

The Great Controversy Series

12 Fanaticism: A Threat to the Reform

When we last left the courageous Luther, he was defending his position and his writings before the emperor Charles and the whole Diet of Worms using the Bible and the Bible alone as a basis and standard. He refused to recant. For a time the whole council was in astonished silence.

The papal supporters had suffered a defeat, their cause was seen in a most unseemly light. They couldn't say anything against Luther by using the Bible. But they could threaten. The Diet spokesman who was a supporter of Rome said, "If you don't recant, the emperor and the states of the emperor will come together and make a decision on what should be done with a heretic.

The papal legate, with eloquent words, before the assembly, presented what would be the price to the emperor and to the states by forsaking the support of the huge and powerful Roman Catholic Church to take sides with a humble monk. His words were affective. The young emperor declared Luther to be a heretic. Luther and his associates were excommunicated and his writings banned. All powers of the state would be used to exterminate them. No one was permitted to give Luther even a cup of water or a morsel of bread. It was prohibited to support Luther by either word or deed. Wherever he was found, he was to be seized and delivered up to the authorities. Yet to Luther a safe conduct would be respected until he reached his home.

Let's stop once again and think about this. Why would Luther be executed? Did he ever incite a rebellion against the state? Did he ever encourage people to lie or steal? Did he ever kill anyone? Why would he be killed? Because to come against religious rules, wherever they are enforced by civil penalties, means to come against the stability of the state. Thus when religion and state are mixed, there is no freedom of conscience. In the Dark Ages in Europe, the Catholic Church and the states formed together a religious state. Luther, as a free person before God, wanted to worship God not according to the doctrines and rites of the Catholic Church but according to the Bible and his own conscience, to preach the doctrines of the Bible and to show the errors regarding religion. This was his crime.

In every place and in every age, the God-given freedom of freedom of conscience is in danger. In the time of the prophet Daniel, king Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree: Either you worship the image I have set up or you will be thrown into the burning fiery furnace. What was the issue? It was the power of the king versus the freedom of conscience. It was not permissible to speak against popular religion. People were forced to accept a belief made up by men place them above the God's word revealed through the prophets. The Bible openly tells us that such a situation will occur again just before Jesus comes.

Revelation 13:15-17 He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶ He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free

and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,¹⁷ and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

Do see in our world now that freedom of conscience is under threat?

Luther had supporters but what could they do? Could they resist the emperor and his army? But Prince Fredrick of Saxony had a plan to rescue Luther. He had Luther kidnapped while on his way home. The plan was so secret that even Fredrick did not know where he was. Luther was taken to a distant castle. There he wrote and began to translate the New Testament into German. His writings were read and interest in the reform increased.

The papists were very unhappy. Instead of decreasing, Luther's influence was increasing. The reform gained strength. While Luther was absent, others began to work and reform principles were spread everywhere.

But Satan did not remain idle. Whenever the Lord affects a revival, Satan is ready to make a counterfeit and in Luther's time this was no exception. It happened in Jesus' time and now.

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

We must be careful. A wonder, a sign is not doubtless proof that it is God's power. Satan and those fallen angels in rebellion with him are extremely powerful beings. They can do things which to us are miracles. Didn't pharaoh's magicians work miracles? How can we discern between the false and true prophets?

Matthew 7:15-16" Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.¹⁶ "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

What are the fruits of false prophets?

A few people appeared who claimed to have special revelation from God. They said that God had appointed them to forward the reform that Luther had begun. These people certainly possessed an extraordinary spirit but what spirit? In religious matters sincere people were highly influenced by these so-called prophets. But in a short time their fruits were made manifest.

Some of these so-called prophets claimed that God had given them the ability to interpret scripture. They made their interpretations according to their own thoughts, impulses, feelings and impressions. Soon these and others encouraged people to either neglect the Bible or toss it aside altogether. There was great confusion. Many students left school. Some resorted to violence against the Catholic mass.

When Luther heard of these things he was greatly troubled. The papists said, "Look, if you give the right to people to interpret the Bible for themselves, this is the result." This is just as Satan

would have it. The reform movement was marred. To resist this, Luther came out of hiding and preached against these fanatics. The crowds calmed down but Luther put himself at risk to be killed.

One of the fanatics was a man named Thomas Munzer. He said that the principle of the Bible and the Bible only as the rule of doctrine and practice was wrong and just another type of papacy. He claimed that he himself was appointed by God to make true reform. He said that those who had true faith were those that had the spirit that was in him.

These kind of people believe that every impulse, every feeling, every impression is God's voice speaking to them. Some burned their Bibles and declared, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Corinthians 3:16. Bu putting absurd interpretations on Bible texts, they were feeding their pride because they put their own ideas above the Bible. Munzer gathered thousands of people and maintained that there should be no order in worship. He taught that to obey princes was to serve both God and Baal and in the ensuing rebellion, many people lost their lives.

Papists held Luther and his teachings responsible for the rebellion. But Luther was fighting against fanaticism with all his might.

Today, false prophets and miracle workers are found in the churches. People cry, "The Spirit!, the Spirit!" and are taken away by every fanatic and obtuse idea. In these churches there is great excitement and activities that capture the senses. People claim that they possess special gifts of the Holy Spirit. The masses go to satisfy their curiosity and they come under Satan's influence. Music benumbs the reasoning powers. They put the Bible aside and prophecy according to their own feelings and impressions. These so-called prophets try to exercise power over others with their supposedly God-given prophecies. The source of inspiration for these people is mostly only themselves, but sometimes the prince of darkness. Because Satan's work is to bury the truth under foolish and absurd claims and errors that disgust people of intellect.

From these people come disorder and nonsense actions that make true believers sorrowful. These fanatics don't feel any need of the Bible and God's precepts. What is predominant is their own ideas and feelings. But the fruits of the false prophets are just at this point.

In order to control people, the papacy banned the Scriptures which point out their own errors. Fanaticism however, arrives at the same result with a different justification. They put feelings and impressions above the Bible. They belittle the Bible. When the Bible is rejected as the standard of faith and practice, then Satan work is seen. Any so-called prophet that says the Old and New Testaments have been changed is a false prophet. You will know them by their fruits.

Isaiah 8:20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is because there is* no light in them.

Deuteronomy 13:1-4 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder,² "and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' -- which you have not known -- 'and let us serve them,'³ "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of

dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ⁴ "You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

How will you know the false prophets? They are false prophets if they do not harmonize with the commandments given by God through the previous prophets. But you say, "But they did great miracles. It must be from God!" No! Wrong! Satan and his fallen angels can do miracles friend.

The Bible gives us warning about this:

Revelation 16:13-14 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴ For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

The reform advanced Luther's translation of the New Testament circulated. In order to stop the reformation, the papacy and papists persecuted the believers. Many people were tortured and many lost their lives. But the reform that God initiated continued. People, Satan and fallen angels always try to restrict the Bible. But God's word will not disappear.

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."

Jesus said:

Matthew 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

These cannot pass away because they are the test of all faith and practice. Anyone who says differently is a false prophet.