on it, which is the five pointed occult star, astrology books, Love Magic, Charms, books from cults such as the J. W. or Mormon. If you have got a copy of the Mormon Bible, the Book of Mormon, burn it. When in doubt, destroy it.

Get rid of all these things that you might have in your house, all the juju, all the idols, every little thing that you have used for magic. It can be all sorts of things. I know of someone using a little sculpture that looks like a dragon, and they burn cigarette smoke in it, and they mutter spells, and those spells seem to have real effect. There are many, many different kinds, depending on the country, depending on the region, I cannot list it all here. But you, with your local knowledge, will know what is not of God. And if it is not of God, get rid of it. If it is from a foreign religion, get rid of it.

Many people are trapped by the value of these items because they are expensive or they are historical. And they say, Oh, this is covered with gold or silver, or this is a very rare book. But the Ephesians Christians did not worry about the value. They did not worry about those 50,000 drachmas. They said, "Let's get rid of all these evil books. Let's get rid of the evil from our city." And they burned it and they destroyed it. And Deuteronomy 7:25, which I read, says we are not to covet the silver or gold that is on them. If you have got something and you say, "Oh, this is a valuable historical thing I cannot possibly burn it." Remember, the will of God is more important, and it is the devil's lying to you. The demon in that idol is lying to you. They are trying to convince you to hold on to it.

I remember a family I was trying to help and I said, you have got to burn all this stuff. Their house was full of all this junk, and they were getting into the feng shui and they had every idol imaginable. And I said, "You have got to get rid of it." So, they put it in the garage. I said, "No. You have got to get rid of it." So, they put them in bags in the garage and I said, "No, you have got to get rid of it." They never got rid of it. And their house, all sorts of financial troubles came upon them. And they were always after money. Their real idol was money. And then that is where God afflicted them, in their finances. He judged them, and everything they wanted fell apart, because they refused to get rid of these idols.

So, the other thing is, you need to renew yourself in God. You need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And you need to know the spiritual power that is from God and serve him. Now, if you would like a prayer, if you would like something to help you with this, that you can pass around to people, I will give you a website now where you can download a prayer, a pdf, and print it out and pray it for yourself and your family. Here it is, just, if you have got pen and paper, write it down: www.globalchristians.org

slash cleansing, c l e a n s i n g. So, I will give you that Web address again. globalchristians.org/cleansing Global Christians, all one word, globalchristians.org/cleansing . Write that down and you can pass that around to your friends and family.

I have had thousands and thousands of people download that prayer, and it has been very effective. It is like a spiritual antibiotic. You pray it twice a day for three weeks and you confess your sins. Get rid of idols, come back, do it again. God will bring new things to mind, and you just do it. It only takes a couple of minutes, twice a day, and it will gradually cleanse your mind and your spirit from the effects of the occult in your life, and you will find yourself very blessed. And many people say it is really really transformed their life.

It is free. There is no cost to it whatsoever. It is absolutely free, and you should be able to be very blessed and encouraged by that prayer. I will give you the website again, just in case you did not get it earlier. www.globalchristians.org/cleansing . So, globalchristians is one word .org/cleansing, and it does not matter if it is uppercase or lowercase. It does not matter in the Internet, just make sure you get that the Web address down.

Repent of your involvement in idols, pray various prayers to break off the curses from your life, and stand tall in the presence of God. You do not need idols. You do not need magic. God is sovereign. God is gracious. God is good. He will work all things together for good, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. And so you do not have to worry about that. God will work things around.

Idols just give you a shortcut. They seem to work, but they do not work because outwardly you prosper, but inwardly you are cursed, and you certainly do not want to end up in the lake of fire. You do not want to end up taking the mark of the beast. You do not want to end up following the various idols of this world because that is how God's wrath and God's anger comes upon you and on your household, on your family, and even on your children to the 3rd and 4th generations. So, stay away from idols, divination, witchcraft and all forms of occult and false teaching. And God will bless you in your ways.

It says in the New Testament, flee idols, says that in quite a few places, run away from them. They are not going to help you. They are a false hope. When you are desperate they seem like a real hope because you are impatient. You are in a hurry. You want to grab something, something that is worked for people in your culture for generations. But it does not work. God, God has better plans. God's plans are slower, but they are better. So, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, trust that God is going to work everything good for you. And the Web site again: www.globalchristians.org/cleansing.

10. True and False Revival

We are having a very interesting series on spiritual discernment for pastors, helping to equip Christian leaders to discern true from false in the body of Christ. And today's session will be "Is it a true revival or a false revival?" That is the topic. "Is it a true revival or a false revival?" Before we get into today's fascinating topic, let's pray. Father in heaven, we know that you are gracious, that you are good, that you give us discernment, wisdom and truth from your word. And we ask Lord Jesus Christ that you will help us to understand what is going on in the world around us. Open our spiritual ears and eyes, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, today we are going to talk about how to evaluate a revival movement or rather, movements that claim to be revival movements, but which may be involved with hypnotism, occult mysteries, all kinds of crazy things going on, stage performances, emotional manipulation and the rest. So, how do we know the difference between someone who is just hypnotising people, emotionally manipulating them, working them up, using some kind of NLP script, which is neurolinguistic programming and all the rest? How are these people getting their results? Are they actually making real Christian disciples, or are they just getting money out of suckers, getting money out of gullible people?

So, when someone says they are a revivalist, they are an apostle, a prophet, great big important person, and they are saying that they are doing a great, mighty movement of God around the world, should we check them out, or should we just believe their claims? Now, if you have been listening to the rest of this series, you should know that we should check people out. We should check their fruits. We should see what is going on with them, and is this revival of God. Now that is a question you can ask, you are not blaspheming the Holy Spirit by saying that a revival is not of God if it is plainly false. If the leaders are involved in lots of sexual immorality and things like that, you can say, "Wait a sec, I am very skeptical about this movement because it is dishonest. It is sexually manipulative of the people, or doing this, that and the other." And you can say, "No, I do not think this is of God." God gives you the right to evaluate things that appear to be from God.

And remember, the devil is very good at imitating the work of God. He does things that are very close to the truth, but they are a little bit off, so that people get seduced. People get lied to, people get drawn into false movements that can waste years of their life. I once had an engineering student living with me, much younger than me, but he was going through engineering, and he stayed in a spare room in the house. And so he was drawn into a false local revival and he would spend lots of time what he called "soaking in the spirit" on the floor. He abandoned his engineering studies, and his life went off the rails for a few years, until he finally got back on the rails and resumed his engineering studies. And now I think he is working in England as an engineer.

But he lost a few years of his life to a false revival movement, in a local church with a very ruthless pastor who really pumped a lot of money out of people, and many stories about that church, and how they talked about double and triple tithing, and getting more and more money out of people. And one day, one of his congregational members who was a plumber, went into the house and he installed gold taps in this pastor's place. And the plumber thought to himself, "Why am I installing gold taps in my pastor's place when I cannot put food on the table and I am double and triple tithing?"

This was clearly a false revival run by a dishonest person who understood the art of emotional manipulation, and that leads us to our first point here, which is the leaders. But we are going to have six main points, so you can write them down and a little bit of discussion as we go along. So, point 1, Are the revival leaders workers of righteousness? Or are they workers of iniquity. Here, the false pastor with his false revival, and his gold taps, and his manipulation, and his hypnotic trances that he put people into, he was clearly a worker of iniquity. And he had a very powerful, dominating personality that would get people in, and people who were gullible and vulnerable fell for his rhetoric.

And so we need to be careful about people with powerful, dominating personalities who engage in wicked and manipulative behaviour. Are they, are these leaders, characterised by financial greed, or are they characterised by good works? Are they characterised by good doctrine or by fables, stories, myths and things that cannot be confirmed? Are they characterised by deep Christian character or by selfish ambition? Are they always wanting more and more from the congregation and people? Are they driving in bigger and bigger cars and et cetera? Are they lawful or are they lawless? Are they humble and meek and lowly and kind and good, or are they boastful and wild and immoral?

So, you have to have a look at the leaders in the biblical criteria. We have gone through a lot of those biblical criteria in other parts of this series, but you need to check out the leadership of the movement. And if it stinks, it stinks. And some of the people of some modern revival movements have been heavily tattooed. They have used cuss words, they have ended up having affairs, and people say, "Oh, well, these people are different, They are tattooed, They are like us. We get along with them. And look at that, they are knocking people over, they are making people fall on the floor. They have spiritual power."

Well, spiritual power could have many different sources. And if the person is loud, if the person is aggressive, if the person is not humble, meek, wise and good, then you think maybe the spiritual power is false. And so we do not want dominating people, as in people that are dominating in a selfish kind of domineering manner. We want people that are Christlike, that are humble, good, wise, meek, gentle, kind and godly. They are the sort of people that should be leading these movements. If they are the opposite of this, if they are loud, if they are crass, if they are vulgar, if they are sexually suggestive, if they are always going after money, then run away. That is not a true revival. That is not a true Christian leader. They are lawless. They are throwing off the yoke of God. They are throwing off the commandments of God in order to carry on with their theatrical show, their hypnotism and their programming of people.

And there is a lot of modern psychology used by these fake revival leaders to get people into a hypnotic state or to get people to do something wrong. And they have a false anointing about them. And Paul says in II Corinthians 11 that the false apostles were very attractive people. They were more glamorous than Paul, but they had a false holy spirit. They had a false anointing, a fake anointing about them.

So, you will sense some anointing. You will sense spiritual power, but it is fake spiritual power. It is sickly sweet. It does not challenge sin. It does not make you examine yourself and repent. Instead, it is just a whooshy feeling with no specific moral component to it. Let me go over that again. A false anointing is a whooshy, sensual kind of feeling with no specifically moral component to it.

Now the Holy Spirit is holy. So, if it is the Holy Spirit, he is going to speak in terms of holiness and love, and in the gracious words of God. But you will know the truth. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth. He is

not just the spirit of nice feelings. He is the spirit of truth, and the Holy Spirit will confront you with truth. And the leader of a revival should be someone that you know speaks truth, not just who gushes spiritual power here and there, and really does not have any large capital T Truth content at all.

There needs to be truth content. You need to know that this person, not just believes the Bible, but has some deep thoughts, have some sense of fruitful thinking, depth of thinking involved in what they are doing in ministry. So, the leaders have to walk in truth, they have to be lawful. They have to do righteous things and good works. They have to have good doctrine, they have to be solid, sensible people of good character. If they are not, if they are flaky, if they are wild, if they are lawless, that is not a good movement to be part of.

Number two point. What are the long term fruits of the revival in terms of Christian character? Do people affected by this revival repent of their sins, get straight with God, put their lives in order, and lead generally successful Christian lives full of the fruit of the spirit? Okay, then, if they are doing that, that is probably a true revival, because they are repenting of sins and getting on with God. They are getting deep into the word. Their life is a better life because of it.

Or are they becoming an emotionally dependent person, dependent on the preacher, pastor, apostle? Are they becoming someone who is emotionally a nervous wreck? Is their life becoming more and more bizarre? Are they getting into conspiracy theories and crazy stuff? Is their character falling apart rather than coming together? So, if you find that people are becoming more and more dependent and neurotic, like my friend, the engineering student whose life fell apart, he was lying on the floor 3, 4 or five hours a day, not attending studies, living in a trance state for three years. That is a disaster, that is not good fruit. That is bad fruit. And I could not convince him that this was not the way to go, because he felt so deeply that this was God. But it was not God. It was human hypnosis. It was a mentally induced state. He came from a very difficult family. It was a mentally induced state that was getting hold of him, and he went on to become a nice person. But I do not think those years improved his life at all. They were just a waste of time.

So, the fruit of Christian character, things like faithfulness, truth, love, mercy and righteousness, are those coming out of the revival, are the people becoming more righteous and good? Okay, that is a good revival. Go along with that, because it is producing the fruits of repentance. But if there is no fruit of repentance, if it is just Christian experience after Christian experience, or rather spiritual experience after spiritual experience, then you need to be very wary about that.

So, by the fruit, you will know them. Are the people coming out of this revival becoming more responsible, are they are getting rid of the drugs and the alcohol, are they holding down steady jobs? Are the people coming out of the revival really saved, deeply saved? Or they just touched by a spiritual experience of some sort that has now got them enslaved to the denomination, the leader, the next meeting, the next thing coming along. So, if someone is enslaved to the revival, if they are rushing from meeting to meeting and there is no responsibility in their behaviour, if they are not getting their life together, then you need to be suspicious of what is going on in the said revival movement. If they are just being having money pumped out of them, and this and that and the other, then they have got on the wrong track. So, let's look at the fruit in the life of those who believe the doctrines of the revival.

Point 3 is, does the movement as a whole display a love of sound doctrine and does it love Scripture? Every revival holds the Bible up in the air. But does the revival teach you how to interpret Scripture?

Does the revival have a love of sound doctrine? Does the revival show you how to understand Christ better? Does the revival show you how to understand the Bible better? Is there deeper teaching of the word going on, and does it seem to be a movement that has a rational component to it? So, is it just emotional, or does it have some rational truth basis to it? Do you come out a person that is better educated in the Scriptures?

I am not saying that the revival has to teach you mathematics or chemistry or something like that. But it has to teach you the doctrines of the faith. It should believe in the resurrection. It should believe in the ascension, the death of Christ on the cross, the inerrancy of Scripture. It should show a healthy regard for the development of doctrines through the Christian Church. If a revival scorns the Trinity or the two natures of Christ, then you know that those people are proud and puffed up in themselves, and they have decided to go off on their own little tangent and do their own little thing.

And so the revival should believe in the Trinity, should show respect for the basic doctrines like the two natures of Christ, the inerrancy of Scripture, that is the Bible is inerrant, infallible Word of God. It should show some respect for doctrine and should ask believers to go deep in the word, not just skip from passage to passage in some sort of emotional rush. And when the preacher preaches, are they preaching in a sound and sensible manner, deeply breaking apart the word of God? Or do they just take one text and swirl around it with an enormous amount of emotions? Repeating this and repeating that and not getting to the point? And you think, "Where is this person going?" And they are not really going anywhere? What they are just trying to do is generate emotions.

I remember hearing one particular false preacher in America. His text was, "Please Come Before Winter," was an abstruse little reference from one of the epistles, and he is saying come before winter because I need the.... And then he just had all this big appeal for money after it, and he wanted \$140,000 out of that congregation and that thing, and he was just a complete liar and there was no doctrine. It was just a big emotional storytelling rush, all stories and no Scripture.

So, as appealing as those people are, as persuasive as those people are, you have got to look past that and say, Where is the scripture? Where is the logic? Does this hold together? Does point A flow into point B to point C? Is this person developing a thoughtful presentation of the Gospel? Or is this person just telling stories to work up people's emotions, so that this person can hold them like putty in the palm of his hand and then make them write a good check at the end of the service?

So, you have to be very careful about the kind of preaching that you are listening to. Does it sound like sound doctrine, or is it just really, really entertaining and moving? And if it is just entertaining and moving, if there is no sound doctrine, nothing happening from Scriptures there, then you need to be very, very careful about that kind of a revival. You are not just there to experience a lot of feelings. You are there to grow in Christ, and growing in Christ requires sound doctrine, including moral doctrine. Are they are teaching the right morality of Scripture, or are they teaching immorality, or they even amoral? They do not really care what you do, as long as you put some money in their plate, in their hand. So, just do they love sound doctrine, logic and truth, or are they just an emotional mess trying to manipulate you? Okay, that is our point 3.

So, the next thing is, does the movement have a clear aim? And is it built on Christ? Now, in I Corinthians three, it talks about those who build with straw, stubble and hay, the people that are just building a whooshy very fragile movement on false doctrine, on emotions, on personality, instead of building it on

Christ. If a revival is built on personality, if it is built on a leader, if it is built on following so and so and such and such, and having these feelings and those experiences, then it is probably false. It should not be built on a personality. It should not be built on feelings and experiences. The movement should be built on Christ. Is it a house of straw that is soon going to be gone? Or is it built on a foundation that can last for centuries?

Is there a doctrinal foundation to it? Is there a Christological foundation to it. Is this something that is solid and wise and good? And is it built on the historical Jesus of Scripture, the Jesus, who was born in Nazareth, died on the cross, rose again, ascended into heaven, taught the sermon on the mount? Or is it based on the claims, the wild claims, of prophet so and so, or apostle so and so, or some evangelist. Is it built on human emotion, or is it built on the word of God? So, where is the movement going? Where is it taking people at the end of the day? So, is this movement taking people to Christ, to a deeper walk with God? Or is this movement just taking people off to its own little area somewhere, where it just does its own thing and gets more and more emotional and stranger and stranger as it goes along?

So, you have got to ask, where is the movement going? Does it have a clear aim? Or is it just a great big ball of emotion and manipulation, which is laying hold of people's hopes and fears and playing on them for some reason? For ecclesiastical power, money, sex, greed, whatever is going on there. So, we have to ask, does the movement have a clear aim? Is it built on God? Is it built on Christ? Excuse me as I turn the page here of my points.

Next, does the movement have a sound morality to it? You want to have a look at the movement. Is it moral? Are the leaders moral? Are they honest? Do they have integrity? Do they speak to you in a truthful manner, or are they very sort of slimy and slippery? Do they tell you where the money is going, or do not they? Are they sexually immoral? Are they running off with the girls in the worship team or something like that? What are they doing? Because unless they are moral, unless they are talking about morality and truth, and exhorting you to walk morally, then it is probably false, because the Holy Spirit is holy and he wants people to be moral and wise and good.

And some of these leaders of these false revivals are very immoral people who just want to do wicked things for their own concern. They might be homosexuals. They might be adulterers. They might, in some case cases be paedophiles and terrible things like that. That is relatively rare. But are they moral or immoral in what they are doing? And also there are two errors here. One is that they are licentious, which means that they do all sorts of wild and wicked things. They have licence, and they really do not care about morality.

The other is they become extremely legalistic, and they have got rules and rules and rules and rules, and they enslave people to their rules and their legalism in order to have power over them. And you do not want that either. So, you do not want legalism. You do not want lots of rules. On the other hand, you do not want licentiousness.

So, what is their moral code? Is it a Christian moral code? Or is that a human moral code of rules and regulations or no moral code at all, which is an immoral people? They promise people freedom, but they enslave them to sin. And you do not want that. You want a movement, a revival, that is genuinely of God and reflects a Christian view of morality.

Okay, point 6. What is the attitude of the movement to the rest of the body of Christ? So, does the movement say, "Yes. We like the rest of the church. We respect Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Baptists, et cetera. We would like to work along with them. We are having this revival, but you are welcome to go down the road to the Baptist Church or the Presbyterian Church, or whatever church is there in your area, the Pentecostal church, Assemblies of God."

And so, do they welcome the rest of the body of Christ, which is the proper attitude? Or do they split off from the rest of the body of Christ and say our revival is the only true thing? We are the only true Christians on planet Earth. We are doing this. We are the movement of God for this generation, and so on and so forth. At that point, you know that you have got trouble on your hands.

So, we need to look at the movement and say, does this movement care about other Christians? Does it care about the Baptists, the Pentecostals, the Presbyterians and the Anglicans and so on, or is it very judgmental of them? Does it put them down? Does it call them names, like this and that and the other. "They are unspiritual over there. The only spiritual people are part of our movement." If it is saying that, if it is saying, that the only spiritual people are the part of their movement, and you have got to be with them because everyone else is wrong, then they are wrong. They are completely wrong about that. God has various parts of his body and he loves all of them. And he wants the Christian Church to be united and not splintered off, following a personality here or a personality there.

And you know, if they do this, that what they really want is followers for themselves, and they will take the Baptists, Presbyterians and Pentecostals and make them slaves of themselves and their wrong doctrine, and they will take their money and everything else like that. So, when you see a movement like that say, that is not the right movement, that is not an attitude of unity. It is not an attitude of humility. It is not a gracious attitude at all. It is a very bad attitude, and we are not going to go along with that movement. We will be cautious. It is divisive, it is dividing churches, it is dividing denominations. It is splintering things here and there. Let's leave that movement alone, and we just want to be very cautious about them.

Now, here are some things I want to throw in the mix as well. And it is common ways of where we can misjudge things. Sometimes we will say something like, "If people are getting saved, then it must be of God." Well, people get saved by all sorts of things, it does not mean it is of God. It just means that God used something bad for something good. And God sometimes does that.

If someone gets saved because they get confronted by a demon and scared and suddenly realises the spiritual realm and cry out to God. And I know that happened to a person who was an atheist and they got confronted by a demon in the form of a snake. They tried all sorts of things, and finally they used the name of Jesus and the demon left. Well, you cannot say that the demon, who was the cause of that person's salvation is good. God just used that snake demon to drive the person to Christ. But that the snake demon was a demon. It was not the truth. And there are some deceptive demons out there that accidentally lead people to Christ. That does not mean that the demonic movement is of Christ. You have got to test using the biblical tests of the movement.

What happens sometimes is people get falsely converted and Jesus talks about this, he says, the Pharisees made converts, and but the converts turned out to be twice as much a son of hell as the Pharisees. So, they were converted. The Pharisees would go to Greece or somewhere and then bring them back and then convert them to Judaism. They said, "Go across the earth and the seas to make a

single convert," they dragged this convert off from Syria or Greece or whatever, and they turn them into a Jew. And, "Oh, look, this person from Syria became a Jew. This is fantastic." But they were, they became so legalistic, these converts became so legalistic that Jesus called those converts sons of hell. And particularly fundamentalist revivals take people, they convert them, but they convert them into a very legalistic system. It is not a true conversion to Jesus Christ at all. It is a conversion to religion and to religious power. So, we have to be very careful about.

The next thing is to judge a movement, and say, "Look, these people in the movement are nice, they are friendly. Therefore, the movement must be okay." What you need to understand is that these psychologically powerful, manipulative leaders can appear very nice. They can appear as sons of light, and the people that follow them are often very gullible, very nice people. And these gullible nice people follow the manipulative leader. And you talk to the people, you talk to the followers. Just because a movement has nice people in it, does not mean that the movement is of God.

So, be very careful about a movement that is full of nice people, but the movement is not of the Lord at all. And that includes someone who says, "Look, I made a lot of money out of this. I got into this movement. God blessed me and I have got a BMW." That does not indicate that the movement is of God at all, because the devil has all the wealth of the world and can give it to whom he pleases. So, what we are looking for is good fruit. We are looking for good character. We are looking for things that are of God, not just of the world.

So, be very careful. Evaluate the revival movement by the six criteria I gave you. What are the leaders like? What are the fruits in terms of Christian character? What is the doctrine of the movement? Is it sound doctrine? Is the movement taking people deeper into Christ? Is it built on Christ? Does the movement have sound morality? And what is the attitude of the movement to the rest of the body of Christ? They are the six criteria you need to learn to look at when you are looking at a revival. Do not just believe your emotions, do not just believe wild claims. Look at it with scriptural evidence.

11. The Prosperity Gospel

In Insights for Eternity, we teach those who teach others. And today's topic is a continuation of our series on spiritual discernment for pastors, helping you to grow a movement for God. And today's topic is going to be "What is wrong with the prosperity gospel?" And before we do that, let's pray. Father in heaven, we rejoice in you. We thank you. We glorify your name, we worship you, and we are thankful for all that you do in our lives. And now we ask that you will bless this broadcast, that you will make it strong and powerful, that you will open our spiritual eyes and spiritual ears to understand wonderful things from your law, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, What is wrong? What is wrong with the prosperity gospel? You go into some churches and all they talk about is the offering money, how you are going to be blessed, how you are going to have a destiny in the future, how God has got a future and a hope for you. And some of that is true. A lot of that is true, but it becomes an unhealthy emphasis in the church of God. God did not save you just to make you wealthy. God can make you wealthy, that is for sure. But that is not the purpose of Christian salvation. Christian salvation is not about you having a nice car, a nice house, kids going to an extremely good university or even your own private jet. That is no sign of God's blessing on your life, or some of the rich people on this world who are clearly unsaved, who are clearly billionaires with big yachts, and they are doing wicked things in the earth and unjust. They would say, "These people are blessed by God," but they are not blessed by God.

Let's remember the parable in Luke, Chapter 16 of the Rich Man and Lazarus. There was a beggar sitting at the gate there, and he was covered in sores and the dogs licked his sores. But the rich man had no mercy on the beggar. The rich man dies and the poor man dies. And what happens? The rich man goes down into the fires of hell. He was not blessed at all. Because he was stingy, wicked and terrible, even though he was dressed in purple, even though he rode in carriages and chariots around the place, he looked like he was really important. But he was selfish. He was demonic. He is now cast down into the pit of hell and he has no mercy. There is not even a drop of water could be put on his tongue. He went into eternal damnation and eternal punishment, separated from God and separated from the righteous by a great gulf.

What happened to the poor man? Because he suffered in faith, because he took things as they were, he was comforted in Abraham's bosom. He was saved. He was given good things in the life to come. So, there is no connection at all between your life here and the life to come. Jesus often says the first shall be last and the last shall be first. So many of those who are first in this world, who are prominent, who are powerful, they become hardened in their own pride. They become hardened. They have very few consequences in this life to their behaviour. And so they get more and more sinful, and they become more and more wicked, and their relationships with people get worse and worse. But everyone flatters them because they are rich, and eventually they discover that they are lost. They are damned. They are going to hell, as the kings and princes of the earth that get thrown into the lake of fire in the Book of Revelation. Because it is the kings and princes of the Earth that are deceived by the devil and follow after the Antichrist.

And so we find that the rich cannot enter the kingdom of God. Often they cannot. It is harder for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of the needle. And whatever that means, it means it is difficult. They have pride. They have their position. They have their status. They have their money, and that holds them in a toxic circle of pride, arrogance and getting away with things that normal people cannot get away with. So, their sin seems to go unpunished. They seem to be blessed. But of course there are spiritual consequences for them. So, the prosperity gospel is a false gospel in that it makes money the measure of faith. Your faith is not indicated by the size of your bank account. Otherwise, the man by the gate, covered in sores, who had no bank account at all, would not have made it to heaven, and the rich man should have got there. But no, that was the understanding of the disciples. When Jesus said that this rich man who had obeyed all the commandments could not get into heaven. He said, "You have got to sell everything and follow me." Why? Because God wanted to change his heart from his pride and his independence. He had to change his attitude. And the disciples said, "Who then can be saved?" And Jesus says, "With man, this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible."

So, yes, God does bless and prosper people. God will reach down and he will bless and prosper you. But prosperity is a side effect. It is not the main effect of the gospel. What is the gospel for? The gospel is sanctification. The gospel is for holiness. The gospel is to give you a new man and a new woman, a new heart, a new mind. To give you forgiveness, to give you the Holy Ghost, to give you spiritual gifts such as healing and prophecy and preaching, and very many other spiritual gifts, including leadership. The gifts of the gospel are spiritual gifts. They are not gold bars in your letterbox. If you expect gold bars in your letterbox, if you expect God to hand you checks, if you expect God to send you money simply for becoming a believer, then you are still worshipping Mammon. And it is very clear that the pursuit of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And by pursuing it, many have gone astray. I Timothy Chapter six verses, 10 to 18, that the love of money destroys the Christian. And we cannot serve both God and Mammon.

And you get to the Book of Revelation. What happens? You have got a choice between God and Mammon. If they take the mark of the beast, they can still buy and sell and be prosperous. There it is. They can be part of Babylon, rich Babylon, with all the luxury of the world in the great Babylonian Empire. So, all they have got to do to stay in all that luxury and power is to take the mark of the beast, and many, many people do. But if you refuse the mark of the beast, then that is a sign that they are saved, that they are following Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour instead.

So, you have two groups of people. You have those who are in the market, buying and selling, and you have those who are in the kingdom filled with the Holy Ghost and the approval of God. But they become martyrs. They are given white robes in heaven. They have washed their robes going through the tribulation, through their righteousness, through their testimony, through their faith, through which they defeat the devil. So, you see, in the end times it is going to be a choice between God and Mammon, just like it was for Judas, just like it was for Demas, just as it was for many, many people. And the prosperity gospel says you can have both. It says you can have both God and money at the same time, and God is going to pour all this money out on you. And then the prosperity gospel preacher passes the plate around and guess who is the only person getting rich? And that is the prosperity gospel preacher, and his minions and people that work for him, who share in the money they extract from gullible people. So, do not get sucked into the prosperity gospel. God has not saved you just so you can be rich in this world. Life is more than in this world, life is more than food, more than clothing. With these

things, we should be content. And Jesus says, do not worry about tomorrow. Do not worry about more than what we are going to eat or drink. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

And I have been in the ministry 40 years. I have lived by faith for the entire time, and God has met our needs. And so God will meet your needs, He meets my needs for food and clothing and a house over my head, and all those things, because we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. That is what you are to do. And so do not worry about what you eat, what you drink, what clothes you will put on, for God knows what you need. And that is in Matthew chapter six.

So, God saved you to get sanctified. Without sanctification you cannot see the Lord. So, the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of sanctification and it does not run on cash. Now, of course, you need cash to keep the lights on in the church, pay the pastor, to do all these things. But the Kingdom of God runs by faith and by spiritual power. God made the heavens and the earth without having to consult a bank. God fed the 5000 without having to go and get a credit card. God did mighty things and raised Lazarus from the dead without spending a solitary single cent. God caused a great catch of Peter, and he let out his boat into the deep, 153 big fish, so much that they had trouble getting them all to land. Those 153 big fish did not come through the ingenuity of any human being, any fishing technique, or any large amount of money. It did not come through a great investment. It came through the power of God.

Simply put, when Elijah was up on the top of Mount Carmel and he was facing the prophets of Baal the 400 or 800 prophets, however many there were, and he called fire from heaven. The fire came and Elijah did not have to pay God to get the fire, did he? He just prayed. He had faith. He had glory. And the fire came down from heaven and consumed the offering. And the prophets of Baal, which were servants of Mammon, servants of money, servants of prosperity, they were ashamed. They were taken down and they were slaughtered.

God's kingdom operates without money driving it. Moses called out the 10 plagues. He did not say, Look, I am going to go to a bank account over here. I am going to pay God so much money, and He is going to send a plague of frogs. No, The 10 plagues came and Moses did his work without a cent in his bank account. Led the people through the wilderness without paying anyone anything, and God supplied manna from heaven. The Kingdom of God operates by spiritual power, it operates by faith. It does not operate from bank accounts, human techniques or anything else from the world. God has his own way of doing things.

Ultimately, of course, we have the cross. Jesus dies naked upon the cross, nailed to the cross, as poor as you could get. And yet He saved the entire world. Our sins were forgiven, not by some commercial transaction, but by Jesus dying on the cross as payment for our sins. It was a spiritual payment for a spiritual debt. And he took our sins and he died, and he was raised from the dead without any cash involved. He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. All of that was done without requiring any commercial intervention.

The Kingdom of God is not a commercial enterprise. It is not a business. It cannot be run like a business. The Kingdom of God runs by faith. It runs by Holiness. It runs by sacrifice. It runs on the power of the word of God, and on the power of the prophecies of God, which of course, were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. So, the Kingdom of God is not a commercial kingdom. It is not like a business. It is not turning people into rich, luxurious people. Saint Paul did not run around in a Lear jet. Peter was

crucified upside down in Rome. All the 12 apostles met various kinds of martyrdom as their end. Thomas was killed in India. Various people were killed in various other ways around the world, I have forgotten them all by now. But we know that that God has called us to live a life of faith and that prosperity is a byproduct. It is not the aim of the gospel. It is not the purpose of you being saved.

And your level of prosperity has absolutely nothing to do with the level of your faith. And the power of God is not measured by the size of your bank account. Someone might say, "Well, look, this person, God has made this person very wealthy." So, the power of God is operating in this person who is rich, it is not operating in this person who is poor. But the person who is poor might have joy in their heart. They might have peace in their heart. They may have been delivered out of an addiction. The power of God is still working in that person, it is still working in that life.

So, let's go to two very important Bible passages to really nail this down, to get it right. The first one is Hebrews chapter 11:35 to 40. Hebrews, 11 is the whole hallmark of faith. It is the whole way of faith. The heroes of faith are all put together there. Hebrews 11:35 to 40. The first bit of the chapter talks about all these people having great victories. But then it gets down to some serious business. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheeps and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy. Wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised. Since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

So, here we have all these Old Testament saints, these people of faith, and they did not receive what they were promised. They were destitute. They were living in holes in the ground. They were sawn in two. They were living in sheepskins and goat skins, and dens and caves of the earth. Why? Because they were people of faith in a wicked world, run by a wicked small G god, Lucifer, Satan, the devil. And he has his powers and principalities that hate those who are of faith. And so these people were persecuted. The prophets, like Isaiah, was sawn in two, because the devils do not like the word of God. And so they came against these messengers of God, and they did not received fully what was promised. But of course, through Christ through us through the church, they have been made complete. But their prosperity was not the problem. Their faith was great. They were killed with the sword. They were in chains and in imprisonment.

And we remember the life of Paul, who was beaten with rods, who was jailed numerous times. He was finally executed with the sword, who spent a day and a night in the deep, who was naked, who was hungry, who went through many trials and tribulations. He was not leading a life that many of us would want, any of us would want. Who would want the life of Paul going through all these difficulties and trials? But he became a great and mighty apostle of God, a good soldier of Christ Jesus, and received his reward in the end, because his faith was able to rejoice in circumstances that most of us could not rejoice in. He rejoiced when he was put in jail. In Phillipi he was beaten. He was hurting. He was put in stocks. He had wounds that later had to be treated by the jailer, when he led the jailer to Christ.

So, we see that all these great saints, all these people who are martyred, are still people of great faith, but their faith is not producing a lot of money for them at all. So, you find there are people who are very close to God, but they are in difficult circumstances. They might be in Iran. They might be in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan at the moment the Taliban is hunting down Christian believers. They are doing terrible things to any Christian that they can find. It is now the most murderous country in the world. And in Nigeria, many, many people are being killed in Nigeria every year for the faith, by certain tribesmen and groups in the north of Nigeria who are actively raping, killing and kidnapping Christians. Are those Christians any less a Christian because they were kidnapped by terrorists? No, they have suffered for the gospel they have suffered for their faith. They have kept on going with their faith, even under terrible, terrible circumstances.

So, the prosperity gospel is not the truth. There are people who are suffering for the gospel, who God loves, who God knows, and who God is going to reward, knowing that they will receive a better resurrection, refusing to accept release so that might rise again to a better life. Our hope is in the resurrection, and the resurrection will give us a better life. And they will say they wanted a greater reward when they are resurrected, because when we are persecuted, great is our reward in heaven. So, these people were looking to the reward in heaven. They were saying, "I am persecuted. I am insulted. This is something I am going to get a great reward for. I am going to get a great resurrection one day because of the things that I have gone through." That is what Paul's perspective was, and that is what the perspective of all these Old Testament saints were. Knowing that God would resurrect them one day, they would rise, they would stand before the Lord, and all the things that they had been through would be to their credit. That would be to their credit. It would increase their reward as believers when they stood before the heavenly throne.

Continuing on that way, let's go to II Corinthians, chapter four, verses 7 to 18. II Corinthians, chapter four verses 7 to 18. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Going along a few verses, to verse 16. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

So, all that money out there is transient. All the things that are seen, the planes, the cars, the houses, the big positions, the things that are seen are transient. But the things that are unseen are eternal. So, Paul is saying we do not look on our external prosperity as a sign of faith. It is not something we are clinging to. It comes and it goes. It is transient. It passes away. And this, even the suffering passes away. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us, what? an eternal weight of glory. So, the afflictions that you go through for the gospel, the afflictions you go through in order to follow Jesus, are preparing for you an eternal weight of glory, and the eternal weight of glory is what you want. You want to be clothed in the glory of God when you stand before the judgement seat of Christ.

And you will stand before the judgement seat of Christ, that is in the next chapter over II Corinthians five, to give an account of what you have done in the flesh, whether good or evil. And if you have lived selfishly in the flesh, if you have just lived for yourself and your own pleasure, your own money, your own power, your own prosperity, then you are going to get very little reward, if nothing at all. But what

if you have lived generously? If you have been kind, if you have been good, if you have reached out to people and blessed people, and you have declared the gospel around the world and done what you can for the Lord, then you will receive a great reward, especially for those who suffer, especially those were martyred for the faith. And that is very clear from the Book of Revelation, how much God values the martyrs. They are put under the altar of God, they are given white robes, they are given a very high and holy place in heaven.

So, it says, we are afflicted in every way, we are persecuted, we are perplexed, we are struck down. So, all these things are happening to Paul, but he rejoices in them. He says all these things that are happening to him and to Barnabas and to all the other saints of God in that era, in that time, they are for the glory of God. He is not worried about these things. He is not driven by anxiety over his situation. And so he says, his body, his life is a jar of clay. It is an old battered jar of clay made out of earthenware, and it contains in this unworthy looking vessel, inside of it has all the diamonds and treasure that you can imagine. It is been hidden away in a jar of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. The treasure in the jars of clay is Christ, Christ in us, the hope of glory.

So, he says, we are always being given over to death. By that he means the sacrifices of the missionary life. He was travelling around the world, he was given over to all sorts of bondages, all sorts of jailing, all sorts of persecution, all sorts of false accusations. He was being given over to death. His life was not particularly enjoyable by worldly standards. He was not hobnobbing with the great, and he was not running around with supermodels or anything like that. Thank goodness for that. He was focused on the gospel and on the church and on the weight of caring for the churches and helping them to become sanctified and holy.

So, let's go back to asking about this prosperity gospel, "Why is it false? Why is it wrong?" Because it focuses on transient things. It does not focus on eternal things. It simply focuses on "God is there to make your life better." God is not your personal butler. He is not your servant. He is not there to make your life better. God is there to make you holy and to prepare you for eternity. You have an eternal life coming to you. And he is preparing you to dwell in heaven, not on Earth. So, sometimes God will take material things away from you, or make you go through certain circumstances so that you can be better prepared for eternal life.

But you might say to me, "Ah, but Pastor John, I know a Christian. He is a very nice man and he is very rich. And God blessed this person with wealth." Yes, God does do that. God does bless some people with wealth. And we think of Philemon in the New Testament, who was very rich and owned slaves and had a big house. And Paul says, set aside a room for me, so he could set aside a room in his mansion just in case Paul would turn up one day. And Paul's request was not an unreasonable request because Philemon was so incredibly rich. And of course, we have Quartus, the treasurer of Rome, who was in charge of all of Rome's money, and he was a member of the Church of Rome that Paul acknowledges in his epistle to the Romans. So, we find there are some very rich Christians, Joseph of Arimathea, et cetera. But they often gave a lot away, like Joseph of Arimathea gave away his tomb and many other things. Paul may have come from a very wealthy family, but he gave up all of that to become an apostle and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, there are wealthy Christians. Yes, there are wealthy Christians within the will of God, but they are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then all things will be added to them.

As for you and me, our job is to become holy and blameless and upright and righteous and wise. They are the gifts of God. And the gifts of the spirit, to exercise the gifts of the spirit that God has given you, whether it be evangelism or teaching or prophecy or tongues or any other gift. Exercise those gifts, be a person of prayer, be a person of holiness, and you will receive a great reward in heaven, particularly if you go through trouble for the sake of Jesus. Because great is the reward in heaven of those who accept the sufferings of the gospel. If you suffer for righteousness sake, great is your reward in heaven, and it is your reward in heaven that counts.

Of course, you can pray for a job. Of course, you can pray for God to help you with your finances. That is fine. That is just a normal part of life. But do not put all your hope in material things. Put your hope in Jesus Christ who saves you and sanctifies you. The sign of your faith is not the size of your bank account. It is not how things are going for you financially. The sign of your faith is the change in your soul. Are you changing from glory to glory? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit. Do you have peace in your heart? Do you have a mind full of faith? Are you rejoicing in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? Or are you worried about the things of this life? Is money preoccupying your mind day and night? Or are you given to the glory of God, to the scriptures, to prayer and to serving the saints? Because you have got to switch your mind over from the cares of this world to the things that God has prepared for those who love him, for God works all things together for good, for those that love God and are called according to his purpose.

You are not to set your mind on earthly things. Rather, you are to set your mind on things above. Paul wept tears over those who set their mind on worldly things and their god was their stomach. He says that, I think, in the Book of Philippians, do not be like that. Do not be someone over which the spiritual leaders weep because you have become so worldly, because you have become so preoccupied with worldly things. Rather show and demonstrate your faith by a life of love, lived in faith, giving service to others, and let God take care of your circumstances in life. The prosperity gospel is false. You must not preach it, and you must not listen to it, because it is so addictive. It is a false gospel.

12. Magicians or Christians?

And today's topic is going to be magicians or Christians, about the false gospel that is magic disguised as Christianity. So, people who are witches, wizards and warlocks preach a gospel that looks superficially Christian but does not have any repentance, any true faith, any real worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is just a power name, He is just a source of power rather than a God on a throne in heaven, who is the creator of heavens and Earth. So, We are going to look at a very deep, dark spiritual deception, and this episode will be the last episode in our series about spiritual discernment for pastors, helping leaders and pastors to cope with the deluge of deception that is out there today. And grab your pens, your Bibles and your notebooks as we look into this vast and fascinating topic.

But of course, before we go into God's word, let us pray. Father in heaven, we ask for your illumination. Make clear that which is unclear. Help us to discern our path through life. Give us wisdom as we preach your gospel around the world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, let's start with a key verse and II Timothy, chapter three, verses eight and nine. II Timothy chapter three, verses eight and nine. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth. Men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

Well, who were Jannes and Jambres? They were Pharaoh's magicians that opposed Moses as he was doing his work trying to do the 10 plagues. So, for the first three or so plagues, they would replicate what Moses and Aaron were doing. But when it gets to the gnats, they could not do that, and they said, "This is the finger of God." So, let's just have a look at Exodus 7:10 to 13, get a bit of the background going on here. So, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded, Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Still, Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

So here, the first demonstration of power was the casting down of the staff, which turned into a snake and then back to a staff again. And this was the first sign that they had been given. And it was not powerful enough to shake the dark, evil occult magic of Egypt. So, these magicians stood up, Jannes and Jambres, and we learn the names from later Jewish literature that names them, and Paul writing to Timothy. He knew the names of these people from the other Jewish literature around. So, he introduces them to us, even though those names are not specifically in the Bible. So, those, Jannes and Jambres, were powerful court magicians of the evil pharaoh that was killing people, and sending the baby boys to death in Egypt, and enslaving everybody. So, later on, there are a few of these occurrences. We get to Exodus eight, verses 16 to 19. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt." And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. Magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. Then the magicians said to

Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

So, we find these magicians tried to oppose the work of God through Aaron and Moses, and we find it is Aaron the one who is wielding the staff at this point. So, they are always trying to imitate and discredit the work of God, and that is what Satan does. He imitates the work of God, but he has not got the same power as Almighty God. So, the rest of the miracles, the rest of the plagues, were clearly from the finger of God. But that did not impress Pharaoh at all because he was just got harder and more evil and nastier. And we see some world leaders like that today, no matter what Christians do, they are not impressed, and they just do not listen to the word of God. They just do not listen to of the Gospel at all.

So, throughout history, people who are magicians, people who are working works of magic have tried to imitate and get the power of God for themselves, so that they could puff up their egos. And one of those people in the book of Acts was a chap called Simon Magus, who we learn about in Acts chapter eight. Now there is this big revival down there in Samaria. Philip has this huge thing, all miracles are happening. Peter and John and some of the apostles come down. They baptise people in the Holy Spirit. And this magician who had been operating in the Samaritan area became very envious.

And a little bit of background here. Samaria was what we would call New Age today. It was a mixture of various faiths, old bits of Babylonian faith, old bits of the faith of Ninevah, and the old Syrian empire. Local gods and goddesses mixed in also with the Jewish faith. They also believed in Yahweh, but it was syncretistic, everything was mushed together, and so the Jews, rightly, considered them to be complete heretics. But these complete heretics heard the gospel and they believed, and because they were very demonised because of their previous occult practises, demons came out of them with loud shrieks under the power of the apostle's preaching. And there was great joy in that city.

So, this place was being delivered from demonisation, from false doctrine and from the occult. So, Simon Magus' business was a little bit under threat. But he is impressed. He thinks, "This is magnificent," and he starts to become a sort of a believer. He is impressed, he says, "This is real power and I want it." And let's have a look at some of what it says there in Acts chapter eight. But there was a man named Simon who had previously practised magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him from the least of the greatest saying, "This man is the power of God that is called great."

So, all the local culture was really impressed with Simon. He was the big guy. He was the guy that could pull all the magic tricks, the love magic, the death magic, potions, everything. He had it all there, he was doing all these magic tricks. Everyone said, "Wow, this guy has it all." And they paid attention to him, because for a long time he had amazed him with his magic.

Then going down a little bit, verse 18. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money." So, this guy says, "Oh, look at all this power. I want this power too. I will just add it in to my other magical gifts." He was not really saved, he did get baptised. He did get saved and baptised. He did ask that Peter would forgive him, but we find out later on in church history that he became a pest. He opposed the apostles, especially the Apostle Peter, again and again and again with his magic arts. And there are various legends about this

that finally Simon Magus met his death during an occult ceremony in Rome. But we are not going to take those legends too seriously here on this programme. But he did become a serious opponent of the apostles. Why? Because he wanted power. He wanted adulation. He wanted to be at the centre of the stage, doing all the magic tricks. And the apostles were a serious threat to his business of doing magic.

Now, for another Bible verse, a very tragic verse from Matthew, chapter 7:21 to 23. We are building up a picture here, of people who are doing magic in the name of Jesus, or Christian "magic", but they are not obedient to God. It is just about their own ego. So, let's learn a bit about them, from the Book of Matthew in chapter seven, verses 21 to 23. Matthew, chapter seven, verses 21 to 23. Not everyone who says to me, Lord Lord, will enter the Kingdom of heaven but the one who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

So, here we have got these people, they are working lawlessness, but they are doing miracles. Why? They are doing miracles using the name of Jesus as a power tool, as a magic spell. They are casting magic spells using Christian words, but their hearts are darkened. They are workers of iniquity. They are stealing and cheating and lying to people, and deceiving people at every turn, because their hearts are set on money and greed and commercialising spiritual power. And this commercialising of spiritual power is very, very common today. And so, I did previously a session on miracles in the end times, or false miracles in the end times, and you can go back and read that from the archives, or you will find it in a few weeks at eternity radio dot org. Just go to Insights for Eternity, or we will have a special link to it. They are on eternity radio dot org.

But we have got these magicians, and they have a devastating impact on the Christian faith, because they are opposing the work of God, and they are twisting theology. So, how are they twisting the theology? First of all, they substitute success for sanctification. So, the goal of the life of a Christian is to become holy, to become in the image of God. But the magicians say, "Oh, you do not need to be holy. I will give you success with my magic spells that use the name of Jesus and use the name of angels," et cetera, et cetera. "Look, just say these words, make this confession. Pray this formula of words, and you will get what you want. You will get your Mercedes, you will get your house. You will get the girl that you love, et cetera. Just say these words, and you do not have to be obedient. You do not have to be holy. You do not have to restrain your sexual impulses, or anything like that, because you just need the right magic words. You just need the right confession. You just need the right words, and that solves everything."

Well, that is confusing sanctification with success. You might get your goals in life temporarily, but because you follow them and they are unholy, you lose your sanctification. You lose your holiness, and without sanctification you cannot see the Lord. So, they are substituting worldly success for godly sanctification, and they use their spiritual power to make you happy, but not to make you holy. I will repeat that these magicians use their spiritual power to make you happy, but they never make you holy.

Okay, The next thing they do is they replace personal responsibility with spiritual warfare, and what do I mean by that? So, instead of you being disciplined and responsible and having integrity and being righteous, they will say, "Well, all the problems of your life are due to demons over here, and we can fix the demons for you and then you will be successful." So, instead of saying to them, you need to be more disciplined, more holy, you need to do it this way, this way and this way, and then because you are godly

and disciplined, life will work out. They say, "Oh, you do not need to be godly and disciplined. You just need to deal with the demons."

Now, demons are real, but they are not the main source of problems in life. Problems in life are often due to laziness, fear, all sorts of immorality, lack of discipline, lack of focus, lack of concentration. If you want to be successful in life, be a disciplined person with a plan and a procedure, and a plan and procedure will often get you to the goal line. So, that is important. But they do not want you to be personally responsible. They want you to be dependent on them, and they want you to think everything spiritual warfare and to rush off to them to deal with the demons. They say, "Do not worry about it, John. We will deal with the demons for you." And they are doing that, and that is a form of deception. By making you afraid of demons that only they can deal with.

They substitute spells for theology. This is point 3. They substitute spells for the theology, so you do not have to know God, that is theology. You do not have to know God, you just have to know the right words, the right confessions, the right magic spells. So, there is no systematic theology in their preaching at all. There is no idea of a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no knowledge of the two natures of Christ. There is no knowledge of the Bible in any depth. The Bible becomes a source of magic spells and proof texts, and so they are substituting theology. They are getting rid of any real theology and substituting it with their magic spells that sound Christian. They have the name of Jesus dabbed on into them, just like in Matthew seven, they said we did all these things in your name. They were just using the name of Jesus for power and not for worship.

So, the next thing, that leads us to the next thing, they put power in place of righteousness. They say you do not need to be righteous. You just need to have enough spiritual power to make everything work. So, let me repeat that. The magicians say it is all a matter of spiritual power, not of goodness, not of righteousness, not of truth. And they do not love the truth at all. They just say, Let's get more and more and more spiritual power, have more and more and more manifestations, and then we can cast down the devil, and the devil is the source of all the problems, so you do not really need to be righteous. Now that is untrue. We do need to be righteous. God is a god of righteousness.

Again, in point 5 sins with demons. Instead of saying you have sins and you need to repent, they say you have demons and we need to cast them out for you. So, you might have a problem with lust. And instead of saying, you have a sin called lust and you need to repent of your lust, they say, "Oh, you have a demon of lust and we will get the demon out of you and then you will be fine." So, this is a very subtle thing, and lots of people are doing it, okay, but the demon of lust, there might be one, probably is one, but it is latching into the sin of lust that is in your heart. You have to repent, the demon will go away when you repent and confess and throw yourself on God. So, it is not just the problem of the demon, it is a problem of a love of sin, a love of iniquity in your own heart, and the false people do not talk about the problem of your heart. Well, you say, "Oh, it is a demon of lust, we will get rid of that here, pay me some money, put some extra money in the offering.

The next thing that they do is they replace ministry with miracles. Now, miracles are great. Jesus did miracles. The apostles did miracles. They are an important part of the Christian faith. I do believe in miracles. But there is much more to ministry than miracles. There is praying for people, walking along people who are full of grief and suffering. There are all sorts of things that we need to do in the ministry other than one miracle after another, because miracles are useful, but they did not get through to the heart of Pharaoh. They do not get through to the hearts of many people.

And there are more problems in life than can be solved by sudden miracles, such as turning water into wine. Instead, ministry is getting people into the image of God, making them righteous, making them holy, patient, loving, kind, moral and people of integrity. And there is a lot more of that than just miraculous. We want people who are blameless and righteous on the day of judgement. That is the goal of ministry. People who are blameless and righteous on the day of judgement.

That leads us to the next point, point seven. They replace character with charisma and charm. These miracle workers, they are tremendously charming. They have got great personalities. They have got tremendous charisma. But there are people of depraved character. They prey on women and they prey on rich people and they prey on desperate people. And it is always after the money or sex or power or having a following or breaking away from them, so they are very toxic. They have charisma and charm, but they do not have deep character. They do not have humility, they do not have meekness. They do not have patience. They say outrageous and outlandish things, and they tarnish the gospel.

The next thing is that these false teachers generate a lot of fear to keep people trapped. So, after people say, "Oh, there is a demon of this and the demon of that and we will solve it for you." They have got to keep people fearful and needing ministry all the time. So, they go back, pay a bit more money, go back, pay a bit more money, and they are always going back to the magician because the magician plants sorts of fear in the head. You have got to be afraid of this demon and this demon, and this is happening. And the world is like this. And there are all these conspiracy theories out there. You need the spiritual power that false teacher X can provide. And so that is the kind of thing that they do, they create people who are incredibly dependent, isolated, distrustful and paranoid. They do not want you to be quiet to be confident to have adequate and loving relationships, because that would mean no business for them. And they are business figures, first and foremost.

The next thing is, they replace true wisdom with secret knowledge. They say, "Oh, well, yes. The Bible is really good. Contains a lot of wisdom, but I have got a secret to you. I went up into heaven and I saw this and that and the other. And this secret knowledge over here is what you need." No, the scripture is what you need. Their secret knowledge is just a claim that they are making. And instead of you concentrating on the Bible, on the word of God, and the teachings of Jesus, and the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ, they drag you off to secret knowledge about spiritual this or spiritual that. And this knowledge is not in the scripture. It is not of God. It is part of their magical mumbo jumbo they are sucking you into. They are getting your mind wrapped around it so that you will depend on them. "Oh, yes. So and so, Calling himself prophet X y z. He has this secret knowledge, and I have got to write down all the secret knowledge." No, you do not. That secret knowledge, that occult knowledge is not for you. It is what is in the Bible, that is for you. The teaching about Jesus is what is for you, not the teaching that they come up with.

The next thing, they confuse is science with spirits. They do not ever have any real scientific knowledge. Everything is the result of a spirit. So, they will say, "Oh, malaria is the result of a spirit. Tuberculosis is the result of a spirit. This is all the result of a spirit. And so you need X Y Z's magic to get rid of it." Well, maybe the doctor can help you. Maybe taking malaria drugs can help you. Certainly there are good doctors out there who can help you.

And not everything is a spirit. There are things that can be dealt with in the natural realm and by wise and people of integrity. And we need to do that. We need both science and prayer. We need science

and faith. Science is raised up by God to get rid of some of the ignorance in the world. And so we do not want to have everything being spiritual. We want to lead a balanced life.

Next thing they do is they confuse integrity with popularity. We say, "Oh, this person prophet X Y Z. He is very popular. He must be a great man of God." Well, just because he is popular does not mean that he is a great man of God. It just means that he is popular, that he knows how to play on people's emotions, give great and swelling promises to people, how to let people feel good about themselves and never rebuke them for their sins. And he can become popular. But that is not integrity, that is not holding to the Gospel. That is just the ability to draw a crowd.

Now the ability to draw a crowd, you can do that if you are a circus performer, you can do that if you are an American politician, you can do that if you are a crooked businessman and you know how to get into people's heads and hearts and minds, or even if you are a TV performer. That says nothing about your knowledge of the Gospel. Instead, your knowledge of the gospel is shown by your integrity and righteousness, peace, truth, wisdom, gentleness, kindness, meekness and self control. So, integrity is first, and popularity is no indication of spiritual anything.

The next thing they do, these people or these magicians do, is they want to take away your self awareness. They want to take your ability to understand yourself and what is going on and replace it with dependence on them. So, they want you to get out of touch with reality, live in their fantasy world, live in their fearful world, never look into yourself, never look into yourself and say, "Hey, I am being sinful here. I need to repent." They do not want you to repent. They want you to attribute everything to demons, because they have the solution to the demons. And prophet so and so, X Y z, will say "Oh no, no, you do not have anything wrong with you." Maybe you do. Maybe we all do. Maybe we have to regularly repent, but no it is all the problem of demons, and you have to rush off to the prophet or the church and tithe, and double tithe, pay for this person's Mercedes. It is all a scam. They do not want you to think about yourself and go to the Lord in humility and meekness and truth, and deal with your problems that way. They want you to be blind to yourself and totally dependent on them.

The next thing is, they do not want you to have any real knowledge of your own. They want to have all the knowledge. You go to them, you get a little bit of knowledge off them. You come back to them, then get a little bit more knowledge. They do not want you to think for yourself. They want you to be completely dependent on them and on their game that they are playing. And so they do not want you to know all 66 books of the Bible. They do not want you to get into the deep things of church history and into the Bible and the culture and everything like that. They will not teach you how to open up the Bible with integrity and read it for yourself. They do not want you to be theologically equipped. They want you running from meeting to meeting, putting money in the plate. They do not want you thinking for yourself. They want you depending on them and their magic formulations to solve every problem in your life, will be solved by prophet X y z. No, God wants you to solve your own problems. God wants you to have real knowledge and real strength, and to be able to get through with these things.

And lastly and most importantly, they confuse eternal life with present blessings. They say, "Here is the magic, it is going to solve the problem of your girlfriend, of your disease, of whatever you have got in your life. Here is the magic and it will solve everything." And they never point you to eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. That just does not happen. And they are not pointing you to the throne of God. They are not pointing you to your reward in heaven. They are not saying, "Maybe you have got to go through some tough things. Maybe you have got to suffer with the Lord Jesus Christ as a good

servant of God." They never point you to that. No, they just say, "Here is the quick, easy answer to your present problem in this life in this world." So, they take away your eternal life to give you present blessings that come from, they are not really blessings, they are curses, but to solve your current problems instead of the real problems of your heart, your mind and your soul.

So, we have to beware of this magical approach to the Christian faith. It is not all spiritual warfare. It is not all curses. It is not all these problems out there. We need to get back to solid Christianity. It is about the cross. It is about the resurrection. It is about the ascension. It is about having good Christian character. It is about love, and we have to keep the main thing, the main thing, if we are to remain Christians. We cannot go off into sidetracks. We cannot go off into seeing everything from a magical point of view, instead of a Christian point of view. There is a heaven, and there is an earth, and there are spiritual realms. We acknowledge the existence of spiritual realms. But when you look into the Bible, the main emphasis in the New Testament is on you and on your Christian character. On your faith in God, your trust in God, not your trust in magic spells, not on your trust on certain confessions and words and amulets, and a special water or holy water or anything like that. That is a dangerous way to go.

We do not want to go into those dangerous ways of fake spirituality. You do not want to be using holy water or special amulets to solve the problems in your life. You solve them by having true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, being a loving human being, being a wise, gentle and good human being. That is the way to go. You are not going to go off into the craziness of those people who are trying to manifest this and manifest that, and produce Mercedes Benzes, and other things by their occult procedures. They look Christian. They seem to use the name of Jesus. They might even use the name of certain churches and denominations. But they might give themselves all sorts of titles and this and that and the other. But they are not Christian. They are just magicians pretending to be Christian.

Do not be sucked into them. Ask, "Is this person believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, His death, His resurrection, His ascension? Are they believing in the love of God? Are they believing in the Trinity? Are they believing in the two natures of Christ? Or do they just throw that out all the window for these wild practises during their services?" Be discerning, be wise. Do not be sucked into a magical substitute. Instead, have true faith in God.