

## HARD LESSONS IN DISCERNMENT

BY DAVID DOMBROWSKI

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. (Ephesians 4: 13-15)

People often wonder, whether they verbalize it or not, why Lighthouse Trails has taken on the task of “criticizing other ministries.” After all, isn’t unity the most important thing in all of Christianity?

Recently, for example, our office received an e-mail from someone who was very upset over our critiques and concerns of the movie series, *The Chosen*. Below is a portion of the comments we received from this person:

With all due respect, you’re absolutely wrong, and bearing (in a documented way) false witness against a brother [Dallas Jenkins] and his ministry. Maybe check up on what the word says about those practices, eh? . . . [Lighthouse Trails] is an organization that fashions themselves after the Pharisees of scripture . . . and gatekeeping the faith. . . . It’s sad but true that there will always be that percentage of Christians who relish judging others and being purveyors of gossip and false witness, and you’ve found purpose in providing them fodder for their sinful attitudes. For shame.

It is difficult to read such harsh criticism; but we also know we don’t stand alone; many of our readers have been accused of ungodly behavior when expressing concerns over practices or teachings they felt were unbiblical and spiritually dangerous.

If you have read my booklet, *My Journey Out of Catholicism*,<sup>1</sup> you know that I was raised Catholic and found the Lord after being drafted and sent to Germany as the Vietnam War was just ending. During this era, many young people in the ’60s and ’70s found the Lord as the Gospel was presented to hearts that were searching and hungry for truth. After my military duty ended, and I returned home (now as a born-again believer), I first got involved with a group in the Catholic charismatic movement. One of the great ironies of my Christian walk is that it was the charismatic Catholics who told me I had a “gift of discernment.”

I say ironic because it was discernment that led me out of the Catholic Church. As difficult as that time period was, it was also somewhat amusing that the spiritual gift the Catholic charismatics said I had was actually rejected by them as I began questioning practices like “inner healing,” contemplative prayer, “slaying in the Spirit,” and deliverance rituals.

### LESSONS IN HARSH CRITICISMS

Over the years since then, I’ve given a lot of thought to what biblical discernment is all about and have come to realize that it’s so important to be sensitive to what the Lord wants us to do as a ministry. For one, we know we can’t cover every topic, so we seek the Lord on what He would have us to do.

This may come as a surprise, but some of the harshest criticisms we’ve ever received were not about exposing error in the church but that we weren’t doing enough. In at least two cases, the offended party told us they would do all they could do to destroy Lighthouse Trails and the ministries of some of our authors because we would not post or cover an issue they felt we should cover. At this point, their initial request that we would post *their* material now became a demand! The argument in each case was basically that because we would not expose a particular person or error, we must be in league with the enemy, and consequently, heretics and deceivers. These threats were brutal in that these parties said they would use whatever means or media they could avail themselves with to destroy Lighthouse Trails. As far as handling such situations, we made the decision many years ago that if an attack was unwarranted, rather than quickly coming to our own defense, we would lean on the Lord’s protection and trust Him to vindicate us as He saw fit.

There were a few reasons why we refused to post these materials on our website: first and foremost, we wanted to be led by the Lord and not by intimidation and threats; second, in these severe cases and in others as well, the materials being presented to us were vehement, poorly researched, and even slanderous and erroneous. Lighthouse Trails has always tried to be careful in our treatment of those who bring false teachings into the church. As much as we can, we try to keep our focus on the false teachings themselves with the hopes that these false teachings might cease—or at least be exposed and avoided. We realize it is not our job or even within our ability to know the heart and motives of those presenting false teachings. But, at the same time, we are not naïve enough as to not see the apostasy that is presently sweeping our world and the church.

One of these individuals who said he would destroy Lighthouse Trails (largely because we wouldn’t post his materials) said that when he exposes someone, he likes to go for the “shock and the awe” as he attempts to destroy someone’s reputation. As we see it, such an attitude goes against the purpose of a biblical discernment

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ministry, which is to aid and serve the body of Christ by exposing things that are a dangerous hindrance to finding or walking with God and exhorting the church to remain anchored to the truth found in God's Word.

### THE CHOSEN: AN UNPLEASANT TASK IN DISCERNMENT

In First John chapter 4, John distinguishes the spirit of antichrist from the true Christ by using the Gospel itself as the standard for measurement. I have written about this before: It is the idea that anything that tears down the Gospel is not of God, and whatever builds it up is of God. This standard has also been the tool we employ in deciding what subjects to write about. You see, the Gospel has everything to do with our eternal destiny, so it is essential that we defend and protect it. It's important to remember too that the spirit of antichrist is not always portrayed as hatred of Christ, but it can often come in a much more subtle form as a substitute for Christ or an imitation (i.e., false) Christ.

In this article about difficult lessons in discernment, I decided to use *The Chosen* as an example. What I said in the previous paragraph is why we took on warning about it. Doing this has not been a pleasant task; we already had friends, family members, and readers who felt, at first, that *The Chosen* was a wonderful way of presenting the Gospel, and after all, Christian leaders are recommending it.

But there was something amiss; and as we did our research, it became apparent that a subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) dismantling of the Gospel was taking place where Jesus, the Son of God, takes on more and more human qualities to the point that He is *just like us*. Now, it may seem OK to some to do this since the Gospel teaches us that Jesus is fully God and fully man; but what happens when we see, on the screen, that Jesus is just another one of us? What happens when we see one of Jesus' disciples

helping Him recite His lines for His sermon on the Mount? And what will happen to Derral Eves' (*The Chosen's* Mormon CEO and Executive Producer) teenage son, who rushed to his father in the middle of the night with joyful tears in his eyes, saying "Dad, Jesus really does live, doesn't he . . . and he's a real person, right?" His son said this after viewing a scene in *The Chosen* in season three where "Jesus" was "blowing raspberries" (i.e., making flatulence sounds with his lips) while interacting among children.<sup>2</sup>

This scene was obviously intended to be funny, but it was clearly an attempt to bring Jesus down to our level which very much lines up with Mormonism (which teaches that Jesus was just a man who attained divinity, just as Mormon believers will attain godhood). As we learn more about Mormonism, we find that Heaven will be a place where Joseph Smith will be seated next to the Father (in as much prominence as Jesus Christ), and Jesus will be further removed sitting among various historical figures.

Then consider John the Baptist who is depicted in *The Chosen* as "creepy John."<sup>3</sup> At face value, John could have been seen as creepy to his culture; after all, he was out there in the desert eating locusts and honey. But if we search the Scriptures to see what John was really like and how people perceived him, to call him "creepy John" is not "plausible"<sup>4</sup> as Dallas Jenkins likes to call his version of Bible stories—it is fabrication and slanderous!

As it turns out, John was loved and respected by many—both Jew and Gentile. More importantly, we should note how God perceived him. In Luke, chapter one, an angel spoke these words about John:

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. . . . And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the

disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:15, 17)

Then in Luke, chapter 7, Jesus spoke of John's ministry as very honorable saying, "Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke 7:28). With these verses in mind, it is puzzling, then, that *The Chosen* would depict "creepy John" as someone Jesus felt was going off the deep end and needing correction.<sup>5</sup>

Reading further in Luke 7, and in light of the depiction of John in *The Chosen*, it is amazing to see what Jesus said next because, while multitudes of people went to hear and be baptized by John, a small minority would not hear him, and these were "the Pharisees and lawyers [who] rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Luke 7:30). What caught my attention first in this Bible passage is the fact that Jesus addresses the Pharisees and describes what they are like; so I was curious to see what Jesus had to say about them, having been freshly accused of being modern-day Pharisees ourselves. Speaking of these men, Jesus said:

Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! (Luke 7:31-34)

Now, let's be careful here in understanding what Jesus is trying to say:

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Jesus is not authenticating the view that Jesus (or His disciples) are party animals who go out and get drunk, nor is He authenticating the view that John the Baptist is creepy or mad or “hath a devil.” No actually, He is denying it.

Reading these verses reminded me again about *The Chosen* episode where Jesus has a disciple help recite His lines for the Sermon on the Mount. In Scripture, did Jesus have something to say on that subject? Let’s consider the following words of Jesus:

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. (John 8:28)

Does this sound like Jesus practiced His lines with the help of a disciple, where in fact, He only wanted to speak what He received of the Father? Jesus spoke the things He received directly from the Father because Jesus was eternally God with the Father. And He is telling the people here that when they see Him crucified, die, and rise again, they will know who was with them. Again, we see a gradual whittling down of Jesus in *The Chosen* to being just a man. Dallas Jenkins claims to be presenting the “authentic Jesus”<sup>6</sup> in this series while only using five percent of Scripture.<sup>7</sup> It seems more like they are trying to present an authentic Jesus while contradicting Scripture (something impossible to do!). Again, the die has been cast, and it appears that the Jesus of *The Chosen* resembles more that of the Book of Mormon than that of Holy Scripture.

#### A LESSON IN FINDING THE TRUTH: THE CHOSEN AND THE MORMONS

Given that the Mormon producers of *The Chosen* are obligated by their religion to stay true to the Book of

Mormon, how can they justify depicting Jesus as revealed in the Holy Bible when their Book of Mormon supersedes the Bible? This is a real predicament as the Mormons have invested heavily into this production. Perhaps for a time, it will be possible to ride the fence of neutrality, but the day will surely come when they will have to abide by their true persuasions. Most likely, by then, the damage will already be done in gradually sizing Jesus down to just a man who *eventually* became “god” just as all Mormons will one day become gods—that is, as the Book of Mormon teaches.

A while back, Dallas Jenkins made a statement indicating that it is OK to have Mormons involved in the creation of *The Chosen* series, by saying that Mormons and Christians believe in the same Jesus.<sup>8</sup> What he should have said is Christianity and Mormonism have entirely separate views of who Jesus was and who He is. Jesus, according to Mormonism, was never part of the eternal Godhead but attained godhood just as they believe man can attain godhood. Consequently, Jesus can never become one’s Savior under that belief system.

What we see happening in *The Chosen* series is a subtle and gradual dismantling of Jesus Christ, the disciples, and the Bible itself. This is serious because, while this series may be entertaining, the distortions to Scripture can have eternal consequences. Some argue that *The Chosen* will stimulate people to read their Bibles; but just like the Book of Mormon, this series may easily supplant the Bible (and probably already has because of its powerful seduction of the senses), and it will be the only “Bible” many viewers will ever know. We have already seen this happen with *Jesus Calling*, where readers of this book contacted us to admit that they had become so “addicted” to and enamored with the romantic nature of this “Jesus” that they increasingly set their Bibles aside and used this book for their devotional reading.

#### A LESSON IN KNOWING WHO WE ARE AND WHO HE IS

In closing, I would like to make a few remarks about distinguishing truth from error. First, in referring back to the e-mail we received from our critic who parenthetically injected a keen observation about our position on *The Chosen*, I am very thankful. She said we present our information “in a documented way,” which, in and of itself, is a compliment. We research things carefully to get to the truth on any issue. For example, when we said that only five percent of *The Chosen* is from the Bible, we were quoting Dallas Jenkins himself who said this. The point being, it’s valuable to do the research though it takes much time and effort before making an observation or a criticism. Another point she made was in referring to us as gatekeepers of the faith, which I also take as a compliment, but one that we have neither earned nor deserve. Jesus is the sheepgate. He stated that when He said:

I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. (John 10:9).

By this, Jesus was indicating that He is our all in all things. Paul expanded on the various aspects of what Jesus does for us when he said:

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30)

In other words, Jesus provides everything we need for salvation and Christian living. Indeed, He is both the gate and the gatekeeper of our faith, enabling us to discern what is good and what is not.

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There will come a time when we will meet the Lord, and there will be plenty of surprises when God reveals how much that was done “for God” was actually counter-productive. May we humbly seek Him to help us to build His kingdom and not tear it down. On that day, God will test our lives (and ministries) as with fire to a house—some built with straw and some built with stone.

I find myself described in the same chapter from Paul when he says:

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen *the foolish things of the world* to confound the wise; and God hath chosen *the weak things of the world* to confound the things which are mighty; And *base things of the world*, and *things which are*

*despised*, hath God chosen, yea, and *things which are not*, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1: 26-31; emphasis added)

Do you find yourself described in these verses? If so, you are in good company, and God can use you even through the hardest lessons in discernment.



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## ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=10964>.
2. “So You Still Think *The Chosen* Is an Accurate Reflection of the “Authentic” Jesus Christ? Really?” (<https://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=35080>).
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTh3glbl8s4>.
4. Dallas Jenkins often says that the fictionalized stories he’s created are “plausible.” According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, the word plausible means “superficially fair, reasonable, or valuable but often specious (i.e., having a “false look of truth or genuineness” and “having deceptive attraction or allure”).
5. <https://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/blog/?p=34616>.
6. “A Candid Conversation with Dallas Jenkins, Director of *The Chosen*” (Melissa Dougherty, 4/27/21, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_\\_Yyq1FPQI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__Yyq1FPQI)), mm: 67:45-67:55.
7. *Ibid.*, mm: 25:11.
8. “Interview with a Mormon and an Evangelical!” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXIiv3NhIhc&t=796s>), mm: 9:37-10:55.