

I John 2:18-27; 4:1-6 (tx: Ephesians 6:10-13)

SATAN'S SUBTLE STRATEGIES (II)

I. His counterfeit assailants

B. False religious groups

INTRODUCTION

Well, what a terrible enemy that wars against us, **Eph.6** has been telling us!

- not one who is flesh & blood; neither one who is just evil principles & influences.
- but a huge host of powerful, personal, superhuman & subtle, spiritual beings out to get God & us by using every trick of the trade.

And so we saw last time one of **SATAN'S SUBTLE STRATEGIES** in his war against us is to attack through counterfeit assailants.

- through counterfeit-Christian ideas & beliefs.
- or through heresies—doubt & denials about the doctrinal truths of Bible.
 - & about their importance & necessity to be a true Christian.

Well, today we consider another way the devil wars through the attack of counterfeit-Christian groups.

-that is, also through FALSE RELIGIOUS GROUPS.

B. FALSE RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Now then, we see Satan carries out his subtle strategies by presenting what at 1st looks like genuine Christianity.

- that looks “O, so scriptural”, but really isn't at all.
- & these are the false religious groups, like the cults of today.
 - people devoted to 1 particular person or teachings, like the Jehovah Witnesses or the Mormons.
 - or groups that overemphasize various forms of mysticism or emotionalism or subjectivism.
 - & they are often found right in the Christian Church.

To be sure, there is a true, biblical, Christian mysticism & emotionalism.

- for Bible teaches genuine Christian faith & life aren't just an intellectual response & understanding of Scriptures' truths with our heads.
- no, but the Christian faith & life also involve an equal emphasis on a living, vital, personal relationship with Jesus that includes our hearts & hands as well.
 - & so our total beings & behavior.

Th'fore true Christianity is a faith or a total trust in God that is alive & active, as well as intellectual.

- it is also a real, living, emotional experience of fellowship & praise to Lord.

But the danger is the devil often turns the Christian faith, that must be of our mind & will & emotions, into something not really Christian.

- he gets us to stress & overemphasis the emotional & experiential that we make feelings all-important.
- & an intellectual understanding of biblical truth & doctrine or of Jesus Christ become unimportant.

Now, we must note here in a real sense the existence of false religious group & emotional emphases are “a striking criticism of Christian Church.

- “For, if [we are] functioning as we should be, [these groups] would never have an opportunity [to exist]. Hence [their] appearance is a condemnation of the Christian Church, & the mark of its failure.”

You see, false religious groups are basically emphasizing certain elements missing in a lot of Christian circles.

- for people are looking to find real satisfaction & certainty.
 - to find peace & power, joy & real life in a difficult world.
- indeed, we all have personal problems & pain, times of trouble, trials & tears & tragedies.
 - &, when we are pressed with strife & suffering, we look for help & hope, comfort & guidance.
- now these times provide good opportunities for Satan to subtly use groups who claim they offer true hope & happiness.
 - all to separate us from God who really cares.

So, in times of hurt & perplexities, when people are baffled & bewildered, they look for something authentic.

- something that can give them help & hope.
- but, sad to say, when they look to the Christian Church, where they should find peace & joy, they often fail to find genuine satisfaction & help.
 - for in a lot of churches today the real good news of Bible isn't being preached & taught & lived.

That's because the heart of the Christian faith & way of salvation & eternal life are missing or played down.

- for the Jesus Christ of Scriptures & His cross of salvation aren't there.
- th'fore what's left of the Christian faith can't offer any real way of rescue from sin & death.
 - & bring people true, abundant, joy-filled, eternal life with Lord.

Or we find in other churches, even in evangelistic, conservative ones, a dead orthodoxy that is useless.

- so those seeking satisfaction & happiness don't find in many churches real joy & love & life.
- instead they only see a mere intellectual assent to a body of doctrines.
 - just a formal, habitual practices of traditions; just routine religious rituals & rites.
 - & often there is just constant emphasis on sin & hell, divine anger & strict obedience to law.

Th'fore the members of a church often look unhappy.

- & that makes Christianity very unattractive involving only intellectual knowledge of doctrine, weekly customs of worship on Sunday.
 - saying a few prayers, a routine reading of Bible & observing a few dos & don'ts.
 - that's all--no real life & joy so it all looks so drab & dull & dry.
- no wonder then, people turn to false religious groups like the cults where there seems to be power & life & love to satisfy people's needs.
 - & they are lost to the devil.

Th'fore, God forbid, that we Christians & Christ's Church should ever drive people into Satan's hands & into false religions.

- that we do it by not being the people & the Church Lord wants us to be.
- that we present the Christian faith & life as being merely intellectual & routine, & so dead & dull & dry.
 - all because our faith isn't involving & affecting, shaping & being worked out in our daily lives.

And we must be careful we are driving people away from Jesus because we have made our fellowship &

worship & witness seen not to be those of authentic joy & love & life.

- but they are seen to be something that can't satisfy people's needs.
 - especially those who hurt so.
- for then the devil will have a heyday using false religious group to draw people away from God who only can give real salvation & satisfaction & security.
 - for God isn't really found in our church!

So then, the devil's subtle strategy is to use counterfeit Christian groups of cults & cultic emphases to prey on people to keep them from Lord.

- & these groups are characterized, 1st & foremost, by sounding a lot like true Christianity.
 - very often they use Christian terms & practices as they talk about Bible & Jesus Christ as God's Son & Savior.
 - & so unsuspectingly we think they are Christians, & we swallow Satan's bait: hook, line, sinker.

- yet, when we question their followers & study their beliefs more closely, we find they have different sense & meaning than Bible does.

2nd, the character of these cults is they always seem to offer great blessings, they say, that are more wonderful than the Christian Church can offer.

- & so the Church, in comparison, is shown to be uninteresting.
- something unspectacular, unexciting, uninviting.

3rd, these false religious groups are characterized by fact their followers are so sincere & committed to their cause, even more so than we Christians.

- they are enthusiastic, alive & active--always ready to sacrifice their all for their group.
- th'fore they always give the impression they have something so important & marvelous & wonderful that involves their whole person: his or her total love & loyalty.
 - & that attracts & appeals to people.

The 4th characteristic of a cult is that the practical teachings & experience they offer aren't really based on or a working out of scriptural truths & doctrines.

- for they don't want doctrine so that they start on practical level.
- & that's dangerous because then you don't have 1, objective, sovereign & supreme, sole standard & authority to judge right & wrong.

That's why **Scriptures**, especially **NT. letters**, always begin with doctrine that we must accept & believe.

- & then they end with the practical based on & worked out from the principles.
- for, as we saw, we must live based on & worked out from what we believe, or else we end up in pure subjectivism.
 - with each of us being our own boss, doing what we think & feel is right.

5th, false religious groups are characterized with a lack of real godly fear & humbleness.

- instead they possess a lot of glibness & self-satisfaction, even boasting that they have arrived.
 - they've got it & are superior supersaints with a greater spirituality.
- but Bible says in Phil. we must work out our salvation in fear & trembling for we haven't yet arrived.
 - so we must constantly press on to the high calling of Jesus Christ till we die: to be more & more like Him.

The 6th characteristic of a cult is they claim it is so simple to receive real life & love & joy.

- all you have to do is just follow their formula or method.
- they are often like those old peddlers of patent medicines long ago who claimed their medicine was a cure-all for every ailment: just buy it & drink it!
 - that's all you need to do, & you will be cured of everything.

So these false religious groups don't acknowledge Holy Spirit whom **Scriptures** teach is in you & me as Christians.

- & He works in us to accept & believe biblical truths.
 - & to put them into practice in our total, daily living.
- instead, cults emphasize you can cure all your problems if you just apply their formula.
 - if you just take their remedy, then all your aches & pains will be gone for good.

7th, these groups are characterized by the fact they claim their cure or blessings are ours at once if we believe their teachings & apply their methods.

- then immediately you will arrive at full & perfect joy.
 - & there will be no more difficulties, struggles, sufferings.
- &, of course, such short-cuts are always more appealing & acceptable than Bible's way to eternal life.
 - the way of disciplined living & trust & obedience, of holiness & honesty, sacrifice & struggles.

But, you see, such a short-cut method to happiness & real life isn't biblical Christianity.

- for Scriptures teach, when we believe in Christ as Lord & Savior, we are changed into a new person.
 - we are forgiven & renewed, & we are brought into a living relationship with God now & forever.
 - & we have abundant, everlasting life.
- but no way does that mean, from moment we believe in Lord, from then on our whole life will be one of living happily ever after.

No, never, for in an evil, erring world ruled by the devil & sinful spirits we are told, & we know it too, being Christian involves constant watching.

- praying & struggling, the crucifying of sinful desires & deeds.
 - beating our body black & blue to keep our passions & behavior in check, ICor.9 says.
- & all that demands discipline & hard work & spiritual surgery, as Jesus teaches in His Sermon on the Mount, if we want to be a Christian.

That's why we need the whole armor of Lord to be strong with His presence & power.

- it's because it's so hard & takes a lot of effort to stand on our feet & win in the Christian faith & life.
- & so, if anyone offers a Christianity as being simple & smooth,--
 - offers short-cuts to peace & joy, that isn't the Christianity of Bible in anyway.

Th'fore, there is no being in all world who knows so well how to package a parcel so pretty as Satan does.

- he cleverly wraps it up in attractive paper with colorful ribbons & bows to make it so appealing.

- & so we must realize that & always be on guard against the subtle strategies of groups that offer just what we need in such simple, short-cut ways.

Now then, to do be on guard, we must always test the spirits to see if they are of God, **IJo.4**says.

- you see, there are certain objective tests Bible gives to use to see the difference between false religious groups & what is genuine, scriptural, Christian faith & living.
- &, to be sure, we can't use the test that principles & practice are good & Christian just because they do good & make you & me feel better & happy, warm & fuzzy all over.
- instead we need the test based on objective, specific standards outside of ourselves, or else we will fall into the devil's trap.

Well then, the **1st objective test** is to ask: “When & how did the group begin?”

- & you will always find that they, like the cults, started in 19th century in the USA as result of a so-called revelation their founders claim they received directly & dramatically from an angel or Lord Himself.
- so then that person becomes very important so he or she is given total devotion, & the group looks to them & their writings for final authority.

Th'fore the teachings of the cults have a great attraction & appeal.

- that's because they claim they don't simply explain Scriptures as anyone can do.
- but they follow a person who has an inside track to God.
 - an extra, supernatural, special revelation from heaven.
 - & so we must listen to them only.

Th'fore, the **2nd test** we must apply to see what is a false group & what is authentic Christianity is cults always recognize & are governed by an authority in addition to & over **Bible**.

- like the Mormons with their Book of Mormons.
- so then cults claim, if we really want to understand the world & Bible, then we must interpret them in light of their revelation.
 - &, though they say they believe Bible, their real authority for faith & life is a new, added, direct revelation of their founders.

Now, it seems some Christians fall into the error of additional revelation with their overemphasis on Holy Spirit.

- on His gifts & works so that they make experiencing Holy Spirit & His gifts the final authority of whether we are real Christians or not.
- so then, our own personal feelings & experiences of Spirit are put above or alongside of Scriptures.
- & some even claim direct revelations from Spirit by which they interpret Scriptures.

Th'fore, to test any group, we must always ask: “Where does **Bible** actually fit in with their beliefs & living?”

- “Do they view it as the all-sufficient, totally enough & the only necessary authority & guide for faith & life as IITim.3 says?
- “Are all their teachings & experiences based only on Bible & are only the explanation of Scriptures?”

The 3rd test is we must look at their doctrines for it will show they are going astray on some essential doctrines.

- & they can be wrong regarding truths of God & creation & prayer.
 - but especially they are invariably wrong about Jesus’ person & work.
 - for they claim He isn’t fully divine or equal to God or God Himself.
- & these groups are also wrong in their view of Holy Spirit as they often ignore His person & work.
- then too, they really don’t have a belief in sin, & that, of course, makes them very attractive & popular.
- & so they are also wrong in their view of salvation, for they deny Jesus died for our sins, but He is just our great teacher & a good example to follow.
 - they then by-pass the cross & deny the most essential, glorious element of the Christian faith.

That’s why it’s so important, when false religious groups come to us with their teachings in Christian terms that sound so scriptural,--

- we must then thoroughly examine what they mean by these terms.
 - for then we will soon discover their teachings & terms are entirely empty of true, historic, Christian content & meaning.
- th’fore we must stay close to God & His Word for His wisdom to see through Satan’s sneaky strategies as he comes as an angel of light.

The 4th test of whether a group is genuinely Christian or false one is to look at the way they claim the blessings they offer of joy & peace come.

- is it based on Bible & by our working & living out its truths?
- or is it only if we simply accept their formula, practice their methods, & then somehow in a magical way & automatically all will be well.

Now, here too, we must be very careful to realize that even in Christian Church we can so easily imitate the methods of false religious groups.

- we can by emphasizing we are automatically saved & are a Christian by just accepting the doctrines of the Church, reading Bible, worshiping on Sunday, being baptized, being born of Christian parents.
- & we forget true Christianity involves a personal, active, alive faith in obedient loving & disciplined living for Lord & others.
 - & that done always & everywhere with our total being & conduct.

Or we can imitate false religious groups by overemphasizing the subjective, emotional side of the Christian faith & life.

- & we claim salvation & its joy are ours if we just feel it.
- then we forget Christianity also involves objective truths.
 - it involves preaching Christ--His person & work.
 - & it involves believing & living only the doctrines & explanations of God's truths in Bible.

CONCLUSION

Th'fore, as we face these counterfeit-Christian groups & emphases, we must try the spirits to see if they are of God & according to His Word.

- &, in summary, the basic test is, as IJo.4 says, the person & work of Jesus Christ.
 - the believing & living the truth that He is God in human flesh.
- & any person or group or emphasis that claims we can get to God & know Him, receive His blessings without believing Jesus is God & our only Savior & Lord,--
 - without believing He & His Word are entirely enough to live by, then these are denials of true Christianity & Scriptures.

And IJo.2says they are really of the Anti-Christ.

- for they are denying the biblical truth that Jesus is God & human.
 - & that He is the only true way to God & eternal life.
- so they must be condemned & opposed as not preaching a genuine gospel.

You see, Col.2:3,9 says in Christ “are hidden all treasures of wisdom & knowledge, for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.”

- that means we don't need anything or anybody else than Bible.
- & Jesus Christ to have salvation & real, eternal life of peace & joy.
 - to receive assistance & assurance in our faith & life.

Indeed, to come to God & have Jesus Christ & Holy Spirit by faith,--

- & to live only for them in their Word, Holy Scriptures, & by their will,--
 - that's all we will ever need now & for eternity.
- that's because Lord is everything & is all in all.
 - He fills us with His presence & power so that we have all we need to live & die happily & victoriously now & forever after.

Phil.4 says, when we go to God through Jesus Christ, we receive His peace that transcends all understanding.

- & it will guard our hearts & minds in Jesus Christ.
- then we will learn to be content in all situations, for we can do everything, even fight the devil & win, through Him, who gives us the strength.

AMEN