

## Damnable Deception

Scripture: Galatians 1:6–9; 2 John 7–11

Code: B140226

What would you call a man or a woman who claimed to receive direct messages from God that contradicted the clear teaching of Scripture? Words like *charlatan*, *heretic*, *liar*, and *phony* probably come to mind. And yet there are many Christians—often earnest but ignorant believers—who follow and even *defend* such men and women.

Scripture is clear about the danger false teaching represents to God's people. We even see examples of how leaders in the New Testament church dealt with false teachers. The apostle Paul confronted the Judaizers throughout his ministry. When they tried to gain influence in the Galatian church, Paul sent this warning to the believers there:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:6–9)

Much that the Judaizers taught corresponded to the true gospel. They no doubt affirmed that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament prophets, and a great miracle worker. They likely believed that He was crucified and resurrected and that salvation demanded belief in Him. But they also taught that to be right with God and to maintain that righteous salvation a person must conform to all the laws of the Old Covenant. In doing so, they undercut the power of the true gospel—God's sovereign, saving, and enabling grace. By adding works to salvation they had subtly but completely undermined the gospel of God's grace, of which there is really not another. This was bad news, since man cannot maintain his right relationship to God by self-effort and good works. He will produce good works as a result of God's saving grace and power working in him (Ephesians 2:10; James 2:14–26), but he does not do good works to earn or keep salvation.

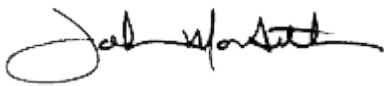
Because of their deception, false teachers such as the Judaizers are even more dangerous than those who openly deny "that Jesus is the Christ" and thereby clearly participate in the work of the antichrist (1 John 2:22). False systems labeled as Christianity always distort the nature and work of Jesus Christ. Those who deny Christ altogether are easily seen as the unbelievers they are; but those who claim to teach and follow Christ while undermining the gospel of His grace are immeasurably more dangerous—because they give the appearance of leading people to Christ while they are actually erecting barriers to salvation by grace.

False teachers not only should not be believed or followed but should be left to God's judgment to be accursed. *Accursed* translates *anathema*, which refers to that which is devoted to destruction. The apostle John wrote:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. . . . If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 7, 10–11)

Christians are to have nothing to do with false teachers, no matter what their credentials. It is both naive and unscriptural to believe, for instance, that staying in a religious school or church that denies the Bible and distorts the gospel gives a believer the opportunity to be a positive influence for the Lord. Even a leader like Timothy, well trained in divine truth, was warned to stay away from error and to concentrate on the pure truth of God (1 Timothy 4:6–7, 13; 2 Timothy 2:15–17). To subject oneself to false teaching, no matter how orthodox one's own convictions may be, is to disobey God, to compromise and weaken one's testimony, and to tolerate distortion of the grace of God in Christ.

The surest way to confuse the faithful, corrupt the truth, and impede the work of the gospel is to tolerate and accommodate false teachers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

(Adapted from [\*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians\*](#).)

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