

## IS IT WRONG TO CRITICIZE SOMEONE ELSE'S RELIGION?

So passionately has God rejected unacceptable worship that under Old Testament Law false prophets were actually executed (Deuteronomy 13:5) and pagan altars destroyed (Exodus 14:13). Typical of ancient prophets of the Lord, Jeremiah's ministry was heavily critical. He was to ". . . root out, to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). Elijah even resorted to ridicule in his exposure of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:27).

When Jesus confronted the religionists of His day, He left no doubt concerning a Christlike attitude toward falsehood. To the Sadducees was directed the crisp assessment, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures" (Matthew 22:29). But it was the Pharisees who received His most scathing indictments. Matthew 23:13-33 records Christ's description of these individuals as hypocrites, blind guides, fools, and serpents. He concluded with the stinging question, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Committed as they were, the Lord declared to them, "Ye are of your father, the devil" (John 8:44).

Following the examples of Christ and the prophets, by Divine inspiration New Testament writers roundly denounced false religion. Paul admonished his readers to clearly mark (identify) offenders (Romans 16:17,18), and pointedly named unfaithful or unbelieving individuals such as Peter (Galatians 2:11), Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19,20), Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy 1:15), Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8), and Demas (2 Timothy 4:10). The use of public rebuke is authorized by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:20. More insights into Paul's response to deficient religion are numerous (Romans 10:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:13; Galatians 1:7; 3:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14; 1 Timothy 6:3,4; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:12; 3:10,11).

Likewise, James accuses disobedient Christians of spiritual adultery (James 4:4), and John labels some as liars, antichrists, devilish, and murders (1 John 2:4,22; 3:8,12,15). He flatly states that those who entertain serious error about Christ "hath not God" and are not to be bidden God-speed (2 John 9,10). He later exposes by name Diotrephes as a disruptive brother (3 John 9). Jude is equally graphic in his characterizations of apostates as ungodly, filthy dreamers, brute beasts, murmurers, complainers, and mockers (Jude 4,8,10,16,18). The Bible closes by naming seven specific local churches, detailing their faults (Revelation 3-4) and condemns one endtime religious system as "the mother of harlots. . ." (Revelation 17:5).

Rather than view condemnations of false religion as contentious criticism, such evaluations should be seen as solemn warnings of great danger. When "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) and judging "righteous judgment" (John 7:24), employing the Bible as the standard for truth (Isaiah 8:20), those who expose the error of untrue religion are acting in an undeniably Biblical manner, following the holy examples of prophets, apostles, and Jesus Christ Himself.

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