

Morning Sermon August 30, 2020

“Beware of False Prophets!”

Matthew 7:15-20

When we consider False Prophets, we have to understand that Scripture communicates about prophets in two different ways. There is a narrower definition of a prophet that had to do with foretelling future events. Such a prophet would be known to be true or false by whether what they foretold came to pass or not!

²⁰ But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ ²¹ And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’—²² when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. Deuteronomy 18:20–22 (NKJV)

⁹ As for the prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent.” Jeremiah 28:9 (NKJV)

However, I believe here Jesus uses the word prophet in a broader way, not describing only those who would foretell the future but anyone who would speak for God or even broader than that, any would who would claim to be speaking truth –

“There are thousands who seem ready to believe anything in religion if they hear it from an ordained minister. They forget that clergymen may err as much as laymen: they are not infallible.” J. C. Ryle

I. False prophets –

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, ... Matthew 7:15 A

I want to pull these words out of context for just a moment, because not all “false prophets” wear sheep’s clothing!

In the Old Testament the prophets of Baal were “false prophets.” They did not pretend to be followers of the LORD, and yet they were still “false” in that they were leading people astray!

Today, we have similar “false prophets” – atheists, Muslims, New Agers, Worshipers of nature ... Very few of these claims to be Christians, but they are still false, we have to be careful we don’t believe everything we see on television or read in a book –

II. *The worst kind of false prophet –*
¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. Matthew 7:15 (entire verse)

who come to you in sheep’s clothing – means they look like us, now Mormons claim to be “Christian” but an examination of their doctrine proves they are not... Joseph Smith claimed to be a prophet, but he definitely was not a Christian!

Yet, false prophets can have an even harder to discern disguise –

¹³ ... And from the prophet even to the priest, Everyone deals falsely. ¹⁴ They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ When *there is no peace.* Jeremiah 6:13 B–14 (NKJV)

We have such people in the church today, even Pastors in the PCA, at least one.

III. How to identify such a false prophet: good or bad fruit –

¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?
¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. Matthew 7:16-18

1. Notice Jesus does not give us the “does-their-word-come-to-pass-test” for discerning false prophets.
2. This shows us He is using the broader definition of a prophet which I believe would include: Pastors, Teachers – from seminary to Sunday school, politicians, news casters, anyone who claims to teach truth, especially God’s truth.
3. What does it mean you will know them by their fruit?
 - A. Moral, spiritual fruit –

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Galatians 5:22–23 (NKJV)

Their own life should be characterized by such fruit!

B. *They also should not be characterized by the works of the flesh –*

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19–21 (NKJV)

C. *All Christians struggle with such this, so no one is perfect, but those who are leaders, people we would / should listen to, should be winning this battle –*

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Galatians 5:16–18 (NKJV)

If the walk does not match the talk, be careful about trusting the talk!

IV. *How to identify anyone as true or false Christians? Discerning vs. Judging...*

¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Matthew 7:16-20

1. *Jesus goes further with this I believe including everyone claiming to be a believer and not just prophets, teachers, preachers, why?*

A. *Even non-prophets, non-teachers / preachers can have an influence on us ...*

³³ Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." 1 Corinthians 15:33 (NKJV)

B. *Such people will be judged by God –*
¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Matthew 7:19

C. *We are not to judge such people, at least not about their final destination – thrown into the fire.*

D. *Yet, because we don't want to go to Hell with them, we avoid following their example, or teaching!*

E. *Elders in the church are called to deal with false teachers –*

²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Acts 20:28–31 (NKJV)

2. *Two ways elders might deal with someone:*
A. *Correct a straying brother or sister, especially if such a person was in leadership –*
B. *Remove such a person from teaching in the church –*

² "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; Revelation 2:2 (NKJV)

3. *This is at least partially the duty of every church member –*

¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Acts 17:11 (NKJV)

"What is the best safeguard against false teaching? Beyond all doubt the regular study of the Word of God, with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Bible was given to be a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). The man who reads it aright will never be allowed greatly to err. It is neglect of the Bible which makes so many a prey to the first false teacher whom they hear."

J. C. Ryle

Arnold Brevick