

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Pseudo-Christians

By Steven Harper

The world in which we live is full of fake and imitation objects, people, and situations, and it seems to be getting harder to distinguish the real from the fake. Some fakes and imitations may be harmless or even entertaining [as in Elvis impersonators], but some can be outright dangerous. For example, years ago, fake fasteners [bolts] were discovered to have been purchased by a major large truck manufacturer, with markings that would tell someone who understood the standards that these bolts would be more than sufficient for use on heavy trucks. They were not. They were fakes, marked to leave the impression they were able to withstand heavy loads and the rigors of heavy truck usage, but would break under stresses far lower than what they should have. Imagine driving down the highway at speed when one of those bolts broke and you can understand the danger of fakes!

In the English language, we have a prefix that is sometimes added onto other words to describe it as a fake: pseudo. The prefix comes directly from the Greek language and the Greek word *pseudes*, which, not surprisingly, means “*false*.” As it is used in the English language, pseudo means “not actually but having the appearance of; pretended; false or spurious.” We may have heard it in such words as pseudonym [a fictitious name] or pseudoscience [information or an explanation purported to be scientific, but which does not meet the actual definition], or even pseudohistory [where one changes, omits, or even invents the historical facts and events that they might satisfy or justify one’s political beliefs].

Unfortunately, we have to add another word to the growing list of fakes: pseudo-Christians. And, as with all the other pseudo-words, this means fake Christians, and implies ones pretending to be, or having the appearance of, Christians, but who are not actually Christians. Such individuals may be driven by varying motives for appearing to be Christians, but no matter the motive, they are still fake. But how can we say this? Isn’t being a Christian a determination only that individual or God can make.

First of all, let us rid ourselves of the notion and the false claim that we cannot identify false anything unless we know their hearts [which we cannot do]. The claim is sometimes made that we cannot identify anyone as a “false teacher” unless we know their hearts, but upon what basis is this claim made? Certainly not Scripture! The apostle Peter warned the early disciples, “*But there were also false prophets [pseudoprophetes] among the people, even as there will be false teachers [pseudodidaskalos] among you*” (2 Pet. 2:1), and wrote of their “*destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them,*” and how they would, “*By covetousness...exploit you with deceptive words*” (2 Pet. 2:2, 3). Note well that Peter said nothing regarding their motives because that was irrelevant! What was relevant — and important — was that they taught heresies, denying even the Lord, and used covetousness to exploit believers, and using deceptive words. Again, motive is irrelevant!

To identify something or someone as false, we must first know what the true and real thing or person is, and then comparisons must be made to that; if something or someone does not match, then it would rightly be called false, regardless of the motives of the false one. A false teacher is so identified because his or her teaching does not match with what is true or truth; that is, what is being taught as God’s word is not actually what God’s word teaches. A false prophet is one who claims to be speaking from God’s direction, but is not. God’s word actually tells us plainly how we may know one is a false prophet: “*But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously*” (Deut. 18:20-22). Unfortunately, there is an abundance of false teaching now being promoted in this world, and a good deal of it is being believed; should we be surprised that false teaching produces false Christians?

False teachers will tell you, ***“It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you’re sincere.”*** False teachers will tell you, “Just believe on the Lord Jesus and pray to ask Him into your heart and you will be saved.” False teachers will tell you, “There are many roads to heaven.” I will repeat: False teachers produce false Christians. But until we know what the Bible says one must do to become a true Christian, we will likely not know that we have been misled! Again, we must know what the true and the real is before we can identify the false, so we must first take the time to diligently study God’s word to see what was done by those in the Bible record who were converted and became Christians.

And what we will find by a diligent study of God’s word is that the first disciples [Christians] were told, ***“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”*** (Acts 2:38), and those who did so (Acts 2:41), were added to the Lord’s church as those who had been saved (Acts 2:47). Later that same day, the audience was told, ***“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out”*** (Acts 3:19), and it is said ***“many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand”*** (Acts 4:4). An extensive study of all the conversions recorded in the book of Acts will show all the factors that led to their salvation: The word of God was preached, they believed and repented of their past sins, and they were baptized. That was just how they became Christians; they [and all disciples] have to follow the teachings of Jesus and the apostles and New Testament writers, as Christians, if they expect the final reward of eternal life in heaven.

It is here where many fail to meet the definition of what a true Christian is, too: By failing to deny ***“ungodliness and worldly lusts”*** and ***“live soberly, righteously, and godly”*** (Titus 2:12). Though this is a foundational teaching of the gospel message, many today who claim to be Christians falsely believe that they may live however they want and God is going to save them anyway. That was never true for God’s people under the Old Law, and it has never been true for God’s people today, who follow Jesus. We are instructed to ***“abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable”*** (1 Pet. 2:11, 12), yet many today who claim to be followers of Jesus live no differently than the world and indulge in sin just as frequently, falsely believing they can never lose their eternal reward. The sad part is, these pseudo-Christians have no desire to deny their fleshly lusts, but are simply claiming the name without living the life of one who is a true Christian.

The pseudo-Christian will be among those who stand before Jesus in the final judgment and say, ***“Lord, Lord,”*** but hear Him say to them, ***“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”*** (Matt. 7:21-23). — *The Words of Truth and Reason*, December 18, 2022. ■

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“Diligence”

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

“And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:11-12).

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:5-10).

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14).

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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