



How to Identify FALSE TEACHERS

After any major catastrophe, the scammers seem to come out of the shadows and prey on the concerned. For example, after a major hurricane, deceivers will form fake organizations that appear to collect donations for the victims of the hurricane. Using deception, they will pounce on any opportunity to steal and lie to those in need, or those that want to help.

Given this inevitable fact of life, today more than ever, we need to be aware of the schemes of evil people. Jesus warned us explicitly to be on guard for these people and their scams in these last days. Here's one example from Matthew 7:

¹⁵“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

¹⁷Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

Matthew 24 tells of their goal:

¹¹and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Deception Is Their Mode of Operation

First, Jesus tells us that false teachers will appear to be friendly and harmless. In their speech, appearance and intentions they will seem well-intentioned. But in their hearts, they are motivated by evil with the goal of discrediting the Gospel of Jesus and harming his disciples. Their goal, like an enemy spy, is to infiltrate families, schools, churches and other organizations to distract and distort the truth. Ultimately, these spies intend to destroy our souls. Even Jesus calls them “ferocious” in their methods.

Tactics of Deception

Prior to the Ezekiel Event of Ezekiel 38 & 39, our society was already overrun by deceptive, anti-biblical teaching. But the challenge for the church is that many of these false truths have been allowed to influence and define church doctrine and practices. This is a grave error. The church is the caretaker and teacher of God’s truth and should be led by the word of God alone. So, watch out for churches and leaders that believe and promote non-biblical doctrines, as these are signs of false teaching.

A few examples of major societal false teachings are listed here. These deceptions appear to appeal to a sense of inclusion, fairness and equality. But reasons that sound good on the surface may be motivated by a heart of evil and deception – and Jesus warned us this is exactly what the enemy would do to deceive us. For example, here is a short (but by no means complete) list of common evil deceptions that are permeating our world:

“Love is love” – this common deception that we can enter into intimate, sexual relationships with whomever we want, whenever we want is a direct affront to and discrediting of God’s holy purposes in the creation of males and females. God’s intent was for one man to marry one woman and to enjoy a lifetime of surrender to each other in total faithfulness.

Satan hates God’s plan of marriage because Jesus says earthly marriages are an illustration of our spiritual marriage to him. Ephesians 5:31-32 says:



*³¹“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about **Christ and the church.**”*

“My body, my choice” – this deception places decisions about the sanctity of life above the authority of God. Psalm 139 says this:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

The infinite Creator loves his creation and sees even the unborn as they are conceived and develop into his children. They are precious and wonderfully made in his sight. Man must never destroy what God alone has created for his purposes.

“There are many paths to God” – This common falsehood is meant to distract from the exclusive saving nature of Jesus and his final sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. The miracle of God’s salvation is a primary message Satan looks to attack with the seemingly innocent “many paths” message. Acts 4:12, in speaking of Jesus, says this:

*“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given to mankind by which we must be **saved**.”*

“If you don’t accept me and my lifestyle, you’re a hater” – This message is based on the false premise of tolerance of someone’s self-defined truth. Due to our corruption by sin, we are not capable of defining truth. The only truth we can believe comes from a holy God who acts in love. And, God’s truth is exclusively found in his word, the holy bible. Any deviations from the revealed truth of God, as found in his word, are false teachings and beliefs.

In fact, Jesus tells us that he, in his holy nature, is the definition of Truth. The difference is profound. He doesn’t just tell the truth, or just speak the truth, his very nature IS absolute truth itself. John 14:6 says:

“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Again, these common societal beliefs are all contrary to the word of God. They should never influence our church leaders or members into deviating from the truth.

Who is Qualified to be a Church Pastor?

Scripture is clear on the qualifications for church leaders. Here’s an example from 1 Timothy 3:

*“Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ²Now the overseer is to be **above reproach**, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, **how can he take care of God’s church?**) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.”*

The word “overseer” can be translated as elder or bishop also. Essentially, it is what we refer to as a pastor in today’s churches. Notice that the qualities here speak to character and proven behavior over a period of time. The only skill or talent mentioned is the ability to teach, which, of course is important but not primary.

A true church leader loves the Lord Jesus Christ above even his own life. His speech, character, and relationships should be the proof of his inner spiritual qualities, especially in his marriage and family. Scripture directs us to ask, what fruit has his life produced that can validate his fitness to serve? Does he have a strong, faithful marriage and believing, obedient children?

This also means anyone desiring to be an overseer must open their life and heart to those evaluating their fitness for duty. Pastors must live in glass houses for all to see and should be ready to provide a guided tour of that house whenever asked. Given the spiritual leadership entrusted to them, accountability and transparency to the criteria for their role is a requirement.

Jesus mentioned the bad fruit produced by the lives of false teachers would be the sign that gives them away. Look past the large crowds and the highly motivating speeches of some leaders. How do they live their lives? Do they meet all the biblical criteria for an overseer?

Church Leaders Must Be Under Authority

If questions arise about a leader’s teaching, lifestyle or similar area of concern, there is a proper path of due process for resolving issues well laid out in scripture. Those scriptures must be followed diligently so we are not hypocritical ourselves. False accusations, slander, gossip, politics and favoritism must never enter into our oversight process of church leaders.

Does your church have a legitimate way to resolve doctrinal questions and provide access to leaders for these types of discussions? If you experience a “take it or leave it attitude” when raising questions, you should beware.

Next, every church leader must sit under the true authority of a board of elected (not hand-picked) church leaders to whom they are fully accountable. Every leader must be accountable to an authoritative body. This governance process must be transparent and held to a high standard to protect the integrity of our leadership process.

Watch out for oversight and governance practices within churches that do not provide full accountability for the behavior and performance of its leaders. This lack of accountability can directly lead to many abuses.

False Teachers in The Church

Knowing what Jesus requires of his pastors and overseers is vital to understanding how to spot a deceiver. And that’s because wolves in sheep’s clothing will definitely attempt to fill these roles in our churches. This is exactly the type of tactic of Satan frequently uses. He wants to appear righteous, but he in fact, is not. I can barely count the number of well-known church leaders and pastors, who appeared to have powerful ministries, but fell from those roles due to serious character flaws or behavioral issues causing sin.

This is an especially challenging topic, because we never, ever want to implicate upstanding men and women of God in their practices or teaching when we have a basic disagreement that should be resolved person to person. For example, some leaders may interpret some scriptures in ways with which we disagree. We must be diligent to hear our leaders and understand their biblical

position. Seek them out and work towards a resolution. This requires diligence and wisdom on our part to properly evaluate doctrinal questions.

Of course, public slander or sharing opinions through social media is never acceptable in these situations. Fortunately, I find that most church leaders are of high integrity and are above reproach in their love for the Lord Jesus and his holy word.

So how do we identify false teachers in the church with spiritual wisdom?

Leaders With False Motives & Empty Hearts

In Matthew 7, Jesus warns us in no uncertain terms that “many” will appear to be righteous by their works, but in fact do not even know Jesus as Lord. Here’s his warning:

*²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the **kingdom of heaven**, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, ‘**Lord, Lord**, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*

This warning applies to people of all walks of life, but it also includes potential false teachers and false prophets that appear to act with righteous intent, but in fact are acting out of deceit and selfishness. Jesus’ point is we must be discerning about the heart of those who sit in positions of authority.

Notice that Jesus mentions their acts will have an appearance of being spiritually good. This is why we should always select and evaluate our leaders based on the character of their lives and the fruit they produce, not just their engaging speaking ability.

Knowing The Word Is Critical

If a disciple does not know God’s word or research any teaching by validating it against God’s word, then they are ripe for deception. If you don’t know and live by the truth, how will you be able to spot a false teacher? Generally speaking, false teachers will not be hard to spot, because they will perform two main errors. First, they will add teaching to the scriptures that are not found there. Second, they will ignore, overlook or even discredit specific biblical teaching to their benefit and personal beliefs.



Sound Doctrine is Required of Teachers

When instructing his young pastor Timothy, the Apostle Paul gave him this charge in 1 Timothy 6:

*³ “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the **sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ** and to godly teaching, ⁴they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.”*

Notice the requirement that all spiritual teaching must agree with the “sound instruction” of the Lord. This is our standard from which we can never deviate as teachers. Therefore, every leader, pastor and teacher must follow this command to adhere fully to the entire counsel of God as the basis for teaching his truth without addition or subtraction from the text.

Here are just a very few common examples seen from today’s false teachers and false religions:

Material Prosperity. They claim that God wants everyone to live a life of material prosperity. Paul tells us that godliness is not a means to financial gain and that the love of money is a root of evil. And pastors themselves must be free from the love of money.

Denial of Our Sin Nature. They will deny that all men and women are born sinners and teach that people are generally good. Of course, this denies the direct teaching of Jesus that all are lost and in need of his saving grace. It is a classic denial of Jesus himself.

Feel Good Preaching. They teach what people want to hear, not relying on and teaching the authority of the bible. We live a joyful life based on faith in a risen Savior, not just good feelings and happy, optimistic thoughts.

Another Bible. They teach that disciples must follow rules and regulations that are not found in scripture. Some even have written another book or set of teachings that they claim is “equal to scripture” and must be followed. These teachings are nothing more than fake gospels, guiding men and women away from the only true gospel of Jesus.

False Revelation. Many false prophets claim to have new, direct revelations from God and that they are equivalent to scriptural teachings. The Apostle John tells us that no one should add anything to the revealed word of God we possess today.

Follow Your Dreams. They teach that if you follow your heart and your dreams, God will bless you. Rather, disciples will find their greatest joy in following the will of God and being content with what he has given them today.

True Hope Is Found in the Glorious Blessings of Our Lord

The goal of a false teacher can be personal gain, selfish ambition, fame and fortune or a host of other sins. In the end, they have bought into a lie that leads to their destruction eternally and they seek to take others with them. Unfortunately, there are huge churches filled with people following the teachings I've listed above. A right relationship with our Lord and Savior demands that we revere his revealed word, believing and living it out by faith alone.

The true blessings of God are almost too numerous to mention, and you'll find them in the scriptures. We don't need false hope to fulfill us, we just need the word of God dwelling richly in our hearts to provide the spiritual blessings he wishes to pour out on us.

