

KINGDOM-DRIVEN LIFE #19

The Book of Matthew

Beware of False Prophets

Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves.

You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.

Matthew 7:15-23 New Living Translation

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News, but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ.

Galatians 1:6-8 NLT

I. False Prophets: “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing” A Very Real Danger

- Outward manner and appearance can belie inward character and motive.
- The warning here is serious and matches other scriptural warnings about false teachers

II. *By Their Fruits*: What are the “Fruits” that Identify False Prophets?

A. Their Doctrine-the Content of their Teaching

The first and foremost test of a false teacher is what they say about the person of Jesus! These are “Christian” *cults*, those who claim to be Christian or to believe in Christ but in reality preach “another Jesus”:

- **Mormons** or “Church of the Latter Day Saints”-In Mormon theology, Jesus and the created man Adam in the Garden of Eden are one and the same person. This cult was founded on the basis of the appearance in upstate New York of a 12-foot tall angel named “Moroni” to a man named Joseph Smith. The angel presented him with two “golden tablets” containing what is now known as the *Book of Mormon* and is held by them as equivalent in authority to the Bible. Who could guess from their “sheep-like” television commercials stressing family values that this is a religion that teaches all faithful male Mormons will be

rewarded with deification in the next life, meaning they are not mono-theistic at all, but polytheistic!

- **Jehovah's Witnesses**- In JW theology, Jesus and Michael the Archangel are one and the same person. Need we go farther?
- **Christian Scientists**-In CS theology, Christ is the "Divine Idea". In this Gnostic cult, Jesus in the flesh is just a man. It's the "essence" or spirit of Jesus that is deity. CS founder, Mary Baker Eddy, writes in her textbook *Science and Health with Keys to the Scriptures* that, "the blood of Jesus was no more efficacious when it was shed on Calvary than it was when it flowed in his veins as He walked on the seashore at Galilee."
- **Scientology**-Popularized by Tom Cruise, John Travolta and other celebrities- considers belief in God as personal and offers no theology at all on the subject. *There are no particular human incarnations of God.* All humans are immortal spiritual beings called "thetans" who are capable of coming into a godlike state through practicing
- **The Way, International**-Founded by Victor Paul Wierwille, it teaches that Jesus is the son of God, but not God Himself, a denial of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. The core textbook is Wierwille's book, "Jesus Is Not God." Enough said?

There are many "nice" people who are trapped by false teaching in cults!

B. The Focal Point of their Teaching and its Effect upon their Followers

1. **Galatianism**-From the beginning, the church has been plagued by teaching that something must be *added* by us to the work of Christ in order to be saved. This is called "Galatianism", legalism, or (theologically) semi-Pelagianism.

- Circumcision for males in the book of Galatians
- Water baptism
- Church membership
- Completion of classes or instruction

Salvation is *Christ plus nothing!*
Works do not save us; they only confirm our salvation.
All we can do is BELIEVE!

2. **Denominational Exclusivism**-When Christian denominations teach that membership in their denomination is the only assurance of eternal life rather than personal faith in Jesus, false assurance is created in the minds and hearts of the followers. This is taught by the Roman Catholic Church, the United Pentecostal Church, and certain branches of the Church of Christ, among others.

3. **The “Prosperity” Gospel**-While Jesus saves, heals and blesses His people, a continual emphasis on money or the pursuit of financial blessing or prosperity amounts to a sanctification of human greed, with the effect that its followers measure spirituality on the basis of materialism. (Be careful here—preaching a God Who loves and wants to bless His people is biblical—the test or “fruit” we look for is that of overemphasis)

4. **The “Feel-Good” Gospel**-This is where we fail to preach the “whole counsel of God”. Jesus warned us that the gate was straight and the way was narrow that led to life, then immediately warned us to “beware of false prophets”. In other words, false prophets never tell you about the “strait and narrow”! There’s more to following Jesus than self-esteem!

The false prophet is always a very comforting preacher. As you listen to him, he always gives you the impression that there is not very much wrong...He never makes anyone tremble.

David Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*

5. **New Age/Postmodern Versions of Jesus or the Gospel**-These are often attractive or popular secular personalities who presume to teach theology that contradicts the Bible.

- **Deepak Chopra**-This popular writer is actually a New Age “prophet.” His new book *The Third Jesus: The Christ We Can’t Ignore* teaches us to leave the idea of a “first” Jesus (a mere figure of history) and a “second” Jesus (Who is Jesus described in the Bible) in favor of a “third” Jesus...

The third Jesus is the cosmic Christ, the spiritual guide whose teaching embraces all humanity, not just the church built in His name. It is impossible to take Jesus literally...

Deepak Chopra, *The Third Jesus*

- **Oprah Winfrey**-While Oprah is totally likeable and gives millions to charity, she qualifies as a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” and a “false prophet” when it comes to teaching us about Christ or religion.

Oprah Winfrey will be letting out all the stops on her XM Satellite Radio program in 2008. Beginning January 1, 2008, "Oprah & Friends" will offer a year-long course on the New Age teachings of *A Course in Miracles*. A lesson a day throughout the year will completely cover the 365 lessons from the *Course in Miracle* "Workbook." For example:

- Lesson #29 asks you to go through your day affirming that "God is in everything I see"
- Lesson #61 tells each person to repeat the affirmation "I am the light of the world."
- Lesson #70 teaches the student to say and believe "My salvation comes from me."

By the end of the year, "Oprah & Friends" listeners will have completed all of the lessons laid out in the *Course in Miracles Workbook*. Those who finish the course will have a wholly redefined spiritual mindset—a New Age worldview that includes the belief that there is no sin, no evil, no devil, and that God is "in" everyone and everything. *A Course in Miracles* teaches its students to *rethink* everything they believe about God and life. The *Course Workbook* bluntly states: "This is a course in mind training" and is dedicated to "thought reversal."

New Age Christ by Warren Smith

III. Beware False Prophets- What It Does and Doesn't Mean!

A. "Beware" does *not* mean

1. **Be afraid.** Paranoia is not a fruit of the Spirit!
2. **Condemn other people or groups.** (Matthew 7:1-2 "Sheriff" is not one of the five ministry gifts of Ephesians 4!) We should not judge too quickly on one message or one point of doctrine-the idea here is to inspect that which is *consistently* preached and lived.

B. "Beware" *does* mean

1. Our greatest protection from the counterfeit is to become familiar with the genuine.
 - a. The U.S. Government employs people on a full-time basis to identify counterfeit money. How do they train them? They school them in detail on what the GENUINE looks like!
 - b. Only those truly grounded in the Word can afford to do in-depth investigations into cults and false teachings.

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.

Acts 17:11 NASB

c. Statistics show that the vast majority of people in Christian cults today came out of Christian churches!

2. “Beware” our own faults and propensity to deception, maintaining a spirit of humility and teachability at all times.

- When in doubt, we search the scriptures
- When we need help, we refer to trusted authorities

3. Mere profession, even if accompanied by works outside of obedience to the Lord, will not save us.

4. Only a deep, abiding, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, His Word and His true disciples can protect us against “ravaging wolves”.

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

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, you seem to bear them beautifully...But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we...

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 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.

Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth Excerpts from 2 Corinthians 11:1-4; 11-14