



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

Special Study:

KNOWING FALSE PROPHETS THROUGH THEIR FRUITS (FOLLOWERS)

Matthew 7:16-18,20

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Most sheep can easily be deceived into accepting any hireling wearing sheep’s clothing. Most believers, even experienced Samuels, may be impressed by the outward qualities and characteristics of false prophets and false teachers if they look no farther than external manifestations. **“Inwardly they are ravening wolves.”** Our process of admitting workers, leaders and preachers into the ministry must go beyond the evaluation of **“sheep’s clothing”** which human skill can make and wear. What the prospective workers and preachers are **“inwardly”** is more important than all impressive outward qualities. But what if we have difficulty discerning a prophet’s inward desire, ambition and motivation? How else can we identify false prophets? **“Ye shall know them by their fruits.”** Men do not limit themselves to the leaves, barks or flowers of trees to evaluate and identify them. The flowers of a tree may be beautiful and fragrant, the foliage may be thick and green, the appearance may be great and gorgeous, but the fruit is what determines its identity and usefulness. The outward appearance, public image, physical environment, external worship and visible resources of a prophet-preacher may be impressive and attractive but we must ask: what is the quality of the fruits being produced? If the man in sheep’s clothing has the nature of a wolf and produces corrupt fruit, his apparent meekness, gentleness, devotion, zeal, affability, and good humour are all meant to deceive and destroy the sheep. When Satan transforms himself to an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); the tormentors may put on the faces of men and wear crowns like gold (Revelation 9:5-8); the beast may have **“two horns like a lamb”** and **“do great wonders”** (Revelation 13:11-13), the people of God must not be deceived. We must examine the fruits of the prophets, then shall we know whether they are of God or not.

CORRUPT FRUITS OF FAULTY PREACHING

Matthew 7:16-18; 2 Corinthians 2:17; Galatians 1:6-10; Isaiah 5:20-23; Acts 20:26-31; 1 John 2:18-19,26; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:17,18; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

Whatever fruit any preacher produces, it is through preaching. Fruits of life and labour, fruits of character and converts, fruits of belief and behaviour, fruits of doctrine and disciples, fruits in families and followers are produced by the seed we sow, by the messages we preach. The greatest power for deception and destruction which the false prophet has is his faulty preaching. He corrupts the Word of God, not only by misquoting it but by misinterpreting it. He makes his hearers believe a lie, not by denying the strait gate and the narrow way but by never speaking on them. He may not deny the necessity of repentance, the absolute condition of saving faith, the importance of holiness, self-denial, separation from the world with all its lusts and pride, but he never mentions them. He may preach very comforting and reassuring messages on the love of God but he is forever silent on the holiness of God, the justice of God, the righteousness of God, the wrath of God. The false prophet may not openly deny God’s revelation on the final judgment and the eternal destiny of the lost but he never warns his hearers of the wrath to come. Paul had opportunity to preach to **“the most excellent governor Felix”**. **“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled”** (Acts 23:26; 24:24-26). This, the false prophets will not do.

The false prophet may not deny the Lordship of Christ but he does not emphasize our submission to Him as Lord (Luke 6:46). False prophets who deny the clear teaching of God’s Word, who oppose Christ’s way to eternal life, who openly disbelieve the existence of eternal punishment for sinners are dangerous. But the false prophets who cleverly and studiously keep quiet on these salient truths while emphasizing half-truths are doubly dangerous. They make us to think **“peace and safety”** when **“sudden destruction”** is very near (1 Thessalonians 5:3). That is always the effect of the

messages of false prophets. ***“They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace”*** (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). Faulty preaching makes the ***“people to trust in a lie”*** (Jeremiah 28:15; 29:31), and produces corrupt fruits. ***“Beware of false prophets. Ye shall know them by their fruits.”***

CARNAL FOLLOWERS OF FALSE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:16-18; 23:15; Hosea 4:6-9; 1 Timothy 4:1,2; 2 Timothy 3:1-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; 2 Peter 2:1,2,14,19-22; Hebrews 12:15-17; Matthew 24:4,5,11-13,23-25,33.

The followers of false prophets are the fruits of their ministry. The effect of the message of false prophets will be seen in the lives of their followers. We cannot judge a preacher by the life of a few of his congregation; there was an Achan in Joshua’s team and a Judas among Christ’s disciples. But when the general effect of a preacher’s message on his followers is corruption, carnality, deception, immorality, covetousness, unrighteousness and hypocrisy, it is a sure sign that we must watch and beware of false prophets. False prophets ***“make”*** their followers ***“vain”*** (Jeremiah 23:16) ***“cause (the) people to err by their lies”*** (Jeremiah 23:32), ***“strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness”*** (Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 13:22) ***“deceive the hearts of the simple”*** (Romans 16:18) ***“beguile you with enticing words”*** (Colossians 2:4). False prophets make sinners and backsliders hardened in their sins. ***“For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves”*** (Matthew 23:15). Corrupt trees produce evil fruits (Matthew 5:16-18). False prophets raise carnal followers. To be carnal is to be ***“sold under sin”***, to be given to sinful propensities, to be under the influence of fleshly and worldly desires (Romans 7:14). ***“The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be”*** (Romans 8:7). Such followers of false prophets become so resistant to saving truth; they hate the law of God while they profess to love God and desire blessings from Him. Under the ***“strong delusion” of false prophets, religious people “believe a lie”, “believe not the truth” and have “pleasure in unrighteousness”*** (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

COURAGEOUS FIRMNESS AGAINST FALSE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:16-18; Deuteronomy 13:1-8; Proverbs 23:23; 24:21-22; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Timothy 4:15,16; 2 Timothy 3:12-17; 4:1-5; 2 John 7-11; Jude 3,4; Revelation 2:2,6; 3:10-13.

It takes courage to stand up for the truth in the midst of false prophets. It takes courage to defend the truth when those who propagate error are many and mighty. It requires courage in these last days when multitudes are on the broad way and you know that the few unpopular believers on the narrow way are right and approved of God. It takes courage to cast in your lot with the few and lose the favour, help and approval of relatives and family members who are on the broad way. There is physical courage and there is moral courage. Physical courage is bravery, that virtue that enables a person to put fear under control in the face of danger, pain or misfortune. David had this kind of courage to confront and conquer Goliath. Moral courage is greater than physical courage. David did not have the moral courage to stand for truth and righteousness when Absalom sinned against God by killing Amnon. The lack of moral courage causes more problems than the absence of physical courage. Absalom caused David more pain, sorrow and heartache than Goliath and all the giants among the Philistines. Solomon was a greater thorn in the flesh to Israel than all the Philistines put together. The courage to stand up against error and unrighteousness, the courage to resist and withstand false prophets even when they are our kinsmen according to the flesh, the courage to defend and protect the truth with conviction and unrelenting commitment, that is what we need at this hour. Beware of false prophets. Be aware and be warned of false prophets. Be watchful and be a warrior against false prophets. Warn God’s people and watch over them. Beware and watch over your own soul, too.

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