

Shayla: Why do you compare famous evangelists to Eden's serpent?

Extended question:

I was reading your devotional titled Signs and Wonders and found it very interesting. I plan on reading it again a little more in depth. However, a portion caught my eye and I thought I would email you about it.

Our problem is that unscrupulous people have always capitalized on this psychological "back door." Eden's serpent was the first and all the "Jims" (Jim Jones, Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart) will certainly not be the last.

I remember Jim Jones and his cult and how it ended. Are you also comparing Bakker and Swaggart with the Eden's serpent? Do you believe these two men are saved? I found it interesting that you named them and am curious as why. Do you believe they should still be preaching? I am not here to pass judgment on anyone as I'm sure you are not either, but your statement caught my eye, as did your article. I would appreciate your observations.

Meforshim:

Grace and peace to you brother,

I appreciate the fact that you are reading my work. I hope that I may be a blessing to you.

Comparison: As a matter of fact I AM comparing Mr. Bakker and Mr. Swaggart to Eden's serpent in their ability to capitalize on this "back door" I mentioned. They were masters at the art of emotional manipulation. They probably still are, though hopefully to a lesser degree now that everyone has seen them for what they are.¹

My father (also a pastor) and I used to watch these two wolves in sheep's clothing and marvel at their technique. Though we knew what they were doing, their use of music, lighting, eloquent speech, personal illustrations, and emotional projection STILL affected us. It was amazing. I remember my father once saying "Though I don't ever want to teach what their teaching, I sure wish I knew how to speak like them!"

Salvation: I do not believe these men are truly Ransomed. The truly Ransomed produce fruit consistent with repentance.² In my opinion, neither of these men has ever truly repented. They make huge emotional scenes, and they say they have repented, but they keep doing the same things over and over again.

We should not merely promise change but actually come through with action.³ *"Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."*⁴

*"A good man produces good out of the good storeroom of his heart. An evil man produces evil out of the evil storeroom, for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart."*⁵ We can discern their hearts by what they say and do. I think that their spiritual condition has been made abundantly clear.

False prophets: Jesus specifically warned us of these types of fellows. He even gave us the way to identify them, saying, *"Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you'll recognize them by their fruit."*⁶

¹ Proverbs 1:17

² Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8

³ Proverbs 14:23

⁴ Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9

⁵ Matthew 12:35; Luke 6:35

⁶ Matthew 7:15-20 HCSB cp Luke 6:43-44

Qualification to preach: I do not believe that either man is qualified to be an elder in the church of God. Does not that qualification include being self-controlled, respectable, not greedy, and having a good reputation among outsiders so that he does not fall into disgrace and the Devil's trap?⁷

Naming Names: As to the fact that I named them, the scriptures are replete with instances of identifying specific sinners. Jesus "named names" in that He clearly identified false religions.⁸ Paul named names on a number of occasions.⁹ We find Luke naming individuals.¹⁰ John, the apostle of love, did not hesitate to mention people by name.¹¹ Nehemiah, the great prophet of God identified individuals.¹² Moses is also seen naming certain men.¹³

Passing judgment:

- Matthew 7:1-5 HCSB *"Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. For with the judgment you use, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but don't notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, there's a log in your eye? Hypocrite! First take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."*

Notice that the Master doesn't say that you shouldn't remove the speck from your brother's eye, but that you had better clean yourself up first so that you are capable of doing it. I would like to caution you on the issue of "not passing judgment." As fellow sinners saved only by the grace of God, we certainly should not look upon any other human in a condemning manner as though we were any better.¹⁴ However, we are not only allowed but are actually commanded to pass judgment on their sin.¹⁵ This judgment should particularly take place when the person claims to be a disciple of Christ!¹⁶ The entire passage on how to deal with interpersonal sin¹⁷ requires the exercise of spiritual discernment and the passing of judgment on sin!

One of the greatest gifts we can give is an honest answer.¹⁸ El Emet¹⁹ expects and deserves truthful followers,²⁰ so we need to strive for honesty and openness with each other, especially about our motives.²¹

However, honesty must be balanced with grace²² and an honest attempt to live blameless lives that do not cause irritation.²³ We should practice active listening,²⁴ motivated by a humble spirit that is constantly asking, "Lord, have I done wrong?"²⁵

Loving consideration for the sinner should be our priority,²⁶ being careful about prejudging or jumping to conclusions,²⁷ giving them the benefit of the doubt.²⁸

⁷ 1 Timothy 3:2-7

⁸ Matthew 23:23

⁹ 2 Timothy 2:17-18

¹⁰ Acts 13: 8, 18: 24

¹¹ 3 John 9

¹² Nehemiah 6: 14

¹³ Numbers 16:1

¹⁴ Matthew 18:10

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

¹⁷ Matthew 18:15-19

¹⁸ Proverbs 24:26; 1 Corinthians 13:6

¹⁹ God of Truth; Psalm 31:5

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:3

²¹ Proverbs 10:6, 11, 18-20; 26:24-26

²² Proverbs 10:13, 31-32; 12:6; John 1:14; Colossians 4:6

²³ Proverbs 12:14

²⁴ 1 Samuel 25:17; Proverbs 18:2; 21:28; Ecclesiastes 5:1-2; James 1:19

²⁵ Psalm 139:24; 1 Corinthians 11:28

²⁶ Proverbs 21:3; John 15:12

We must think carefully before speaking,²⁹ taking long pauses for silent prayer if necessary,³⁰ not only to avoid saying something stupid³¹ but in order to say the most helpful, healing thing possible.³²

We should never allow a mocking spirit to cause us sin³³ and it goes without saying that gossiping about them will only make things worse!³⁴

The conversation of the Ransomed should be characterized by sacrificial love³⁵ and a quiet spirit³⁶ that borders on reticence to speak.³⁷

We are allowed to be angered by sin³⁸ but we must never allow our emotions to drive us into sin³⁹ or base, corrupt speech.⁴⁰ After all, there will someday be an accounting for every word that comes out of our mouth.⁴¹

I hope that this answers your very good (and very involved!) questions clearly. In the end, it does not matter what you or I think. Only the Scriptures are the final arbiter in these matters.⁴²

May Hashem enlighten you as you seek Him and may you, upon finding Him, decide to seek Him even more.

Kol tuv al shalom

²⁷ Proverbs 14:15; Matthew 7:1-5

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:7

²⁹ Proverbs 15:28; 29:20

³⁰ Proverbs 12:13; 16:1

³¹ Proverbs 14:3; Matthew 12:37

³² Proverbs 16:23-24; 18:4, 20; 22:17-18

³³ Proverbs 11:12; 12:18; 15:4

³⁴ Proverbs 11:13; 16:28; 17:9; 20:19; 25:23

³⁵ Philippians 2:3-8

³⁶ Proverbs 29:11

³⁷ Proverbs 17:27; 18:21; 21:23; Ecclesiastes 5:2

³⁸ 1 Kings 11:9; 2 Kings 17:18; Psalm 7:11; Proverbs 31:8-9; Mark 3:5

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 4:26; 5:8-11

⁴⁰ Proverbs 4:24; 7:13; 11:9; Ephesians 4:29; 5:4; Colossians 3:8; 4:6

⁴¹ Matthew 12:34

⁴² Matthew 7:24-26; John 8:47; 12:47-50; 2 Timothy 3:16-17