

“Smooth and Fair Speech”

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In connection with his instruction to mark and avoid those who divide the church, Paul warned that such employ “smooth and fair speech” to “beguile the hearts of the innocent” (Rom. 16:18). There is great demand for “smooth and fair speech” in our preachers nowadays. How the message is delivered is of more concern than what the message says to many. A man can teach the most blatant false doctrine in many pulpits as long as he is “dynamic” and entertaining. Some of these are men who are invited again and again to speak to gatherings of young people. As long as they draw a good crowd it appears that the colleges and elderships that invite them have no concern that they are beguiling the hearts of the innocent.

There have always been some who demanded “smooth and fair speech.” Seven centuries before Christ some of God’s people were telling the prophets, “speak unto us smooth things” (Isa. 30:10). To Timothy, Paul warned that a generation would arise that would “not endure the sound doctrine; but having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts” (2 Tim. 4:3). Far too many of our preachers are willing to supply what is demanded.

Paul’s warning about “smooth and fair speech” does not stand alone. He spoke of the danger of being deluded by “persuasiveness of speech” (Col. 2:4). Peter warned that some would make merchandise of the saints through “feigned words” (2 Pet. 2:3). Jude said that false teachers used “great swelling words” (Jude 16). The element of deceptiveness on the part of the false teacher is emphasized in more than the passages cited, also. Both Peter and Jude warned that they are sneaky and will come in “privily” (quietly, not revealing their true identity or purpose until they have gained influence) (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 4). The false prophets Jesus warned us of, would appear to be sheep when actually they were vicious wolves (Mat. 7:15). Two elements stand out in these warnings: (1) The purpose of a false teacher is to deceive or beguile; (2) his method is to use flattery, praise, sweet and cute words as bait.

R. L. Whiteside has some excellent comments on Romans 16:18: “People never seem to learn that smooth and fair speech is ‘the stock in trade’ of a deceiver. If he were to announce that he was a wolf in sheep’s clothing . . ., he would not deceive even the simple.” Indeed, false teachers do not advertise what they are. This means we must know the Truth in order to be able to recognize that which is contrary to it. Beware of “smooth and fair speech” in the pulpit.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Edifier*, weekly bulletin of Pearl Street Church of Christ, Denton, TX, May 19, 1988, of which I was editor.]

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