



## Exploring the Kingdom of God in Matthew: Beware False Prophets!

June 24, 2018

TEXT: MATTHEW 7:15

As we approach this holy text, we approach one of the most “warned about” areas in the entire New Testament: the reality of false prophets and false teaching in the LORD’s Church.

Indeed, Satan and other devils wasted NO TIME infiltrating the Church, and our LORD and His apostles new it.

*Act 20:27-31 (KJV) For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

*Rom 16:17-18 (KJV) Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

*2Co 11:12-15 (NLT) But I will continue doing what I have always done. This will undercut those who are looking for an opportunity to boast that their work is just like ours. 13 These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve.*

*2Ti 4:1-4 (KJV) I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

*Tit 1:7-13 (KJV) For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. 10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. 12 One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. 13 This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;*

*2Pe 2:1-3 (KJV) 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. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

*Jud 1:11-16 (KJV) Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. 12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; 13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. 14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, 15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him. 16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.*

*Rev 2:18-23 (KJV) And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; 19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. 20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. 21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.*

Of course this wasn't a problem unique to the NT; the Old Testament describes a number of falsehoods and false prophets. Moses gives the following warning...

*Deu 13:1-5 (KJV) If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. 5 And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.*

Through Jeremiah, God said...

*Jer 23:25-32 (KJV) I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. 26 How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; 27 Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. 28 The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. 29 Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? 30 Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. 31 Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. 32 Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.*

But the prevalence of this warning in the New Testament might suggest a chief desire of our enemy and a part of his hellish stratagem:

**If you cannot beat them, deceive them.**

*2Co 11:1-3 (ESV) I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! 2 For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

FROM ALL THIS, WE CAN QUICKLY LEARN:

1. False prophets and false teaching are an area of great **concern** for our LORD.
2. Every church and every believer must always be on **guard** for teachings that do not align with the scriptures.
3. False teaching must be dealt with **quickly** and as completely as possible. In the Old Testament, the penalty was death! Whole households, and indeed much of the effectiveness of the Church is at stake.

UNDERSTANDING THE WARNING:

1. The word *beware* in Greek (prosecho) means “to turn the mind to; to give heed to one’s self.” Interestingly, one of the definitions of this word is “to bring a ship to land.” The implication is the same sort of care one would use in landing a ship is the type of care needed with false prophets and false teaching.
2. The LORD’s warning includes a metaphor of sheep vs. wolves. This is straight forward: false prophets won’t look like false prophets. False teachers won’t come out and say, “I’m a false teacher;

don't listen to me!" On the contrary, false prophets will appear innocent, kind, gentle, and unassuming. Hence the command to beware!"

3. Remember that this warning is given in the context of the strait gate and narrow way. Recall we said that many believers struggle with the idea of the Way of Life being narrow. "The idea of being 'limited, confined, or constricted' clashes against our modern sensibilities." We've been taught from birth to "believe in yourself" and that we can "be all we want to be." Essentially, we've *deified* our "personhood" and feel **entitled** to almost anything we want. Our feelings are our gods and desires our foremost prayers."
4. **May I humbly submit to you that this is one of the environments (a distaste for hard truths), a false prophet can flourish!**
5. William MacDonald said, "Wherever the stern demands of true discipleship are taught, there are false prophets who advocate the wide gate and easy way. They water down the truth until, as C. H. Spurgeon said, "There is not enough left to make soup for a sick grasshopper." These men who profess to be speaking for God come in sheep's clothing, giving the appearance of being true believers. But inwardly they are ravenous wolves, i.e., they are vicious unbelievers who prey on the immature, the unstable, and the gullible."
6. Other than the basic indicator of their prophecies/dreams not coming to pass, there are three primary fruits or characteristics of *false prophets and false teachers* (more on this next week):
  - 1) They **Add** to the Word of God
  - 2) They **Subtract** from the Word of God
  - 3) They **Change** the Word of God
7. All of this is normally done with great subtlety (like a sheep not a wolf) and with "wide gate" approval.

#### WHAT MUST WE DO IN OUR BEWARING!

1. Be **students** of Scripture! (2 Tim 2:15)
  - *Act 17:10-11 (KJV) And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*
2. Grow up in doctrine!
  - *Eph 4:11-14 (KJV) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*
3. While not despising prophecies, **test** everything!

- *1Th 5:19-21 (KJV) Quench not the Spirit. 20 Despise not prophesyings. 21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*
  - *1Jn 4:1-3 (KJV) Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*
4. Allow your **overseers** to protect you. (Acts 20:27-31)
- The chief job of an under shepherd is the feeding and protection of the flock. He's a guardian of the souls of men and women under his care.
  - However, this guardianship isn't about control; it's about covenant. It must be granted by the flock.
  - *Heb 13:17 (KJV) Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*
  - Assuming your church is healthy, the less submitted you are, the more susceptible you are to false prophets.

Next week, we'll discuss in more detail some characteristics of false prophets and teacher and our LORD's teaching on the importance of inspecting fruit. See you here hopefully!

#### APPLICATIONS FOR EDIFICATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

1. Are you a good student of Scripture?
2. How aware are you that false teaching abounds? What is your "beware" posture like?
3. How submitted are you to those watching out for your soul?