

Separating the Truth from the myth

People in ancient times created myths to explain what they did not understand. Joseph Campbell did some very good work assembling and studying the myths from various cultures around the world. In a similar vein there is a study known as comparative religion that studies the religious beliefs of various cultures. The danger of this type of study is viewing all religion as coming from the mind of man. It is important to understand whether a certain teaching is from man or God. Whether it is truth or myth. The apostle Peter makes this point here:

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.¹

By referring to a specific incident (the transfiguration) and using terms like eyewitness the apostle Peter makes the point that these things actually happened. God's purpose in this event was to confirm not only the words of Jesus but also the words of the prophets that foretold his coming. The passage continues:

For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.²

Peter warns that just as in the days of the prophets some will attempt to draw people away from the truth. Their teaching will consist of made up stories that conflict with Gods teaching.

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them-- bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.³

Notice the contrast. The apostle is relating events that he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses to and he warns against some who will introduce made up stories to mislead the people. Therefore it is important to separate the truth from the myth. After Jesus' ascension when the apostles chose a successor to Judas Iscariot Peter mentions that the one chosen must be an eyewitness to the events surrounding Jesus' ministry.

Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."⁴

¹ 2 Peter 1:16

² 2 Peter 1:17-21

³ 2 Peter 2:1-3

⁴ Acts 1:21-22

The supernatural events surrounding the ministry of Jesus are not myths that have evolved over the years becoming more fantastic with each retelling of the tale. The apostles were eyewitnesses of these events and they testify that their accounts are the truth and not myth. The apostle Paul toward the end of his life gathered together the elders of the church at Ephesus and warned them that some will attempt to distort the truth. Notice that even during the apostle's time there were false teachers among the believers.

"Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.

Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."⁵

So here we are now almost two thousand years later. We have available to us a variety of religious teachings. Most of these teachings have been around for many, many years. It is important to find out which of these teachings come from God and which come from the mind of man. The apostle John cautions believers to test what they hear and understand what is according to the viewpoint of God and the viewpoint of the world. Separating the Truth from the myth.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.

We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."⁶

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⁵ Acts 20:25-32

⁶ 1 John 4:1-6