

MORNING WATCH

A HERALD OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE, AS BRIDEGROOM, REAPER AND KING!

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TEST YOUR LEADERS

“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Revelation 2:1-2).

It would seem absurd to think that these men claimed to have been the apostles selected by our Lord. The only solution would seem to be that their claims were either, that they had been called to that office after the Lord ascended, as Paul was; or, that they claimed the honor due to this name or office, in virtue of some election to it; or, that they claimed to be the successors of the apostles, and to possess and transmit their authority.

In either case there are but two types of apostles spoken of in the Scriptures, the twelve apostles who were sent out by our Lord to spread the Gospel and those apostles sent out by the Church, as the word apostles simply means “messenger, ambassador.” – See Acts 14:14

In our text, there were those who were claiming to be apostles when they were not. The Lord praised the Church at Ephesus for detecting their false claims. While today many denominations claim to have apostles, these men were not apostles of any other Church or association, for the Lord would not have praised them for detecting false apostles of the world. No! These false apostles were in God's Church!

While today we do not have apostles, we do have congregational elders, who not only serve their local ecclesias, but who from time to time are invited to serve other ecclesias and conventions. These elders can and do sit on committees and publish Bible studies by way of journals, newsletters, books, etc. Their qualifications as elders are highlighted in 1

Tim. 3:1-7. They are to shepherd the flock that has been entrusted to them, by teaching them, encouraging them and preparing them for what the Lord describe as “wolves in sheep's clothing.” – Mark 7:15

In our Revelation text, the Lord said, “thou hast tried them.” According to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, the word “tried” is defined as: “to try, make trial of, test: for the purpose of ascertaining his quality.” Does that

sound like we should just go along with what the elders say and teach? The Lord says you can either easily put them to the test or you can easily be deceived.

Our focus should always be on the Christ who is in our midst. Revelation 1:12-13 reads, “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven

candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.” The emphasis is not on the seven candlesticks—the emphasis is on Christ who is in the midst of the seven candlesticks—Christ is right in the middle. But He will allow His followers to go astray.

Let's continue the description of Christ: “His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if

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they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (verses 14-16).

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This great Being is described to introduce the seven eras of Revelation 2 and 3. If we let Christ and His work slide from the middle of the picture, all we have left are deceived churches. So the emphasis is not on being “in the Church,” but following the Lord! When John saw Christ in this vision, he “fell at his feet as dead” (verse 17).

Unless this same Christ leads the Church, we are in serious trouble; and if Christ isn't leading the Church, we should not follow! If the Ephesus Church members, in a right attitude, tried those who said they were apostles, shouldn't you? This was the same Ephesus Church which was discussed in 3 John 9-10. Was Diotrephes one of those false apostles? How did he get all those people to follow him while casting John's followers out of the Church? How much authority did he have? It's difficult to say. John's followers, who stood by John and Christ, were “cast out.” The point is, John discerned Diotrephes' evil motives and rebuked him. We need to do the same.

Paul said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul said the leader is to follow Christ. Follow a man only as he follows Christ. We can't do that unless we are testing and proving all things. It's very biblical to do so.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). John pleaded with God's beloved people to “try the spirits.” Why? Because there are “many” false prophets and false leaders. Often these deceivers were among God's people. We must always test our leaders with God's Word.

We must prove all things! Individuals go astray. Ecclesias go astray. Christ never goes astray! A man is not the trunk of the tree. An organization is not the trunk of the tree. God's Word is the trunk of the tree. And what Christ established through Pastor Russell for some 40 years is a big part of the tree trunk. Anyone who has been among the Lord's people for any period of time is use to change. But not all change is good.

“These [Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Do you realize brethren, that your approach to Bible study helps reveal to God how noble you are? Do you search the Scriptures daily “with all readiness of mind,” eager to see what the Bible says, so you can follow Christ more perfectly? God's elect are very noble people when it comes to their Bible study.

Thayer's Lexicon says the word “searched” is often used as the verb “judge” in the Bible. The Bereans approached their Bible study by investigating and examining the evidence.

That includes examining our elders and those who take the lead, as long as it is done with a Berean attitude. God knows if an attitude is right. It is good to have “righteous indignation” when the direction is wrong among the Lord's people. God certainly does!

Luke said these people had greater nobility because of this attitude. That means a higher reward in God's Kingdom. The very elect have fallen in love with God's truth. They love God so much they will stand alone or even die for Him. They are not deceived by “hugs and kisses” without real substance. And they are not deceived by endless talk of “love”! They know what the true love of God is. They judge by “fruits” (Matthew 7:16), not outward appearance.

“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11). God will personally send strong delusion! But why? Why would God send strong delusion to His own people? Does He want us to fail? Of course not. This is God's way of testing who “received not the love of the truth” (verse 10). God wants to know how much you love Him and His Word. It's not possible to deceive God's very elect (Matthew 24:24).

Paul is not talking about normal delusion being sent to God's people—this is “strong delusion.” We're going to see thousands of people deceived because they are “blind” to their own spiritual condition (Revelation 3:17). They assume there is safety in numbers, and they assume they are God's very elect who cannot be deceived. If they are not careful, these assumptions will lead them into the Great Tribulation and possibly the lake of fire!

We all think we love God. God requires that we have the depth of love necessary to withstand strong delusion. God sends “strong delusion” to His people to determine who will be His very elect. God wants to know who loves the truth—and who just has it. With a wrong attitude, some are going to lose out big time! (2 Thessalonians 2:10). God is dead serious about our calling. The Lord's people have been flooded with the present truth. Now God is going to see if we just talk about faith—or really live by faith—by His Word. Do we remember what we were taught and do we live by it?

God sends strong delusion to see if His people are Faithful. The Lord wants to know who will qualify for His Kingdom. That is the whole purpose for our existence. There are probably more warnings in the New Testament about false teachers than any other subject. If God saw fit to put these warnings in His Word, then we brethren, should take it seriously.