



# Mid-Week

**Bible Study and Prayer  
Wednesdays 6:45pm – 8pm**



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## Beware of The False Preachers (How to Spot a Phony)

### **Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJV)**

- <sup>15</sup> *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*
- <sup>16</sup> *You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?*
- <sup>17</sup> *Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.*
- <sup>18</sup> *A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Therefore by their fruits you will know them.*

**Matthew 7:15-20 (MSG)** <sup>15</sup> *"Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity. Chances are they are out to rip you off some way or other. Don't be impressed with charisma; look for character. Who preachers are is the main thing, not what they say. A genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook. These diseased trees with their bad apples are going to be chopped down and burned.*

### **Acts 20:28-30 (NKJV)**

- <sup>28</sup> *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.*
- <sup>29</sup> *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*
- <sup>30</sup> *Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*

**2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NKJV)**- *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.*

*"many false prophets will appear and deceive many people" (Matthew 24:11).*

Chuck Swindoll tells the story about an unforgettable evening when a friend of his ate dog food. Contrary to what we might expect, he was not starving, nor was he being initiated into a fraternity. Rather, it happened at an elegant physician's home near Miami. The dog food was served on delicate little crackers with a wedge of imported cheese, bacon chips, and an olive, topped with a sliver of pimento. Hors d'oeuvres a la Alpo! The deed was not perpetrated by an enemy but by a friend. (With friends like that, who needs enemies!) She had just graduated from a gourmet cooking course and decided she would put her skills to the ultimate test—and did she ever. After doctoring up those miserable morsels, she placed them on a silver tray. With a sly grin she watched them disappear. Swindoll's friend could not get enough. He kept coming back for more. Evidently the woman's friends were a pretty laid-back group because everyone had a good laugh when she told them what they had been eating.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says: The picture we need to have in our minds, therefore, should rather be this. The false prophet is a man who comes to us, and who at first has the appearance of being everything that could be desired. He is nice and pleasing and pleasant; he appears to be thoroughly Christian, and seems to say the right things. His teaching in general is quite all right and he uses many terms that should be used and employed by a true Christian teacher. He talks about God, he seems to be saying everything that a Christian should say. He is obviously in sheep's clothing, and his way of living seems to correspond. So, you do not suspect that there is anything wrong at all; there is nothing that at once attracts your attention or arouses your suspicions, nothing glaringly wrong.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer adds: There is someone standing by my side, who looks just like a member of the Church. He is a prophet and a preacher. He looks like a Christian, he talks and acts like one. But dark powers are mysteriously at work; it was those who sent him into our midst... He may even be unconscious himself of what he is doing. The devil can give him every encouragement and at the same time keeps him in the dark about his own motives.

R. Kent Hughes - His preaching also has another telltale characteristic—he says nothing that is offensive to the natural man. His message comforts and soothes and never warns of judgment. He wants everyone to speak well of him. He is like the false prophets in Jeremiah's time of whom the prophet said, "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14; cf. 8:11). They speak, according to Isaiah, "smooth things" and "prophecy illusions" (Isaiah 30:10, rsv). There is nothing to make anyone uneasy, but rather only things that make people feel good, content, and falsely assured. They characterize anyone who preaches otherwise as negative.

#### **4 Doctrinal Tests:**

- 1) The false prophet avoids preaching on such things as the holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath of God.
- 2) He avoids preaching on the doctrine of the final judgment. In this regard, two of America's most flourishing cults the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses—reject the Biblical doctrine of Hell in favor of a less stringent and less offensive approach.
- 3) False prophets fail to emphasize the fallenness and depravity of mankind. The truths that man is sinful to the very core of his being and that he cannot save himself are consciously avoided. I once heard a prominent clergyman say he never preached on sin because people already know they are sinners (a very questionable premise!). What they need, he said, is to be built up, to be made to see their potential. He said he never used the word sin in his preaching. Prophets like this do not actually believe the Biblical assessment of man's predicament. We preach what we believe. If we do not preach it, it is because we do not believe it.
- 4) False prophets de-emphasize the substitutionary death and atonement of Christ. They may talk about Christ's death on the cross, but they do not have the vicarious, substitutionary atonement in view. They may sentimentalize about it, they even sing about it, but they do not believe it. A prime example of this is Sir John Bowring, author of the magnificent hymn, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory." He was an English Unitarian and Utilitarian. He was hardly a believer in the Atonement.

False prophets talk about God. They wax eloquent on Jesus and even talk about his death on the cross. Many do not see them as heretics. They are likable—truly nice people—pleasant to be around. Sometimes churches grow under their ministries, but the following years are tragic, bringing a sea of unbelieving children and empty pews.

#### **3 Types of False Prophets (Adrian Rogers)**

- 1) Those Who Pervert the Gospel (Cain) – They come to God another way than what God said.
- 2) Those Who Prostitute the Gospel (Balaam) – They know the truth, but won't tell the truth because they are greedy.
- 3) Those Who Protest the Gospel (Korah) – They hate the truth. They organize others against the truth. They rebel against God's Word.

Many times, warnings have gone unheeded. Captain Smith was the Captain of the Titanic. He received a message, a radio message when the Titanic was on its maiden voyage. And that radio message said that they were entering into iceberg-laden waters. According to the account I read Captain Smith took that message written on a piece of paper, crumpled it, shoved it into his pocket and the Titanic went sailing on, and when it sank, 1,490 people, who went to a watery grave in the icy North Atlantic.

I read somewhere years ago about Sergeant Lockhart. Sergeant Joseph Lockhart. He was sitting at the radar at Pearl Harbor and he noticed a squadron of airplanes coming. The day was December the seventh, 1941. He reported to his commanding officer, I see some unidentified aircraft approaching. Do you know what the commanding officer said? Forget it. Forget it. And 3,000 of America's best perished in that day of infamy.

John Macarthur - In his book *Deceived*, Mel White tries to determine why so many people could be so fatally misled. Among the reasons he suggests are:

He [Jim Jones] knew how to inspire hope. He was committed to people in need; he counseled prisoners and juvenile delinquents. He started a job placement center; he opened rest homes and homes for the retarded; he had a health clinic; he organized a vocational training center; he provided free legal aid; he founded a community center; he preached about God. He even claimed to cast out demons, do miracles and heal. But on the other hand we find all the marks of a false prophet. He promoted himself through the use of celebrities, a very common vehicle for false prophets to gain credibility. He manipulated the press; he wanted certain favorable stories; he was big on playing the press.... And he used the language and the forms of faith to gain his power.

### **BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS WHO TELL YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR**

Ponder this: Dr. Sam Huntington, eminent Political Scientist of Harvard, warned that it is a dangerous thing to listen to a person who always tells you what you want to hear. For years Americans listened to the pundits who said we were coming to a time when every American would experience "the American dream." Yet if any of us had a lick of sense we should have seen we were living in a "bubble" of panglossian optimism which was bound to burst any moment. So it did. How true the words of Jesus, "If you continue in my words, then you are my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

On the religious front, millions of Americans are listening to "Pop Psychology" preachers who say what they want to hear, when if they knew their Bibles they would know they were listening to false prophets. In so speaking I am not thinking of just a few "mega" churches and some big name preachers, but also of many evangelical pulpits, and pastors, including not a few Southern Baptists.

The warnings of God in His Word that false prophets would abound have never been as relevant as they are today. The Apostle Paul strongly cautions us against deceptive false philosophers and philosophies that would arise. "*See to it that no one take you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men,...rather than according to*" (Col. 2:8). The Apostle John wrote a similar word, "*Beloved do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:10). Jesus Himself avowed that "*the way is narrow that leads to life and few there be that find it*" (Matthew 7:14). Then He immediately warns, "*Beware of false prophets...*" (Matthew 7:15). It would seem that the false prophets to whom Jesus referred were those who were telling people what they wanted to hear, that is, the way to heaven is broad and easy, recognizing no sin and requiring no repentance, an "Easy Believism" which is sweeping and destroying evangelical churches today and giving millions, I fear, a false hope of salvation.

The Religious "Bubble" is about to explode and the fall out spiritually will be greater and more disastrous than the "economic" fallout out now in progress. So beware of false prophets who tell you what you want to hear. The end thereof is the way of death. "He who has an ear let him hear what God says in His Word."

### **III. WOLVES [Sheep, Goats and Wolves by: Mark Barclay]**

*Wolves are sort of a breed of their own. They certainly don't conform to others and, most of the time, not even to each other. Not only do they not want to be part of the flock, but the flock doesn't want them around. Not only are they impossible to shepherd, but every shepherd must run them out, protecting the sheep.*

*Wolves do not care if the waters are still or agitated. They have their eyes on flesh and blood. They love the high places so they can observe their prey and set up their attack. They don't want any responsibility, but they will receive all the authority and positions you give them.*

*They may show up in sheep's clothing, but it won't take long to know they are there. First of all, sheep are frightened by them, so the flock begins to be unsettled and nervous.*

*Second, signs will follow wolves that will identify them. Here are some of them. **Wolves growl and show their teeth. Sheep never do.** (Neither do goats.) Wolves are sly and sneaky. They will do their best to stay away from shepherds and cling to the sheep.*

*Now remember, wolves are meat eaters. They love flesh and blood. In fact, they go from church to church devouring and living on the carnality, strife and sin that are there.*

*If you want to expose a wolf, just throw out a slab of fresh meat (carnality). Just reveal a carnal problem or lust problem that is running rampant through the flock. Wolves will jump on it in a minute. In fact, if there is more than one wolf around, they will fight over it.*

*No one can deny this problem exists in churches today. Jesus also had to deal with this problem in His own ranks (read John 6:60-71). We learn in these scriptures that Jesus had more than 12 disciples. He had many. They followed Him everywhere seeing the great miracles and hearing the truth proclaimed. They looked like a mighty army. However, one day Jesus preached a sermon about the body and blood of the Lamb. They actually thought He was talking about cannibalism. The Bible records that many of them went back and followed Him no more. They were astounded at His teachings.*

*Today we see many people gathering together, and they have the look of a mighty army marching. But one day the pastor will teach one teaching that astonishes them, and away they will go. What a shame! Let's be humble enough to realize that if it happened to Jesus, as great of a leader as He was, it could happen to us.*

*Jesus asked the remaining 12 disciples if they also would abandon Him. He spoke a heartrending statement: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" That says it all! That's the way it is today in our churches. The church splits, people leave and are scattered, the shepherd looks bad, and out of the few people who stay, normally the troublemaker is still among them.*

*Let me bring your attention once again to Paul's teaching in Acts 20:28-32. Here the author, Holy Spirit-inspired Luke, records something worth examining. Paul warned that not only would grievous wolves enter the flock in the pastor's absence but also some of our own men would rise up and cause division. How sad! Not only do we have to look out for wolves, but we have to be watchful for those who appoint themselves as leaders. They will rise up, speaking perverse things and drawing away disciples after themselves.*

*We see this problem quite often today. It is comforting to know that wolves identify themselves by their attitudes, actions, and living conditions. At best, both shepherd and sheep can pick them out.*

Have you ever passed a house, or have been walking up to a house wanting to knock on the door, and you see a sign that says beware of the dog. Have you ever seen that? What do you do? Well you beware of the dog, don't you? Where there is a sign there that says just beware of the dog, you stop right away. And you look around and wonder, should I go in there? But whatever, it sensitizes you. I want you to imagine walking up to a house and seeing a sign that says beware the wolf. Now, just suppose rather than having a dog in the yard, there is a wolf in the yard. I think you would do a double take.