

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing #2

Matthew 7:15-20; 1 John 4:1

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Warning signs along the highway need to be taken seriously (whether you are approaching train tracks, or there is a sharp curve ahead, or there is a serious storm in the road ahead of you). To carelessly ignore or neglect such warning signs may bring serious injury or even death to you and others.

Our gracious God repeatedly warns us in Scripture—not because He hates us, but because He loves us and would spare us heartache and affliction. Here are a few biblical examples of warnings (“beware”): Luke 12:15; Colossians 2:8; 2 Peter 3:17. These warnings are ignored to our own injury. Why do we have to learn the hard way? In pride we think we can handle the danger we face without heeding the warning from God/others. This is just foolishness on our parts.

Thus, when Jesus warns those to whom He preached (“Beware” in Matthew 7:15), His warning must be believed and applied; otherwise we will be deceived and devoured by wolves who come in sheep’s clothing. This warning of Jesus comes to us because He loves us as His sheep and would protect us from false teachers who would destroy us.

We considered Part 1 to this sermon last Lord’s Day: What Is a False Prophet? Today we come to Part 2: How Is a False Prophet To Be Identified? The main points are: (1) A False Prophet Is Identified by His Doctrine; (2) A False Prophet Is Identified by His Practice.

I. A False Prophet Is Identified by His Doctrine.

A. Review.

1. This warning and command (“Beware of false prophets”) is in the Greek present tense (“Always beware of false prophets”). This warning assumes false teachers are already in the church broadly speaking (not might be in the church, 1 John 4:1; Acts 20:28-31). That is why Jesus describes them as wolves in sheep’s clothing—they even come in the name of the Lord (Jeremiah 14:14; Matthew 7:22-23). The hypocrite within the church is a goat that appears as a sheep, but a false teacher within the church is a wolf that appears as a sheep. He is not a mere deceiver (like the goat); he is also a destroyer (like the wolf).

2. We need not be afraid of them, for Jesus has given to us His Spirit and a biblical way to test these false teachers. How are these false prophets/teachers to be identified? They are not identified by how many follow them, nor by how dynamic they are, nor by their academic degrees, nor by the miracles they claim to perform (antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2), but by their fruit (Matthew 7:16-20). Those who come in the name of the Lord are to be tested by the fruit of their doctrine (Matthew 28:20); and by the fruit of their practice (Matthew 7:21).

3. Just as you do not go to gather tasty grapes from a thorn bush or ripe figs from sharp thistles, so you cannot expect good fruit from false teachers in their doctrine and practice (Matthew 7:16). For, Jesus says, the fruit of a teacher (in doctrine and practice) will expose the nature of a teacher—whether he is good or corrupt (Matthew 7:17-18). And every prophet/teacher (like a tree) that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire of God’s eternal judgment (Matthew 7:19). This describes a false prophet/teacher whose doctrine is damnable and whose practice is evil. This is the test that Jesus gives (Matthew 7:20). We may not be able to see into the heart of a teacher, but we can and ought to judge the fruit (doctrine and practice) of one who claims to be sent by God to lead and teach the flock of Jesus Christ.

B. The first fruit that we are to examine in anyone who claims to come in Christ’s name is that of

doctrine.

1. The fruit of doctrine is a priority in the Old Testament and New Testament when testing one who comes in the name of the Lord (Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Jeremiah 14:14; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; 1 John 4:1-3).

2. Why is this an essential test? Because without truth, one is believing a lie. A lie cannot save anyone from his/her sins—only the truth can lead one to eternal life (John 14:6). Sincerity is not enough to save, for many are sincerely wrong (Proverbs 14:12). False prophets/teachers lie by denying what is true and proclaiming what is false. Here are some examples of truths false prophets/teachers deny and about which they lie to their own destruction.

a. Denial of the inspiration of Scripture without which there is no truth relating to our salvation. Denial of the miracles and supernatural found in Scripture—Liberalism.

b. Denial of the Holy Trinity as One God eternally existing in three distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)— United Pentecostal Church; Apostolic Holiness Church—modalism. Mormons and Watchtower Society.

c. Denial of the incarnation wherein the Son of God assumed to Himself a true human nature so that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man—Mormons and Watchtower Society.

d. Denial of the sinless life, perfect sacrifice, bodily resurrection, and bodily ascension of Jesus Christ—Gnosticism and some Full Preterists. Jesus actually became sin on the cross.

e. Denial of Christ as the alone Savior and Lord of all in whom the sinner must trust for eternal life—Universalists. God is only love.

f. Denial of man's complete corruption and condemnation in Adam—Liberals, Mormons. Man is not just sick in sin, but is dead in trespasses and sins. We don't just need a little help from God, we need life, faith, and a renewed will.

g. Denial of the necessity of God's grace to save the sinner from beginning to end without the merit of man or the works of the law—Legalism; Church of Rome (infused righteousness rather than imputed righteousness); Galatian heresy (Jesus plus works).

h. Denial of the need of holiness in loving God and keeping His commandments—Antinomians, Liberals (sexual immorality, redefinition of marriage and gender—transgender). God is only love.

i. Denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ which focuses on the salvation of our souls rather than the prosperity of our bodies—Prosperity gospel (health and riches); Social gospel.

j. Denial of heaven as the free gift bestowed upon believers and the denial of hell as the deserved judgment rendered to unbelievers—Liberals, JW's, Universalists. God is only love.

II. A False Prophet Is Identified by His Practice.

A. Not only is the doctrine of a false prophet/teacher a fruit to be tested, but also the fruit of his practice (life, character, family, and relationships) is to be tested. There is an objective test (his doctrine) and a subjective test (his life). In Scripture the word "fruit" is also identified with one's conduct (Romans 6:22; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9).

B. Why is it necessary to test a false prophet/teacher by the fruit of his practice, life, character, family, and relationships?

1. Because what one believes in one's heart will be manifested in the way in which one lives. If you love Jesus, you will keep His commandments (John 14:15). If one does not love Jesus, he will not keep His commandments, but will make up his own to follow (Titus 1:16; Matthew 7:21). Just as the lives of those who would be faithful shepherds are to be tested by God's Word (1 Timothy 3:1-7), so likewise will the lives of false prophets/teachers.

2. What are some of the corrupt fruit to be observed in those who come in the name of

the Lord, but reveal by their lives that they are false prophets/teachers?

- a. In pride he boasts in his works, wealth, number of followers, signs and wonders, rather than boasting in Jesus and His wondrous grace to such an undeserving sinner? Rather than humility, he is filled with arrogance. The spotlight is on him, not Christ.
- b. He hungers and thirsts for power, fame, and riches rather than hungering for God's truth and righteousness found in Scripture? He is consumed with earthly gain rather than heavenly gain.
- c. He controls and uses people to promote his own personal goals (though it is said to be the "ministries goals") rather than in serving Christ and people.
- d. He does not evidence the spiritual fruit of self-control or moderation (whether it be in money, sex, fashions, jewelry; possessions, wine, or drugs). These are not necessarily wrong in moderation and in the way God says they are to be used, but he is given to extravagance and self-indulgence.
- e. He speaks irreverently of God and His Word and uses God's name in vain.
- f. He doesn't grieve over his sin, repent of it, or seek God's forgiveness for it. He calls sin a mistake. He tolerates and excuses sin in himself and in others. He is a hypocrite.
- g. He is filled with anger and bitterness toward those who do not support him, follow him, or reprove him. He does not speak the truth in love. He speaks neither the truth nor does he speak it in love for lost and hungering souls.

C. Let me be clear that faithful shepherds of the flock are not sinless. We need Christ as much as all of you. We must daily fall upon the mercy of God just like you. We must daily confess, repent, and seek God's forgiveness and one another's forgiveness just like you. We must take up our cross, deny ourselves, and daily follow Christ just like you. We need your prayers daily even as you pray for one another in your family.

D. Though you ought to test those who come to you in the name of the Lord, what about examining your own doctrine and lives as those who profess faith in Christ? Dear ones, the fruit of sound doctrine and the fruit the Spirit are the glorious inheritance of every Christian. Only as you are growing in sound doctrine found in Scripture (and summarized in faithful confessions, creeds, catechisms, and covenants) will you be able to test those who claim to come in Christ's name. Only as you are growing in a sanctified life by the Spirit of God and according to His holy commandments will you be able to test those who claim to come in Christ's name. If you walk in darkness in doctrine and practice, you will be deceived by false prophets/teachers. But if you walk in the light of Christ's doctrine and in the light of His holiness, He will give you His light to flee from false teachers and to flee to faithful teachers.

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