

The Peril of False Prophets (Part 1 of # 24)

Matthew 7: 15-20

As I studied this passage, I was reminded of the relevance of Scripture for every generation. [2 Tim.3:16 – All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness](#): That is certainly true, and we ought to give attendance to all of God's Word. We live in a day where truth is not being preached as it should. I am convinced that this portion of the Sermon on the Mount needs to be proclaimed from every pulpit in America. The church needs to understand the warfare that we are engaged in. Satan doesn't mind the church gathering together; he doesn't mind the activities that we engage in, as long as we don't share the truth of the gospel. He doesn't mind preaching as long as it doesn't reveal the depravity of humanity and the salvation available through Christ our Lord.

I will never forget, while in Bible College, one of my instructors warned us that for every God called preacher that filled a pulpit in America, the enemy would also provide a counterfeit. I am convinced that our world is filled with those who preach every week, but they are not preaching truth. Jesus dealt with false prophets in His day and they continue to plague our society and hinder the work of the church today.

I trust you have taken the time to read and meditate upon this passage. It reveals a present danger that is prevalent among us. I want to consider the [dangers](#) concerning false doctrine raised in the text as we think on: [The Peril of False Prophets](#).

I. The Exposure of False Prophets (15) – [Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves](#). Jesus exposed the false prophets for what they truly are in this statement. Let's consider it a bit more in depth. Notice:

A. Their Danger – Jesus offers a profound warning as He begins to speak of the false prophet. He urges all who hear His words to [beware](#) the false prophet. The word has the idea of "*paying attention, being cautious, and aware*." You can sense the urgency in His voice. Jesus knew the danger associated with false prophets and the consequences of their deadly poison. They sought to replace the truth of God with a cheap counterfeit, one that pleased men and their passions.

- The dangers of false prophets and their heresy were not uncommon in Jesus' day nor were they new on the scene. Throughout the ages, men have been influenced by the false teaching of those who sought to promote their agenda rather than God's. During the days of the prophets, God sent a message of repentance and judgment. The false prophets refuted the claims of God's men and preached a message of peace and prosperity. Jesus dealt with the Pharisees and

Jewish legalists. Paul warned of the dangers of false prophets. [Acts 20:29 – For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.](#) Peter and John dealt with them as well. [2 Peter 2:1 – But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.](#) [1 John 4:1 – Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.](#) The false prophet remains today and we must be aware of the dangers they pose to the church.

B. Their Description – Jesus was very plain and bold in His warning. **Beware of false prophets.** He exposed them for what they truly were. These were those who had distorted the truth, seeking to pervert the truth of God to benefit their fleshly desires. Many in Jesus' day denied the truth that He was the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Paul dealt with those who sought to mix Judaism with the teachings of the gospel in order to receive salvation. He faced the false doctrines of the Greeks and other pagan influences.

- Our world is filled with false doctrine today as well. There are few among the billions upon this earth that teach and affirm the truth. Religion is alive and well in our world. Mankind seeks to satisfy the spiritual element of his being. He will worship something. Many religious teachings have been developed in an effort to appease the passions of humanity. Many today affirm that we all serve the same God, we are all going to experience the same afterlife, and although we are traveling different courses, we are ultimately heading in the same direction.

- Jesus already refuted that doctrine in the previous verses. He proclaimed Himself as the Savior of the world and the only means of salvation and reconciliation to God, [John 14:6](#). We could spend weeks on the many false doctrines that are being promoted in our day, but let me sum it up with this: Jesus is the only way of salvation. Any message other than the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for the redemption of humanity is a false doctrine! If a man isn't preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, he is preaching a false doctrine. (Those who work for the United States Treasury do not study the various counterfeits they encounter. They study the genuine article, US currency. When you know the genuine inside and out, you will not be fooled by a counterfeit.)

C. Their Dispersion – **Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing.** Jesus exposes where the adversary sends the false prophet. Surely there were those who taught false doctrine in the high places and groves as in the Old Testament. There were those who practiced sorcery and witchcraft in secluded places, but these did not pose real dangers to the believer. Jesus confirms that the adversary seeks to infiltrate the church with false teachers. There were those among the people within the synagogues that taught false doctrine. There were many among the accepted

religious Jews that were guilty of false doctrine. Jesus didn't have to look among the world or the places of secular worship to find them; they were among the religious elite of His day.

- I certainly hope you understand the gravity of Jesus' teaching on this subject. When we consider what our Lord has said, it makes perfect sense. Satan doesn't need to convince or corrupt the worldly and ungodly. They are already under his control. He doesn't need to create doubt in the heart of a lost man. Satan desires to infiltrate the church with false teachers. He desires to place people in places of leadership who spread this deadly poison. He knows the power of the gospel, and he seeks to hinder the sharing of truth at the source, among the church. If he can generate false doctrine from the pulpit, then he has succeeded in preventing the truth from being shared. The gospel has the power to save men's souls and Satan will work against it any way he can.
- Now we can deny the existence of false teachers among the church if we want to, but that does not change the fact that they exist. Consider the watered down gospel that is being preached today. There is no mention of Jesus sacrifice upon the cross or the blood that was shed. There is no mention of His glorious resurrection and the assurance we have through His resurrection. Many among the church are being fed a universal gospel. Many "evangelicals" deny that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Many concentrate more on tradition and legalistic preferences than upon the true gospel of Christ. Many have bought into the "prosperity" teachings and never mention the gospel. The absence of the true gospel is as dangerous as another gospel.
- Take a moment to consider the words of Paul and Peter once again. [Acts 20:29 – For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.](#) [2 Peter 2:1 – But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.](#) We must never assume that false doctrine couldn't take root here. We are responsible to ensure that the true gospel is presented and false doctrine is kept out!

D. Their Disguise – **Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing.** Jesus reveals that these false teachers will be hard to recognize from their outward appearance. In fact, if all we considered was their outward appearance, we would never know their true intentions. They seek to present themselves just like everyone else. We must remember that they are doing the work of Satan. The first mention we have of Satan is that he was [subtil](#), literally "*shrewd, crafty, and sly.*"

- The false prophet will come in among the church dressed in sheep's clothing. He has crafted his skill and knows how to disguise his inner desires. Most of the time one would never be able to point out a false teacher by his appearance.

- Often they work behind the scenes; seeking to develop a relationship with those they perceive to be weak in the faith. They don't want to draw attention to themselves, so they work subtly, convincing a few at a time to follow their teaching. Often they seek to undermine the pastor or others in places of authority, all the while seeking to portray that they only have the good of the church at heart. [2 Cor.11:13-15 – For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. \[14\] And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. \[15\] Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.](#)

- It is up to the church to keep false teachers and their poison doctrine out of the church. I assume the responsibility of defending the sheep of this flock as the pastor and under-shepherd. I am in favor of everyone finding their place among the church and being used of God as He has gifted His children, but we must use caution and godly wisdom as well. [1 Tim. 5:22 – Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.](#) I realize Paul was speaking of the role of the pastor, but this is a principle that applies to all aspects of Christian service. Consider also: [2 Tim. 2:2 – And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.](#)

E. Their Depravity (15) – [Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.](#) Jesus exposes the true nature and character of the false prophet. He looks like everyone else on the outside, but inwardly he is a ravening wolf. Their ravening nature speaks of “*taking by force, seizing without mercy.*” The wolf is not concerned with the welfare of the sheep. In fact, he desires to devour, divide, and destroy them. He has no compassion for the needs of the church or the believer; his sole desire is to corrupt their doctrine and obtain a platform from which to spew his poison.

- Wolves and sheep cannot peacefully coexist. The wolf may not attack immediately, but it is just a matter of time before he makes his move, and when he does he will not spare the flock. Wolves have no desire for the church to prosper. They seek to devour and defeat as much as they can. A wolf's only hope is to realize the error of his way and come to Christ in salvation. In the majority of cases, the wolf is unwilling to repent. He is bent on achieving his agenda. If he is unwilling to repent, then he must be removed from the flock. The overall health of the church is in danger as long as the wolf is on the prowl. Many times when a wolf is discovered and confronted, he or she will move on to another flock, one that appears to be an easier prey.

- We must all be on guard against wolves who come in sheep's clothing. We are a welcoming church to all who come through our doors, but we must be willing to stand for truth, refusing to compromise. There is too much at stake to allow false doctrine to take root among us!

I hope to finish our study concerning the Peril of False Prophets next week, but I felt it to important to rush through. We live in an increasingly less tolerant society, and face the very real possibility of false teachers seeking to gain access among us. I pray that Fellowship remains true to her foundations and continues to adhere to sound biblical doctrine. May we ever be a place that boldly and compassionately proclaims the gospel of our Lord.

This has been a different type of message, but I want to extend an opportunity for you to obey the leadership of the Lord. If He has spoken to your heart, I encourage you to come this evening. You may want to seek the Lord for wisdom and boldness to stand against the perils of our day. If nothing else, I desire your prayers for wisdom and direction as I seek the will of God and His guidance for us.