

Hypocrites and Pagans

Navigating the Narrow Gate

By

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Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.
Matthew 7:13-14

I want to tell you two stories. One is about hypocrites. The other is about pagans. Both are challenges to navigating the Christian life.

Hypocrites

Let's start with hypocrites. Two-thousand years ago, Jesus of Nazareth was surrounded by hypocrites. They were the religious leaders of His time.

Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. Matthew 6:2

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea

to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves ...

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone ...

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence ...

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness ...

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'

MATTHEW 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29-30

The Greek word for “hypocrite” is ὑποκριτής and means “an actor, a pretender, performer acting under a mask.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a hypocrite as “a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion, a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.”

Hypocrisy was a huge problem in Judaism in Jesus' time. Fast forward two thousand years and you'll find that hypocrisy is a big problem in Christianity now. Hypocrisy among church leaders and members is the primary thing that pushed me out of a Christian upbringing and into atheism. Some of the people who are supposed to be Christian "examples" are putting on a false appearance of virtue or religion. Their actions contradict their stated beliefs. They are on the "broad way." If you follow their spiritual example, you could miss the "narrow gate."

Hypocrisy is not a new problem for Jews or Christians. King Solomon wrote that "The hypocrite with *his* mouth destroys his neighbor" (Proverbs 11:9). The prophet Isaiah wrote that the leaders of Israel caused their people "to err," and that "everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer" (Isaiah 9:16-18). Long before Solomon or Isaiah shared their wisdom, the Book of Job mentioned the problem of hypocrites many times. Hypocrisy has been a problem for thousands of years.

Hypocrisy is also a big problem in churches today. Many people who are in positions of church leadership are hypocrites. What we have to do is learn how to “navigate” our way through them or around them. You may be in a position to call them out the way Jesus did. You may be in a position to preach or teach about hypocrisy. However, you may not. Whatever your position, beware of hypocrisy. It can lead you away from the purpose God has for you. What did Jesus tell us to do? “... observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Read your Bible and obey God. That will keep all of us on the straight and narrow.

Don't be surprised if some people in your church or family are hypocrites. Keep your eyes on the narrow gate. Don't let religious people “wearing masks” lead you onto the wide way that leads to destruction. Remember, Jesus called us to “follow” Him. Keep your eyes fixed intently on Christ, “the author and finisher of *our* faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Pagans

Pagans are people who worship gods other than the God of the Bible. While we may think of that as being an ancient problem, or something that happens only in other countries thousands of miles from here, paganism is becoming a big challenge in America. It's been growing slowly, but steadily, for the last 100+ years. Because the growth has been slow for so long, many Christians don't even notice that paganism has seeped into many Christian churches and denominations. I call it "[creep and drift](#)." When did it start?

Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' Genesis 3:4-5

The devil knew that what he told the woman was a lie, but he's a master deceiver and the father of lies. The woman must have liked the idea of being "like God," so she ate from the forbidden fruit and also gave it to her husband to eat. That's when "it" started.

Study the Bible carefully from beginning to end and you'll see a powerful "spiritual pull" toward the worship of self and other gods. God continually calls people away from that false worship, but the pull is powerful.

... although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Romans 1:21-23

Instead of worshipping the true God who is Spirit, people took wood and stone and made images that looked like “corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” What did God do?

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. romans 1:24-25

God “gave them up to uncleanness.” That’s a judicial term for how a judge punishes someone. God gave people who surpassed the truth of God being the eternal God up to a pagan lifestyle. You can read the rest of Romans 1 to see what kind of “uncleanness” God gave them up. He judged them guilty. He is Righteous. Humans are unrighteous. God is Holy. Humans are unholy.

Even though people fell short of God's "glory" (Romans 3:23), God was not done with humans. He had an eternal plan to demonstrate His love, grace, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness toward them through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. How could the eternal Son of God die sacrificially? The eternal Son would put on human flesh in order to suffer, bleed, and die. How could that happen? God called a pagan by the name of Abram and made this promise –

Now the Lord had said to Abram: Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Genesis 12:1-3

God's eternal Son would come from Heaven to earth through the miraculous birth to a virgin girl from the lineage of Abram. We know Him by the name "Jesus" –

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-4, 14

Abram the pagan did as God commanded him. He left his country, his family, and his father's house, and traveled to a land that God showed him. Abram became the father of great nation through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. God changed Jacob's name to Israel, which is the name of the great nation from which Jesus Christ would come.

The people of Israel are an example of this powerful pull toward paganism. God made it abundantly clear to the children of Israel that He was the only true God and that they should have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20). He had already demonstrated that He was greater than all the false gods of the Egyptians. He had parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape Pharaoh's army. He had miraculously led them through the wilderness and provided for their physical needs. So, what did the Israelites do in return? They built a golden calf (false idol god) in the wilderness while Moses was speaking with God on the mountain. The Israelites looked at the golden calf they had made with their own hands and said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32) That was the exact opposite of what God had told the Israelites – "I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Exodus 20)

Why did the people of Israel build the golden calf? “Come, make us gods that shall go before us” (Exodus 32:1). Though they were God’s people and had seen His power over all the idols of Egypt, they still had that powerful pull toward paganism. It took about a thousand years of pain and suffering for the people of Israel to finally stop worshipping false gods. They continued to practice hypocrisy (see above), but the worship of idols was no longer a major problem in Israel by the time Jesus Christ was born. The people of Israel had many misunderstandings about spiritual truth, but they did believe in the One God of Israel. The problem was that they could not or would not recognize when God came to them in flesh. They killed Jesus Christ on a Roman cross, but Jesus rose from the dead.

Before ascending back to Heaven after His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples to take the Gospel message “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). That meant eventually taking Christ’s message of salvation to non-Jews (pagan Gentiles). The apostles were fine taking the Gospel to Jews, but God had to push them toward the Gentiles. He did that through a vision given to Paul (Acts 9) and Peter (Acts 10). Peter assisted Paul in convincing the other apostles and elders of the Jewish congregation in Jerusalem that God had indeed called Paul and Barnabas to preach the Gospel to the pagans (Acts 15; Galatians 2).

The Gentiles of the 1st century AD worshipped false gods throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. They were pagans. Read through the last half of the Book of Acts, and Paul’s church and pastoral letters, and you’ll see the struggle Christians had with paganism. If you read letters and sermons of the [Apostolic Fathers](#) and [Church Fathers](#), you’ll find the battle between Christianity and paganism throughout the early centuries of the Church.

Paganism never disappeared, but the growth of Christianity in many nations made it less of an influence for hundreds of years. Christians eventually made their way to the Americas and established Christianity as a major worldview. Though I disagreed with that worldview when I was an atheist in the 1960s and early 70s, there was no question that Christianity was the dominant “religious” view in the United States. However, that has changed dramatically.

As recently as the early 1990s, about 90% of U.S. adults identified as Christians. But today, about two-thirds of adults are Christians. [Pew Research](#)

I worked with young adults for decades after becoming a Christian. That included in churches, on college campuses, and in the workplace. I saw how many young people were drifting away from an interest in the God of Christianity to other belief systems. Many became what is called “Nones.” That means they have no particular “religious affiliation.”

I became a Christian in 1971. One year later, the General Social Survey (GSS) started a project to find out what was happening with the religious preference of Americans.

In 1972, when the GSS first began asking Americans, “What is your religious preference?” 90% identified as Christian and 5% were religiously unaffiliated. In the next two decades, the share of “nones” crept up slowly, reaching 9% in 1993. But then disaffiliation started speeding up – in 1996, the share of unaffiliated Americans jumped to 12%, and two years later it was 14%. This growth has continued, and 29% of Americans now tell the GSS they have “no religion.”

Pew Research

Keep in mind that the “Nones” are not the same as “nominal” Christians. [Barna Research](#) defines nominal Christians this way –

Individuals in this segment identify with a Christian denomination, but do not meet the criteria of Born Again.

These are religious people who are “Christian” in name only. They may self-identify as Christians, but they are not saved. Christianity is more of a “cultural” thing to them. Jesus Christ means little if anything to them.

Are “nones” and “nominals” pagans? Depends on who or what they worship. If they worship themselves or false gods/ idols, they are technically “pagans.” That means the “spirit of paganism” exists in many churches. What is the “spirit” of paganism? Remember what we read in Genesis 3? A spiritual, supernatural being lied to and deceived the first humans into wanting to be “like God.” That’s where paganism began. That spirit of paganism is still in operation today.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:11-12

Paganism in the Church

While many Christians would agree with what they read in Ephesians 6 about “spiritual warfare,” they might be surprised to know that “paganism” is part of that warfare inside churches and denominations. Some churches and denominations are open about their involvement in paganism, known to many today as “Neo-paganism.” However, other churches and denominations are not open about their involvement in paganism. That might be because they want to keep it hidden from people for as long as they can, or they may not even realize that what they teach and believe is Neo-paganism.

Some groups call this “Christo-Paganism.” They view their beliefs as a “blending” of Christianity and paganism. The Apostle Paul puts the brakes on that idea in his church and pastoral letters. Read them before buying into somebody’s idea of blending Christianity and paganism. It can’t be done.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. Exodus 20:4-6

What true Christians need to do is learn how to navigate the narrow gate that Jesus pointed out to His disciples in the minefield of Neo-paganism that has infiltrated so many churches and denominations. I've been writing about this problem for many years, so I'll point you to some [free reference materials](#) to read and consider.

Unfortunately, much of today's church music is influenced by Neo-paganism. So are many of the most popular books, videos, and study materials available at bookstores and online. Does that surprise you? You shouldn't be surprised. Jesus and His apostles warned us that people would come into the church with false teachings to lead many away from following Christ.

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. Matthew 24:24

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Acts 20:29-30

And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. Galatians 2:4-5

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:13-14

But 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 bring on themselves swift destruction ... These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who

live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. 2 Peter 2:1, 17-19

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. 1 John 4:1-3

'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. Revelation 3:1-3

False teaching and deceptive church leadership was going on in the 1st century and is still going on in the 21st century. Pagan ideology is still finding its way into church leadership and teaching. So, how can you know whether something going on in your church, denomination or study group has Neo-pagan influences? Here are some suggestions:

- Compare everything to God's Word. It is the final Authority on all spiritual matters for a Christian. If any belief runs contrary to God's Word, don't believe it.
- Study the Bible methodically and carefully.
- Don't accept something someone says is true (even a good friend or family member) until you've done the above.
- Ask questions of people who say they've had some kind of new or special experience with God or His Word. Be polite, but skeptical.
- Ask for evidence from the Bible. God is not going to introduce something new or unique into a Christian's life that goes against what He's already revealed in His Word.

Be curious and skeptical of anything new that you see “creep” into your church or denomination. Christianity is two-thousand years old. It’s difficult to think that there’s something “new” after all this time. When someone says they have a “new” idea or way of looking at Scripture or the Christian life, alarm bells go off in my mind, caution flags are waving. I know something isn’t right when someone says they’ve found a “new way” to follow Christ. Jesus made it very clear that the gate is narrow, “and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” The “new” way? That’s usually part of the wide gate and broad way “that leads to destruction.”

Paul and the Pagans

Jesus Christ called Saul of Tarsus (Paul) to become His “apostle to the Gentiles.”

... he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Acts 9:15

Paul took the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire sharing the Gospel of Christ with Gentiles and Jews – primarily with Gentiles. What we find in the Book of Acts is that Paul had to deal with the hypocrisy of Jews and the paganism of the Gentiles. While hypocrisy has been a problem in American churches for centuries, paganism in churches is more recent. That’s our current focus.

Paul “navigated” well through the paganism of the 1st century Roman Empire. How did he do it? He stayed on the narrow road that led through the narrow gate. The people of Iconium were ready to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods, but Paul wouldn’t allow the pagans to do that (Acts 14). It led to the people stoning Paul and leaving him for dead. However, God protected Paul and he lived on to continue preaching the Gospel to pagans and Jews. Paul’s message was clear – “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” When Paul returned to Antioch, Syria, after his first missionary journey, Paul reported that God “had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” The Gospel of Christ overcomes paganism when it is practiced and preached correctly.

One of the best-known examples of how Paul dealt with paganism is found in Acts 17. That’s where he was traveling alone in Athens. The pagans thought he was “a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.” Some of the philosophers invited Paul to speak to them at the famed Areopagus. What Paul said in Acts 17:2-31 is an excellent example of how he explained

Christianity to pagans. He didn't give in to their philosophies for a minute.

Don't Give In To Paganism!

Not giving in to pagan philosophies is a primary emphasis of this series. Neo-paganism has slowly crept into churches, denominations, Christian colleges, seminaries, and conferences. It has infected modern Christianity with a spiritual disease that is slowly choking the truth out of the Gospel of Christ. Here are a couple of examples of what I mean by that.

- According to [Lifeway Research](#) in 2020 almost two-thirds (65%) of evangelical Christians believe Jesus is “the first and greatest being *created* by God.” Since that research was three years ago, I think we can safely say that a full two-thirds of “evangelical” Christians believe that Jesus Christ is a “created” being. Keep in mind that Lifeway, Barna, and other research groups view “evangelical Christians” as people who view themselves as being “born again.” So, two-thirds of people who self-identify as “evangelical, born again” Christians believe that God created Jesus. They believe that even though the New

Testament is very clear that Jesus Christ is Eternal, Uncreated, and Co-Equal with God the Father and God the Spirit. You may remember that the apostles dealt with that heresy in the 1st century, and the early Church condemned that view as “heretical.” Yet, here we are in the 21st century with a large majority of “evangelical” Christians believing in a false view of Jesus Christ. Diminishing the Person of the Son of God is a type of “paganism.”

- Next example. The “truth” of the Gospel of Christ includes sharing the Gospel with unbelievers. Jesus and His apostles made that very clear throughout the New Testament. However, recent [Barna Research](#) (2019) showed that almost half of practicing Christian millennials say evangelism is **wrong** – “Almost half of Millennials (47%) agree at least somewhat that it is wrong to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith.” Though Gen Z was not included in Barna’s research, the future of Christian evangelism is not looking good. The reason given in the research was the “cultural

temperature around spiritual conversations.” Younger people don’t believe it’s right to change what other people believe is “true.” This is what I mean by “creep and drift” in churches and denominations. Christians today have determined that they know better than God about the purpose of being a follower of Jesus Christ. While almost half of Millennials believe that evangelism is wrong, the numbers for older Christians who believe evangelism is wrong is substantially smaller (27% for Gen X, 19% for Boomers, and 20% for Elders). The drift toward error and disobedience in the church has been happening for decades, but is now increasing. It should be no surprise that as more Christians believe evangelism is wrong, fewer people are becoming Christians. The idea that truth is “subjective” rather than “objective” is a type of “paganism.” If everyone’s “truth” is equally valid, then why bother presenting evidence that Jesus Christ is the Truth and the only Way to the Father? This is very insidious and deceptive, and has deeply infected the American church.

Terrible Teaching

How did “Neo-paganism” make its way into the modern church? The Bible clearly points a finger at terrible teaching. Pastors, Bible teachers, seminary professors, religious authors, worship song writers, etc., have been teaching terrible theology for decades. They may have been deceived or they may be the deceivers. Whatever the reason, that bad teaching is causing very bad things to happen in churches and denominations across America. Christians are readily accepting Neo-pagan beliefs and practices into their lives and congregations because of terrible teaching.

Pastors and teachers have a particular responsibility in the Christian community. They are to shepherd, feed, guard, and equip the people of God for “their” maturity and ministry –

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all

come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:11-16

Pastors and teachers are supposed to help Christians “not” be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. Notice where that comes from – “by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” The infiltration of Neo-paganism in the church doesn’t happen by chance. It happens because of the “trickery” of men. It happens because of the “cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” The church in America is in the position it’s in because of bad teaching.

Paganism Revived

Neo-paganism is simply paganism revived. It's the old paganism in new clothing. You can dress up ancient paganism and call it new, but it still stinks. God was very specific when He warned Israel about the dangers of pagan worship as they prepared to enter into the "promised land." That included idol worship (including the worship of nature), sorcery, divination, witchcraft, sexual immorality, child sacrifice, and the like.

But Christians don't believe in paganism or do pagan things. Right? I wish I could agree, but I can't because of what I see influencing Christians today. We are being deceived into accepting "religious syncretism." That's where Christianity blends well with other types of religious or spiritual systems to make a new system that is supposedly better than the Christianity the apostles practiced and preached. Since the Holy Spirit of God inspired that preaching, people believe that they either know more than God or that God has changed since the New Testament was written. The Bible teaches that

God is unchanging and knows more than anyone else in the universe, so those people are wrong – dead wrong.

Here are some of those religious philosophies that are deceiving Christians by the millions in the Americas –

- Relativism – the belief that truth is subject to what individual Christians view as their “personal” truth (reality) – faith in “feelings” are more relevant and important than faith in “facts” – “relativism” more important than “revelation”
- Inclusivism – the belief that all religious viewpoints are equally valid and all people are “God’s children” ... buying into the idea that everyone is a “child of the same universe”
- New-Ageism – the belief in spiritual energy in all things; belief in astrology; belief in palmistry; belief in reading “spiritual cards;” belief in Ouija boards; belief in psychic abilities; belief in power of crystals; belief in mystic powers; “grave sucking” (a type of necromancy); “drunk”

in the spirit; “casting” of spells; spirit writing; belief in reincarnation; etc.

- Spiritualism – the belief that living people can communicate with the dead through “spirit guides” and meditate using their spiritual “energy,” including Kundalini energy; inviting spirit beings to enter the human body for wisdom, power, fame, or fortune
- Angel-ism – belief in the power of angels to serve the desires of God’s human children
- Paranormal – belief in paranormal activities (e.g. seeing ghosts or apparitions, visiting Heaven or Hell and returning to describe it, etc)
- Human wisdom – belief in the power of human wisdom to solve problems in the human condition (e.g. humanistic psychology, philosophy)
- Destiny Control - belief that humans can control their destiny - including health, wealth, and overall prosperity

What's behind Neo-paganism and New-Ageism? "...deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). When Christians invite these Neo-pagan beliefs and activities into their minds and hearts, into their homes, into their churches, into their denominations, into their schools and seminaries, they are inviting in **deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons.**

Paul also sent a warning to the Christians in Corinth – "I do not want you to have fellowship with demons." (1 Corinthians 10:20) He wrote that in the context of the Lord's Supper and "things offered to idols." Interestingly, Paul addressed Israel's history of idol worship while wandering in the wilderness, then told the Corinthians to "flee from idolatry." In that context, Paul wrote this –

Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with

demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. 1 Corinthians 10:18-21

Think about what Paul was saying. He did not want Christians “to have fellowship with demons.” How could Christians “fellowship” with demons? The Greek word translated “fellowship” is κοινωνός. It means “a joint-participant, a sharer, a partner, a companion.” Can you imagine partnering with demons as a child of God? Paul said it was happening in the Corinthian church and needed to stop. Many Christians today are “partnering, participating, cooperating,” with demons, whether they realize it or not.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, warned about a wisdom that “does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.” (James 3:15) The Apostle John warned that people in the end times would “worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood” rather than repent of their evil. (Revelation 9:20)

Demons existed before humans did. They have long been involved in deceiving people into worshipping false gods. Demons accepted the worship of humans. Moses wrote this in Leviticus 17 – “They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot” (Leviticus 17:7). Blood sacrifices were made to gods. God revealed in Leviticus that demons were some, if not all, of the gods that people sacrificed to in Egypt and other nations of the ancient world. Paul pointed that out in 1 Corinthians when he wrote about Gentiles sacrificing to demons and not to God. Then Paul wrote, “you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons.”

Christians cannot have it both ways. They cannot partner with demons through Neo-paganism and still worship God. God is “a jealous God” and will not share Himself with demons. “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). Mixing worship of God with worship of demons is missing the narrow gate. You are now on a broad road that leads to destruction.

Neo-Pagan and New Age Examples

[Pew Research](#) in 2018 found that – “While eight-in-ten Christians say they believe in God as described in the Bible, six-in-ten believe in one or more of the four New Age beliefs analyzed here, ranging from 47% of evangelical Protestants to roughly seven-in-ten Catholics and Protestants in the historically black tradition.” Those four New Age beliefs mentioned in the research included belief in

1. reincarnation
2. astrology
3. psychics
4. the presence of spiritual energy in physical objects like mountains or trees

Are you mixing your belief in Christ with Neo-pagan and New Age beliefs? How would you know if you were? I think we can learn something from a group of Jews who lived in southwestern Macedonia during the 1st century –

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. Acts 17:10-12

The “Scriptures” the Bereans searched daily was the Hebrew Bible – what Christians know as the Old Testament. The Jews listened to what Paul and Silas said about Jesus, then searched through the Hebrew Bible to see if their “truth claims” were true. Many of the Jews did believe what Paul and Silas said. So did some Greeks, “prominent women as well as men.”

The Jews in Berea knew a lot about paganism because they lived among pagans. Pagans in Macedonia worshipped most of the same gods as other Greeks of the time. That included the “Twelve Olympians,” including Zeus, Apollo, Heracles, Aphrodite, Athena, Artemis, Ares, Hermes, Dionysius, and Poseidon. They also knew the long history that Israel had had with paganism, including the worship of even more ancient gods like Asherah, Baal, Dagon, Marduk, Moloch, Shamash, Yarikh, Mot, and Astarte. Paul’s teaching that Jesus Christ is the Son of God may have sounded like paganism to some Jews, but the Berean Jews realized as they searched the Scriptures that Jesus was in fact the long-promised Messiah of Israel – the Son of God, the Son of Man.

What I want you to notice is the word “searched.” It’s an English translation of the Greek verb ἀνακρίνω, which means “investigate, question, examine closely.” I spent much of my career as an investigative journalist, so I understand the process of ἀνακρίνω. It means observing carefully, asking many questions for interpretation, answering those questions thoroughly, making correct interpretations from the answers you get to your questions, then applying the truth to your life.

If you follow the process correctly, you will come to the truth. The Apostle Paul used the phrase, “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15) to express the same idea. It’s the process of handling the Word of God “correctly.”

Investigating Paganism in the Church

We saw in the last part of our series that Jews in the Macedonian town of Berea “searched” the Scriptures to see if what Paul and Silas told them about Jesus Christ being the Son of God/Son of Man/Messiah of Israel was true or just another “pagan” tale. Jews living outside Israel in the 1st century AD were surrounded by pagans and paganism, and were careful of any belief system not supported by the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). That’s why they carefully searched the Scriptures to see if Paul and Silas were telling them the truth about Jesus being Lord and Savior – the promised Messiah.

Christians today need to do the same thing. Paganism (Neopaganism/New-ageism) has infiltrated the teaching and beliefs of American Christians. Half or more believe and practice some type of paganism. I think that has played a role in the decline of Christianity in the Americas, including the closing of thousands of church buildings every year. As we saw in the last part of our series, a large number of younger

Christians believe that evangelism (preaching the Gospel to the unsaved) is wrong. They don't think it's right to try to change what people believe is true. It's not "culturally" correct or appropriate. That in itself is a type of Neo-pagan perspective.

Paganism in the 1st century AD included the worship of many gods (polytheism), while Judaism and Christianity worshipped one God (monotheism). Pagans also worshipped the spiritual power of "nature", while Jews and Christians viewed nature as the creation of the Creator God. The Apostle Paul explained it this way in his letter to the Romans –

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God,

nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Romans 1:18-25

Even though things look bad for the American church, let's not forget that Jesus said He would "build" His Church. He is doing that right now. We are not seeing the decline of the "Church" that Jesus is building. We are seeing the decline of what many of us have thought of as "church" for most of our lives. Christians have too often thought of "church" as a building where Christians met to worship and fellowship. Even "house churches" in America are not immune to Neo-Paganism. Where Christians meet is not the issue. What they believe is the problem.

Resources for Investigating Neo-Paganism

So, how does a Christian go about investigating whether any teaching or practice in a church, denomination, conference, Christian college, or seminary is Neo-pagan (New Age)? While the process is not difficult to follow, it does take time to discover and uncover the deception. It's doing what the Bereans did – investigating to see if a particular teaching is true or false.

Step One – Learn How to Study Your Bible Correctly and Thoroughly

The Berean Jews were able to determine the truth of what Paul and Silas taught because they knew their Bible and how to study it. That's important for any Christian who wants to ensure they can identify false teaching (e.g. Neopaganism, New-ageism). Be sure that you use a reliable Bible and study it carefully. That will help you know whether something you hear or see is true or false.

Here are some resources you can use to help you do that. There are many others, but these will help you get started –

[What Is God's Word? Why Study It?](#)

[How To Study God's Word](#)

[Can I Trust My Bible Translation?](#)

[Can I Trust The Bible – Part 1](#)

[Can I Trust The Bible – Part 2](#)

[Can I Trust The Bible – Part 3](#)

[Can I Trust The Bible – Part 4](#)

[Can I Trust The Bible – Part 5](#)

[Can I Trust The Bible – Part 6](#)

Step Two – Learn About Neo-Pagan and New-Age Deceptions in “Christianity“

[Many of the following articles and videos are the works of former Neo-pagans and New Agers who are now strong Christians.]

[Top Five New Age Teachings in the Church](#)

[Post-Christian or Pagan?](#)

[How a Christian Can Have New Age Beliefs and Not Even Know it](#)

[What is Neo-Paganism?](#)

[What is the New Age movement? What do new agers believe?](#)

[Christian Answers for the New Age](#)

[Why I Quit the Enneagram](#)

[From New Age to Jesus: My Story Out of Deception](#)

[Biblical Responses to the New Age Movement](#)

[I Left the New Age Behind When I Read the Old Testament](#)

[Why Doreen Virtue Left the New Age to Follow Jesus](#)

[Word of Faith Pastors Using “Christianized” New Age Teachings](#)

[From Darkness to Light: One Woman’s Journey out of the Occult, with Jac Marino](#)

[Is Progressive Christianity Christian?](#)

[5 Ways Progressive Christianity and New Age Spirituality Are Kind of the Same Thing](#)

[Another Gospel?: A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity](#)

What is 'New Age' Religion, and Why Can't Christians Get on Board?

Former psychics tell all, and warn Christians NOT to have psychic readings

Why I quit "holy yoga" – Former instructor speaks out

EXvangelical – What's That?

Apologetics for False Preachers & Teachers

Step Three – Learn How to Identify Neo-Pagan and New Age Teaching in Your Church or Denomination

One of the primary principles of investigative journalism is to – “follow the people.” If you hear your pastor or Bible teacher mention a book they’ve been reading in preparation for a sermon or lesson, look up the book online. Who is the author? What other books has the author written? Look for videos of the author teaching or speaking. Is the author a pastor, teacher, professor, or denominational leader? Do you read, see, or hear anything that bothers you about the author your pastor or Bible teacher is looking to for spiritual guidance? By “bother” I mean anything that runs contrary to what the Bible teaches.

If your pastor, Bible teacher, or worship leader says they’re planning to attend a Christian conference, look up the conference online. Who are the speakers? Those are the people who will have some effect on the theology and teaching of people who teach you. Check out each person speaking at the conference. What do they believe? Have they written books? Have they recorded podcasts or videos? Do

you hear or see anything that bothers you about any of the speakers?

When you spend enough time investigating the backgrounds of celebrity pastors, teachers, singers, authors, etc., you will become adept at spotting pagan/new age influences. In fact, you will eventually be able to spot a pagan/new age problem years in advance. Some of the celebrity “Christians” give away their dangerous theology early in their careers. If Christians pay close attention to what’s being written and taught, they can spot that dangerous theology before [small celebrities become big celebrities](#) in the Christian world.

Step Four – Learn How to Address or Avoid Neo-Pagan and New-Age Teachings and Practices in “Christianity”

Once you have identified a teaching or practice in your church, denomination, Bible study group, etc., as Neo-pagan/New Age, you need to decide whether to “address” the problem or “avoid” the problem.

Addressing the problem means following the way Jesus and His apostles taught Christians to address false teaching or practices. You might begin by taking one or more like-minded Christians with you to talk to the person(s) teaching or practicing Neo-Paganism/New Ageism. If the person is the pastor, you might take a few undeceived elders with you. Be cautious when dealing with elders who are involved in false teaching. They are often masters at deception and can make you look like you’re the person practicing false teaching.

Avoiding the problem means following the way Jesus and His apostles taught Christians to deal with false teachers and people who practice false teachings in the church. If you have the support of the pastor and/or elders in your church or denomination, this is the New Testament way to handle the problem of Neo-paganism and New-ageism in your congregation or denomination. Check out the context of each Scripture so you know how to apply the avoidance properly to the offense –

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge— by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. 1 Timothy 6:20-21

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. Romans 16:17

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. 2 Timothy 2:23

But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. Titus 3:9-11

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

[Sexual immorality is mentioned often in the Bible as being connected to paganism. Paul told the Corinthians that the sexual immorality of two of their members was such “as is not even named among the Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 5:1). Given the list of sexual sins Paul mentioned in Romans 1, to say that Christians could be guilty of sexual immorality that even the pagan Gentiles didn’t do is nothing short of terrible. Christians should not participate (partner with deceivers) in any type of

sexual immorality. If they do and will not repent, Paul says the church is to “put away from yourselves the evil person.” You can read 1 and 2 Corinthians to see how the church in Corinth responded to Paul’s rebuke.]

There is the possibility that you may find yourself in the position of being alone in your concern about Neo-pagan and New-Age teaching and practices in your church or denomination. Avoiding the problem in that case may mean you’ll have to leave the church or denomination and find somewhere else to worship, serve, and fellowship. That’s not easy to do, especially if you’ve attended a church or been in a particular denomination for many years. However, obeying God is better than obeying men.

Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. Acts 4:19-20

If your only choice is to move on, by all means move on. If you think you can make a difference by staying, you can try it alone but your chances of breaking through the deception will be slim.

The Apostle John sums this issue up nicely at the end of his first letter –

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. 1 John 5:19-21

Christians and Idols

Idol worship is anything that becomes more important to us than the worship of God. Read the Old and New Testaments and you will see that is true. Jesus spoke about the “gate” leading to life being narrow and difficult. He said “and there are few who find it.” I’m now in my sixth decade as a Christian after having lived as an atheist and a Neo-pagan before that. I can attest to the truth of what Jesus said. The “way that leads to destruction” is broad. It’s easy. Just do what everyone else is doing. Don’t rock the cultural boat. Blend in with the culture. Be a cultural Christian and life will seem good – until you find out it’s not.

Cultural Christianity in America (which, unfortunately, is a majority of “Christians”) has opened its arms to Neo-paganism and New-ageism. It’s popular and makes participants feel good about themselves and their life decisions. The problem is that cultural Christianity is not “biblical” Christianity. It’s not what Jesus Christ taught. It’s not what the Spirit of God inspired the apostles to teach. People are being deceived as

they walk in and out of church buildings in America every week. People are being deceived as they go about their lives with no thought about whether what they believe and practice is approved by Jesus Christ or not. What matters to them more than the approval of Christ is the approval of the culture.

I could write more about this problem, but this is hopefully enough to interest you in learning more about Neo-Paganism/ New-Ageism in American churches, denominations, conferences, schools, seminaries, books, and music. It's a mess and it will take a huge shift in Christian thinking to clean it up.

May God bless you richly as you study His Word and follow His Will. May He give you the strength to make tough decisions that lie ahead of us all as the "deception" grows stronger.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Timothy 4:1-5

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