

False Profits and False Prophets

Greed: the opportunity for spiritual deception.

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness [in *their* greed, NASB] shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.” 2 Peter 2:1-3a, KJV

First came *WorldCom*, and then came *Enron*. By creating fraudulent reports of illusory earnings, both corporations bilked thousands of naïve investors out of their hard earned life savings. Then came *Fannie Mae* and *Freddie Mac*, federal lending agencies that doled out billions of dollars in mortgage loans to borrowers who had little chance of repaying them. “Fannie and Freddie” proceeded to sell the bad loans to banks that in turn pawned them off to other banks that yet again, resold the bad loans other banks. Banks were bankrupted, the Dow was halved, people’s retirement funds were pilfered, and the whole nation looked to the federal government to bail the nation out of the financial crisis, a mess which in essence, was the result of human greed. So to refill the coffers of the bankrupt banks, the President and Congress created a federal “stimulus package” of trillions of dollars that further mortgaged America’s future. We’re paying off one credit card by borrowing on another. With such a monetary policy, the American dream may well turn into an American nightmare. It’s craziness to think that anyone, including the federal government, can borrow itself out of debt. But there’s more . . . Greed’s also rampant in our economy’s private sector.

Bernie Madoff was accused of running a multibillion-dollar fraud scheme, perhaps the largest in Wall Street’s history. A list of his clients read like the “who’s who” of the rich and famous.

Locally, while passing himself off to be an investment advisor and to maintain his lavish lifestyle (he owned a plane and several luxury cars), Marcus Shrenker was guilty of bilking people out of millions. On the verge of being exposed, like “D.B. Cooper” he tried to disappear by crashing his plane after parachuting into safety. Dead men can’t tell tales. Neither can they be prosecuted. As reported by the newspaper, one client invested \$79,000 with Schrenker, who then deposited the money into his business account from which he immediately paid the mortgage due on his \$4 million dollar home. Another person invested \$14,921 with Schrenker. “The money” reports the newspaper, “was supposed to go into a European investment account, which Schrenker promised to monitor through an online system.” But when the investor checked his account online, he saw that Schrenker, using the person’s password, withdrew the funds and deposited the money in his account. “I simply trusted him to do the right things on my behalf,” the investor stated. “As it turned out, he did a lot of bad things on my behalf.” Financial greed and fraud are epidemic in our nation. This is the financial insanity our nation faces at both public and personal levels. The words of Jeremiah are relevant. In his day,

a time of national apostasy, he noted: **“For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness . . .”** (Jeremiah 6:13a).

The irony of all this fraud going on is that what is happening financially in our land is also happening spiritually in churches. Consumer religion has invaded congregations. Consumer driven religion has proven to be big business, which is why once Christian publishers and corporations have been bought and sold by secular ones. Like the prophet told Judah, **“every one is given to covetousness; from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealth falsely”** (Jeremiah 6:13b). Peter predicted the rise of false teachers who like the false prophets and priests of Jeremiah's day, people would follow in their sensuality (“needs” oriented ministries) thereby scandalizing **“the way of the truth”** (2 Peter 2:2b). Of these gospel swindlers and hucksters, Peter warns: **“in their greed they will exploit [i.e., ‘make merchandise of,’ KJV] you with false words [for false needs?]”** (2 Peter 2:3a, NASB; Read 1-3.). Paul told Timothy that **“the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang”** (1 Timothy 6:10). This is the fact about filthy lucre which must be reckoned with by all Christians: *The love of money is the root of all doctrinal and moral error.* On the one hand, greed is killing our nation; on the other, it’s corrupting the Christian movement known as evangelicalism. The one, it appears, mirrors the other.

If people want to give their money to support the vacuous platitudes of the spiritual con artists, then let them. There’s nothing, for the time being, that can be done about it. For those who follow any scam, whether it be financial or religious, there's an old Americanism which says, “There's a sucker born every minute.” And fraud like what’s happening in financial America is also happening in spiritual America. *Prophets for profit* flourish on the American religious landscape because millions of people are buying into spiritualities that are cheating them out of their eternal life savings.

Consumer-driven churches market themselves as institutions through which people's “felt needs” (whatever they might be) can be met. Now-a-days, Christians are seeking for something more and it appears they are more than willing to pay for it. But meeting human needs has become the opportunity for false prophets to feed their greed. The spiritual fraud (sow a hundred dollars and reap a thousand, name-it-claim-it, etc.) abounding in America these days capitalizes on the spiritual dissatisfaction of people with life and in Christ. They, ignoring Paul's statement that **“godliness with contentment is great gain,”** seem to be ever in search of *something more.* (1 Timothy 6:6).

As for me, I’m quite satisfied (not smug) in Christ, for Jesus told His disciples, **“I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst”** (John 6:35). People satisfied in Christ are not looking for “get-rich-quick-schemes,” spiritual or financial. So, please don’t let any spiritual huckster bilk you out of your eternal life savings! Find personal satisfaction by faith in the Word of God and the indwelling Spirit of Christ.