

New Year, New Revelations?

By Rev. Shane C. Rowe

16 Rejoice evermore. 17 Pray without ceasing. 18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. 19 Quench not the Spirit. 20 Despise not prophesings. 21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 22 Abstain from all appearance of evil. – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

It seems that each year, as we make the transition from the past year to the new, ministers & churches around the world find themselves asking God for fresh anointing & direction for the new-year. Now, this is not a bad thing in itself. In fact, it can and should be a good thing.

The beginning of a new year is, in some way, a sort of fresh start. People, both sacred and secular, use it as a time to reflect upon the successes and failures of the past year and determine areas of their lives, businesses, or ministries that they would like to improve or change in the coming weeks and months. It is usually a time of much planning and strategizing. It often culminates in some form of change, either personal or as a group. It is designed to keep us from repeating mistakes of the past and help us to accomplish the new (or old) goals and purposes. Most of the time, while the change may be uncomfortable, it is usually needed and/or well worth the trouble.

Unfortunately, in the church world, this time of reflection and new direction can sometimes produce an undesired and unwelcome variable.

WHAT DID THEY SAY?

Every year, as I tune into Christian TV or visit various churches, there always seems to be some minister or group who claims to have received some new revelation or word from the Lord that is dramatically different from what has been to this point. Some ministers or churches actually make a name for themselves based solely on this “new” revelation or word. Just keep watching the TV or reading the Christian press and it won’t be long until we see this year’s new “celebrity”. They’ll have a “brand new” or “improved” teaching, method, or belief that plaster their face and their words seemingly everywhere.

Most of the time, this is a good thing. They may legitimately have a fresh method, approach, or answer to something that the Church has been struggling with, sometimes for decades. They may indeed have a fresh word from the Lord that changes our course, sets new goals, or ushers us into a new spiritual season. Occasionally, they even may even receive the key to a mystery not revealed since the beginning of creation (I Cor. 2:6-16, Rev. 2:12-17, Isa. 45:1-4, Matt. 13:11, Luke 8:10, 1 Cor. 4:1, 13:2). They may show us a “new thing” God is doing (Isa. 43:19-21).

Sometimes, however, it appears that people get so carried away in their search for something new that they fail to actually examine or “prove” the things they declare to be from God. Sometimes, they announce a false doctrine or dangerous method and assume that, because it came to them while they were searching, it must be from God! In fact, it may have come from their own imaginations or, even worse, from the father of lies. They may or may not be aware that what they are teaching is wrong. Often, it would seem, they definitely have no idea of the scope of the damage they will cause with that teaching.

While I realize that, to many, it may seem unlikely that their favorite pastor, teacher, author, evangelist, or other leader would ever succumb to spreading a false teaching or doctrine, the fact is, more and more, it is happening. Time and space do not permit me to give detailed examples here (many could be their own columns or books even). A short conversation with a “seasoned” believer or elder will provide more examples (past & present) than you would probably want to know.

This is nothing new (Eccl. 1:9). Otherwise well-meaning believers have made mistakes like this all throughout history and people with evil hearts and minds have been purposely trying to deceive us since the beginning of time. It is a sad fact of life but, nonetheless, a fact. **As believers, it is our responsibility to guard ourselves, and those around us, from such false beliefs and to attempt to correct them whenever possible.**

USE YOUR HEAD TO GUARD YOUR HEART

Our main scripture text above gives us biblical guidelines on how to guard ourselves, our families, churches, and others from false teachings, doctrines, and even just plain bad ideas.

STEP #1 – Prove All Things

The Greek word used for “prove” in our text is *Dokimazo*. It means: *to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals; to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy.* What this means to us, I believe, is that we must carefully examine “all” teachings, doctrines, beliefs, practices, or ideas to find out if they are genuinely from God, and therefore worthy of our attention, or if they are false, and therefore unworthy.

How do we do this? We examine them, much like an expert scientist would, by placing them under bright light and looking at them very closely. We need to apply the light of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to the concepts we receive from others and look at them through our spiritual eyes (Ps. 119:105,

Rev. 3:18, John 16:13-15). I have found through experience that most true teachings will be found or referenced to in the Holy Scriptures.

(Note: Most scholars and teachers will remind you that it is very important to read scripture references “in context” or read what is said before and after. Many times, people will search for a portion of scripture that seems to support their belief but, upon further reading, you will quickly find out that it actually does not. This is commonly referred to as taking scripture “out-of-context” or “twisting the scriptures” to suit one’s own needs. This is a common practice of many cults and even some mainstream, well-meaning Christian denominations. Satan even used this practice himself when tempting Christ in the wilderness. Look it up!)

Occasionally, something may arise that is not specifically mentioned or covered in scripture. In these cases, we may have to look at it through the “spirit of the Word” or the general way of doing and being found throughout scriptures. In other words, if God has really said what someone claims he has, does it sound like God talking? Is this something that’s found in His character or actions as presented throughout the Word? Does it seem to, or directly, contradict some other action, commandment, or aspect found in the Bible? Does it align itself with God’s original stated intents for man as presented throughout the Bible?

Still, at other times, we may simply have to rely on the Holy Spirit to tell us if it is right, wrong, good, bad, or indifferent. We may have to find out if it’s something that’s good, or OK, for others but might not be the direction God wants us, our family, or our church to go in. Sometimes things can be for specific times, circumstances, or individuals while not for everyone, or even anyone, else.

All of this can seem very confusing and difficult. In fact, for many new Christians and those who have chosen to stay spiritually immature, this can seem like an impossible task. If you are inexperienced in the Word or your Faith then I recommend talking to other, spiritually mature believers as God directs. Personally, I would try to find elders from other churches or family members and friends who will keep your confidence. If you must talk to others in your church or those who may know the person you are referring to, use wisdom and caution! You don’t want to stir up trouble or confusion for the person in question or yourself. Especially not before you’ve even found out if something is right or wrong.

STEP #2 - Hold fast that which is good/Abstain from all appearance of evil

Once we have examined the teaching/belief and have drawn our conclusions, we are instructed to hold on to, or accept, what is good and to refrain, or hold one’s self off, from the things that seem, or appear, evil.

I find it interesting that we are told to “hold fast” to that which *is* good (or has been proven to be good) but we are told to “abstain” (or refrain) from things that still appear to be evil. What this means to me is that we have a right, even a responsibility, to hold off on things that seem to be bad, even if we can’t yet prove that they are. Sounds a lot like the old saying, “Better safe than sorry.” Doesn’t it?

Before deciding that something *appears* evil, however, we must first know what is meant by the word evil. The Greek word used in our text is *Poneros*. It means:

1. *full of labours, annoyances, hardships*
 - a. *pressed and harassed by labours*
 - b. *bringing toils, annoyances, perils; of a time full of peril to Christian faith and steadfastness; causing pain and trouble*
2. *bad, of a bad nature or condition*
 - a. *in a physical sense: diseased or blind*
 - b. *in an ethical sense: evil wicked, bad*

In other words, anything that is bad or that seems to bring pain, trouble, or hardship to us is classified here as evil. What this means to me is that if, *after careful scrutiny*, something still appears to be bad or would likely cause the body of Christ trouble or injury (or even just us, ourselves) we are perfectly justified in keeping away from it *until* it can be proven to be otherwise.

This may seem like a foreign concept to many believers today who have been taught to accept whatever comes from the mouth of a leader as being directly from God. (See previous articles on this subject.) In fact, even those who have never heard of that teaching often assume that it is true anyway. However, as we can clearly see in the scriptures, we should never do this. Remember, if you’ll read the context these scriptures were taken from, you will find that these instructions were written to believers (or a church), not just to leaders. They have been placed in the Bible to benefit us all (2 Tim. 3:10-17).

It is a sad fact of life that sometimes people make mistakes or, even worse, purpose to deceive believers. Even when they are operating with good intentions, they will often use the “God told me” or “God showed me through His Word” statements as a sort of “spiritual trump card”. Who can argue with that, right? How do you know what God said or showed to someone else? The truth is, you can’t. **You are not responsible for what God shows them or even how they act upon it. You are, however, responsible for what God tells or shows to you and how you choose to act, based on your understanding.** (Look it up.)

HELP A BROTHER OUT

While it is true that you are not responsible for the beliefs and actions of others, we all are responsible to at least try to point them in the right direction and to help protect others from being harmed.

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. – Galatians 6:1

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. – Matthew 18:15-17

If we believe we are right, after much prayer and soul-searching, we need to go to those we feel are in error privately and share our concerns. We need to not only share the problem with them but share the solution as well!

We must also keep ourselves from sinning in the process. I'm not talking about just doing research on your topic of discussion so you won't be deceived. We must also keep from acting "high & mighty", condemning them, or acting otherwise inappropriately. We must show the love of Christ always and behave appropriately. We must be open to them and allow them to talk to us and share what they believe and why. Sometimes, we may have "heard them wrong" or may not have found what they have found in scripture. Other times, we may not be able to prove something is evil. We may need to talk to them to find out their "proof" or fruit that proves, or will eventually prove, their point.

In the case of dealing with leaders, we may have to "agree to disagree" and/or to allow others to embrace something that we feel or believe we cannot. A good leader will understand your personal concerns and, while they may not be happy about it, allow you to refrain from supporting actions or teachings that you feel appear evil or will produce bad/harmful results. Sometimes, leaders only see the final, *desired* results of their words/actions and do not stop to think about what damage may be done to believers in the process. **If you go with a loving heart and a meek spirit, most people will allow you to speak and will actually listen to what you are saying.**

If, after going to them they do not change their position, Christ gave us instructions on how to proceed in the above scriptures in Matthew. **I must caution believers to proceed with those steps only when they can "prove" something through scripture or can show the damage that will occur if the teaching/belief is not corrected. Personal beliefs or preferences have no place being brought before the church, or even just a couple of witnesses.**

Any accusations you make against a brother to others can lead to a whole world of problems for them and you. **Once an accusation is made, it can**

never fully be retracted. It's kind of like when a judge tells a jury to disregard testimony that they have already heard. They can't "un-hear" it! Even if they choose to not reference it when they make their decision, it is still there and often colors the outcome whether they like it or not. You could find out later that you were wrong or were just putting your own preferences off on someone else and you may have ruined or damaged both of your lives in some way! **Pray, pray, pray, and be sure of God's will in the situation before taking the issue public in any way.** Allow the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and use it.

A FEW FINAL, BUT IMPORTANT, THOUGHTS/TIPS

1. Check for fruit (Luke 6:43-45). One of the best things you can do while examining things for good and evil is look to see what type of fruit it is producing. Especially when it appears that there is no scripture for or against the other person's position. In other words, what are, or will be, the results or outcomes that are produced when these teachings, beliefs, or ideas are implemented? What effects do they have on the body of Christ, individual believers, families, communities, etc.? What effects do they have on the life of the individual who is promoting them? Also, please remember to allow time for fruit to be produced, whenever possible. I realize that some things may be so severe as to require immediate decisions, but I have found that most of the time those will have scriptural backing for or against them that is fairly obvious. For other things, keep in mind that while you may be absolutely convinced you know what type of fruit will appear, there is always a chance that you could be wrong. You may need to try or test the fruit to be sure (1 John 4:1).
2. "Despise not prophesying" (1 Thes 5:20). Don't let yourself get so frustrated or worried as to cause you to "hate" to hear someone prophesy or to cause you to discourage the gift of prophecy from being used. A lot of the time the Church focuses on the false prophets and forgets about the true ones (of which there are a whole lot more than most think) and the benefits they can bring to the lives of believers and the world in general. God gave us Prophets and those who, while not called to the office of a Prophet, have and use the gift of prophecy to benefit and equip the Church. (Look it up.) **If you'll notice, Paul placed this word of caution before telling us to prove all things.** Maybe he realized that some people might prefer to just ignore or silence all prophecy and Prophets instead of taking the time and effort to investigate them fairly and accurately? When it's truly from God, I have found that prophecy can be one of the greatest blessings and helps in the lives of believers.

3. Quench not the Spirit (1 Thes 5:19). Last, and I believe most important, always stay open to the Holy Spirit. The Greek word used for “quench” is *Sbennumi*. It refers to extinguishing, suppressing, or stifling a fire or divine influence. **In other words, we need to make sure that we never stifle or suppress the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.** I believe this also cautions us to never stifle or suppress the influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others as well. It’s easy to get judgmental and formulaic when trying to decide what’s right, wrong, good, bad, or indifferent. We need to remember that, in our text scriptures, Paul is not telling us to judge or declare something or someone to be good or evil. Only God has that right and authority. (Look it up.) Also, we need to keep in mind that, no matter how convinced we are that we are right, we might be wrong. We need to afford others, and ourselves, the courtesy of making one’s own choices and acting upon them. If we are wrong, do we want to find ourselves at odds with the Holy Spirit or declaring that something He has ordained and blessed is evil? Consider this, if you were in the other person’s shoes (right or wrong) how would you want others to respond or treat you? Weren’t the religious leaders of the time convinced that Christ was evil? How did that work out for them?

Well, that’s about it for this month. I hope I have been able to shed some light on this subject and give you tools you can use in your daily walk with Christ.

Until next time, keep believing! Know what/why you believe! Live what you believe!

(P.S. - Some of you may be annoyed by the fact that I told you to look some things up instead of giving you all the scripture references, as usual. I'm not trying to be mean, I just want to encourage you to dig deeper into the Word for yourself!)

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