

What About Reading Religious Books?

A couple of days ago I was in a conversation with some church members, and we were discussing some of the religious books we have read (or are currently reading). I am a lover of books, especially of those that may be helpful in my ministry. For instance I am presently reading a book about church growth in order to get a better understanding of God's plan for the church's evangelistic task. Another book I am reading is about the purpose and meaning of life. This book has helped me have a deeper awareness of the meaning of a number of Biblical texts.

There are several authors, both in and out of the Lord's church, that have become my favorites over the years. Some of these sources I would feel safe in recommending to others, and some I would not (even though I feel they have been helpful personally).

Most of us are aware that there is a proliferation of religious books on the market today. Many people are reading Rick Warren's The Purpose Driven Life. A few years ago, The Left Behind Series by Tim LaHaye was big. Many have read He Still Moves Stones and other books by Max Lucado. These books are just a few of the pop-religious best sellers.

We are truly living in the information age, and material of a spiritual and moral nature is no exception. There seems to be no end to the making of books (Ecc.12:12). It is inevitable that these sources will have an influence on both ourselves and others, and this influence will be either good for our souls or destructive.

Here are a number of things we should consider in reading books that promote spiritual and moral ideas:

- (1) Judge all things by the standard of God's Word (1 Thess.5:21; 2 Tim.3:16-17)! Not all ideas and views are Biblically sound, even if Scriptures are given as support for a particular idea or view being expressed. Even the devil can quote the Bible (Matt.4:1-10). The Bible must be taught and cited properly, and consistently with other Biblical texts. The Bible itself is filled with warnings about false teaching (Matt.7:15-20; Acts 20:29-31; Rom.16:17-18; Phil.3:17-19; 2 Tim.2:16-18; 4:1-5; 2 Pet.2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; etc.).
- (2) We should realize that it is the strategy of false teachers to use books to promote their agendas. You've heard the expression, "You can't judge a book by its cover." It's true. Many of the covers of religious books, including the catchy titles and pictures of their authors, are appealing and attractive. Beware that Satan and his workers can transform themselves into angels of light (2 Cor.11:13-15). False teachers do not look like monsters. They come in sheep's clothing; looking harmless. Nor, do they wear signs identifying who they are. Nor, do they believe they are false teachers. Many of those who lead others astray believe they are leading them into truth. Along with television and radio, literature is one way that false teachers are able to have an evil influence on the minds of the unsuspecting far beyond their local churches and pulpits.
- (3) Beware that the danger of many religious books is not in the flagrant abuse of truth or the overt teaching of error. Error often goes undetected and "slips in under the radar." The devil is more than willing for us to believe much of the truth if he can also persuade us to believe error. For example, in many of the books on the subject of worship being written today, many authors call for worship to be Bible-centered (which we support). But then they promote a worship style that includes bells, praise teams, and instruments that have no New Testament authority. For many

authors the Bible is viewed as a guide for men and women today, but its authority, based on sound principles of exegesis, is not an issue that gets much traction.

- (4) Be especially on guard against the following false doctrines evident in so much of today's religious literature: (a) Premillennialism (including the rapture, tribulation, etc.). (b) The direction operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of sinners (including the direct illumination of the Spirit for believers). (c) The advocacy of many false forms of worship. (d) The teaching of salvation by faith alone (by means of the sinner's prayer). Depending on what you are reading, you will also need to be on guard against false teaching concerning creation, marriage, divorce, and the family, and the open acceptance of people in all churches among the saved.
- (5) Be wise to the fact that many religious authors are "pastors" of large, growing churches. The size of these churches and the programs they are involved in are promoted, either directly or indirectly, as evidence that God has blessed them. In their books, they promote the activities of their churches as being of the Lord (because months of prayer preceded them, etc.). But does God bless churches that promote a false gospel (Gal.1:6-9)? God sends strong delusion to those who do not believe and love the truth (2 Thess.2:9-12). Satan is more than willing for people to shout "Jesus is Lord", if he can persuade them not to promote or obey the Word of God (Matt.7:21-23; Luke 6:46). Think: If size is an indication of God's blessing, then Islam must be of God! If numbers are the tell-tale sign of God's favor, then the world must be of God. Who can believe it?
- (6) Watch out for the devil's subtle suggestion: If an author teaches such great and profound truths, is it really possible for the author to be lost? How could an author be correct on so many things, and yet be in error when it comes to the matter of salvation from sin, or some other important issue? Do you see how clever the devil is? He uses such questions to get us to doubt the Bible's teaching on salvation, etc. He uses the authors we admire to cause us to doubt God's Word. The Bible shows us examples of some who promoted truth in some matters, but taught or exemplified error in other matters (Phil.1:12-18; Gal.2:11ff).

The important thing is that we realize there is no substitute for knowing the Scriptures. The devil is seeking to devour us (1 Pet.5:8). We can resist him by being steadfast in the faith (1 Pet.5:9). We need to be men and women who can discern good and evil (Heb.5:12-14). We are told to be on guard against those who twist the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:14-18).

Glean the good from the books you read and give thanks to God for all the insights into His Word that you may receive. But never let down your guard. Search the Scriptures daily to find out whether the things you read or hear are so (Acts 17:11).

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