

Matthew 7:15 Beware of False Prophets

15 “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

We’re talking about false prophets today, and the best way to spot a counterfeit is to know what the genuine article looks like. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the true meaning of the Law and the Prophets, as He illuminates what the Kingdom of God is like. In several places, Jesus’ teaching has crossed the line into the prophetic role, as He has given us further illumination of God’s true purpose beyond what is revealed in the Old Testament.

False Prophets

The first word that Jesus uses is Beware—this means “be on your guard, a warning that we should take seriously. False prophets are defined as those who, claim for themselves the capacity to define for others the will of God, but represent in their practice and teaching a false understanding of the will of God, specifically an understanding that is not in accord with the Old Testament Law and the Prophets, as illuminated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount & other teachings, and the rest of the New Testament. False prophets will tell us that we can have a relationship with the God of the Bible through some other means besides coming to Him on the basis of accepting the free gift of Salvation, and making Jesus our Lord and Savior. They will say that you can have Jesus as your savior by answering an altar call, and then go live whatever way you want. And, of course, this type of “easy believism” produces lawlessness. This is completely opposite of what Jesus taught about the life and character of a Citizen of Heaven in the Beatitudes, and certainly fall far short of Jesus’ call to live our lives to a higher standard. And it prevents a true relationship with Christ, since the person has put faith in their confession, and believes that they’re already saved, which is deadly. And these people running around claiming that they are Christians, while living any way that they like also ruins the witness of Christ. As Romans 2:23 reminds us, **23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” just as it is written.** On the other hand, we must always remember that as Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, **8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** So, our works do not save us, nor do they keep us saved. Our works are an outpouring of what God is already doing inside us. We are to beware of false prophets because their influence can and will distort our own relationship with the teaching of Jesus, and with Jesus Himself.

who come to you in sheep’s clothing

What does it mean to be a sheep of God? It means that we follow Him. We don’t have the right to call ourselves God’s sheep, and call God our shepherd unless we have been bought with a price by Him.

Psalm 95:7 **For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.**

Jesus describes Himself in John 10 as the door that the sheep are called to, that shelters and saves the sheep, and gives us life, and that more abundantly. Notice that Jesus doesn’t say that He points the way to the gate, or ushers us to the gate, He says that He IS the gate—we must go through Him, be identified with Him in order to find life everlasting.

Unbelievers are called wolves, or goats or dogs, or even pigs. But in this case, we’re talking about wolves. Since they disguise themselves as sheep, their falseness is not necessarily immediately apparent. This disguise is to enable free movement by the wolf among the flock of sheep, which therefore identified as the wolf’s intended prey. In Luke 10: Jesus said **“Truly, truly I say to you, the one who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.** Anyone who tells you that there are other ways to reach the God of the Bible besides Jesus is teaching you to be a thief and a robber—who steal God’s sheep—and will be judged. So, we see that these false prophets are not followers of God, they’re not saved—they try to come into the sheepfold some other way than the gate of the sheep, Jesus.

Be on the Alert

Paul warned the church at Ephesus of this very thing during his farewell address to them in Acts 20:27-30. And note that Paul first gives the mark of a true preacher of the Word. He says in Acts 20:26-27 **6 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all people. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.** Paul says that in order to be innocent of the blood of the flock, to not be a wolf, we must not be afraid to preach and teach the whole purpose of God. In other words, whatever God puts on our hearts, we preach and teach, no matter if it's difficult to hear. Paul is concerned that others will come who will preach a different gospel; things that are different from what God wants us to understand from His Word. In verse 28, he continues: **28 Be on guard for yourselves and for 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 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore, be on the alert,** So Paul warns the Ephesians twice to be on their guard against people who would raise themselves up, and then teach a twisted version of biblical doctrine.

1st Characteristic of False Prophets/teachers—twisting the Gospel

So it is preaching another gospel is the problem. In 2 Cor 11:3-4 Paul defends his ministry by contrasting it with what false prophets teach, saying **3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his trickery, your minds will be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, this you tolerate very well!** Paul notes that people have a tendency to accept and receive false teaching easier than the true teaching

2nd Characteristic--Hunger

but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

If we want to know what these wolves are like, we see a great description in Ezekiel 22:27-29. **27 Her leaders within her are like wolves tearing the prey, by shedding blood and destroying lives in order to make dishonest profit. 28 And her prophets have coated with whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'This is what the Lord God says,' when the Lord has not spoken. 29 The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery, and they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have oppressed the stranger without justice.** Wolves make their predatory attacks on the poor and needy. They were doing it in Ezekiel's day, and God poured out His indignation upon them, and brought their own way down upon their heads. And in Jesus' day, this behavior represent the behavior of Jewish officials of the day, who devoured widows houses, and for a pretext, made long prayers. And they do the same thing today, asking people to sign over their houses or give away their life savings. The attacks in Ezekiel's day were blatant, but the attacks today are more insidious. The attack of the wolf is to be understood as serving the self-interest of the wolf.

Remember in Acts 20 vs 30 Paul not only said that they would speak perverse or twisted things, but would also **draw away the disciples after them.** Their desire for these charismatic teachers is to have a following themselves. They want people to follow them; they only pay lip-service to Jesus in order to make this possible among the more gullible of His sheep.

We, as Sheep, Follow Jesus

John 10:14, Jesus is talking and He says ¹⁴ **I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,**". David's talking about the God who created all things, both seen and unseen. Colossians 1, starting in verse 16 and talking about Jesus says: **all things have been created through Him and for Him.** If our Lord Jesus can create all things, existed before all things and literally holds together our universe then He is fully qualified and has adequate credentials to be the shepherd and manager of your life and my life. We can trust him to do a good job managing our lives.