

## Fake News in Religion

We are living in a time period in which what is classified as “news” can literally be spread throughout the world in a matter of minutes. Countless newspapers, magazines, and journals continually report “the news.” Add to that the influence of Radio, Television, the Telephone, the Internet, Face Book, etc., and it becomes almost mind-boggling to contemplate the extent to which a “news story” can be transmitted to millions of readers, hearers, viewers, etc. On a more private level, it is almost scary to think how one individual can take “a selfie,” put it on Face Book, and presto — it can be forwarded again and again to the innumerable friends of the friends to whom it was originally sent.

Properly utilized, our combined abilities to transmit news could prove to be a great blessing — especially if it were used to transmit the word of God. But alas! Satan never misses an opportunity to mislead and deceive the masses. Hence, the media to which we have just referred is often used by his deluded followers, resulting in the world being inundated by false doctrine.

On the Political Level, we are hearing more and more about “Fake News,” and, sadly, millions of people mentally absorb the “fake news” and repeat it as if it were “law and gospel.” One wonders, how many wars have been fought, how many “crooked politicians” have been elected (and re-elected!) to various local, state, and federal offices because they and/or their cohorts “fed” the public with a barrage of lies, especially with regards to their opponents?

I do not want to sound cynical. I do believe there still exists sincere journalists whose aim is simply to “report the news,” instead of giving their “commentary on the news.” And I am glad that our Constitution still guarantees Freedom of Speech. But in view of the direction our nation is headed, I sometimes wonder just how long we can exercise that “freedom” without winding up in jail. But that’s another topic for another day.

The fact is obvious. The public is continually being subjected to “fake news.” I don’t have to prove that statement; all I need to do is to request that you take a few minutes and turn the dial to, or channel different “news outlets,” and listen to the contrasting reports given about the same issues, people, subjects, etc., and it becomes very evident — somebody is lying! And it can become very serious when people react to, and when critical decisions, based upon lies and “misinformation,” are made.

However, serious as it is, the brunt of this article is not based upon “fake news” in the political and economic world. Of greater, and far-reaching, consequence is “fake news” as it exists in the religious world! And surely no informed person would deny that such exists. And it is not a new phenomenon. Eve believed and acted upon “fake news,” when Satan told her that she would “*not surely die*” if she ate of the forbidden fruit, Gen. 3:1-6. She ate, she gave to Adam and he ate, and sin entered the world. Sadly “*through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned,*” Rom. 5:12. Of course, Satan “*is a liar and the father of it,*” John 8:44, so it is completely within his depraved character for Satan to lie, or to issue “fake news.” And, sadly, even today there are countless “*false apostles*” and “*deceitful workers,*” who transform themselves “*into apostles of Christ,*” who are following the diabolic example of Satan who “*transforms himself into an angel of light,*” 2 Cor. 11:13-14. We are thus commanded to “*believe not every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world,*” I John 4:1. Along this line, the apostle Peter wrote, saying, “*there were also false prophets among the people, even as*

*there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them,*” and he further added that *“many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed,”* 2 Peter 2:1-2. The Old Testament records countless examples of *“false prophets”* and of their *“destructive heresies,”* and the New Testament warns that such will continue. This is surely why we are to *“test all things”* and to *“hold fast what is good,”* I Thess. 5:21.

With reference to *“false prophets,”* many, many examples could be cited. In 1989 Benny Hinn who is involved in the so-called *“prosperity gospel,”* declared that the Lord told him that all homosexuals in America would die by fire in the late 1990’s, and that Fidel Castro would die in the 1990’s. Neither happened. In 1968 I was sitting in a radio station in Louisville, KY just waiting to *“go on the air,”* and listening to the speaker who preceded me. He said confidently that though he could not predict *“the day or the hour”* when it would occur, but between that date and four years from then the Lord would return. In 1972 I was sitting in the high school gymnasium in Murray, Ky, in a general meeting of so-called *“Jehovah Witnesses,”* and the speaker ridiculed the idea of seniors graduating that year from High School and going to college for four years; you see, based upon his Watchtower information, the Lord would come in 1975, or before they could graduate in 1976. *“Jehovah Witnesses”* have set many dates for the Lord’s return, only to be proven wrong each time. In fact, one writer a few years ago observed that, regarding the return of Christ, up to that point in time some 242 dates had been set, all of which have come and gone! All of these false prophecies by well known religious leaders, and founders of different religious bodies, remind me of the words recorded in Deut. 18:20-22, which reads as follows: *“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; you shall not be afraid of him.”* When a self-acknowledged *“prophet”* speaks *“presumptuously,”* he is quoting **himself**, not the Lord; he is uttering *“fake news”* — news which, if believed and followed, could cause one to *“spend eternity in hell!”*

However, *“fake news”* in the religious realm is not confined to the espousals of modern day false prophets. Of greater consequence, is the espousal of **false doctrine**. Jesus plainly said *“you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,”* John 8:32, and later, while praying to God, Jesus said *“Your word is truth,”* John 17:17. The plain truth is this; any doctrine which contradicts the word of God, which *“is truth,”* is *“fake news.”* The reason why we need to *“beware of false prophets,”* Matt. 7:15; why we must *“test the spirits,”* I John 4:1; and why we must *“test all things,”* I Thess. 5:21, is because the religious world is awash with *“fake news,”* which if believed and followed can cause one to be lost eternally!

### **Examples of “Fake News”**

Literally volumes could be cited with regards to examples of *“fake news”* in the religious realm. We shall now cite just a few examples.

**1. “It doesn’t make any difference what you believe so long as you are sincere.”** We hear that said so often, but inspiration informs us that those who do *“not abide in the doctrine of Christ,”* do **not** *“have God,”* 2 John 9. For that matter, if it makes no difference what we believe, **then** why did God give us the Bible in the first place?

**2. “One church is as good as another.”** Jesus built one church, Matt. 16:18; it is His *“body,”* over which he rules as *“head,”* Eph. 1:22-23, and the Bible plainly says there is *“one*

*body,*” Eph. 4:4 If should be evident that any church built by mere man can not be “as good” as the one built by Jesus and purchased by His blood, Acts 20:28.

**3. Man is saved by “faith only.”** Admittedly, the words “*faith only*” do appear in the Bible — one time, wherein we are told that “*You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only,*” Jas. 2:24.

**4. “Baptism does not save, and has nothing to do with salvation.”** Jesus said, “*He who believes and is baptized shall be saved...*,” Mark 16:16. He who contradicts Jesus Christ is espousing “fake news.”

**Conclusion:** Many, many more examples of “fake news” as it is announced in today’s religious world could be cited, but we have run out of space. Beloved, instead of gullibly accepting what “the preacher” (**any preacher!**) says, let us follow the example of the Bereans who “*received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so,*” Acts 17:11. —B. Witherington

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