

## BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS & FALSE GOSPELS

### I. [Matthew 7:15-20](#) [Matthew 12:33-37](#) [Galatians 1:8-9](#)

A. In the Melanesian islands of the South Pacific during WW II, the natives watched American and British engineers build airstrips. The islanders were amazed to see that once the airstrips were completed, planes began landing with cargo: food, equipment, vehicles, and building materials. The Melanesians wanted in on this! They thought if they built airstrips, then planes would come with goods for them too. So they hacked makeshift runways out of the jungle, built mock-up control towers out of grass and mud, and lit fires along the their runways. They even put a man in the grass-hut control tower with two coconut halves on his head for headphones, rigged up bamboo antennas, and then waited for the planes to land. From their standpoint everything looked exactly right. But no planes ever came. Their imitation lacked substance. It wasn't even a reasonable facsimile thereof...

B. In the same way, if I went to an orchard and bought several bushel baskets full of apples, tied them to my Buckeye tree, and then called it an apple tree, my neighbors would laugh me straight outta town!

C. Our text today comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount which I referenced last Sunday. Matthew 5, 6 & 7 are almost entirely in red...

D. [Matthew 7:15-20](#) (ESV) is a dire warning to all God's children: **15** *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.* **16** *You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?* **17** *So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.* **18** *A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.* **19** *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* **20** *Thus you will recognize **them** by their fruits. (There are the deceivers and the deceived. We want to recognize the former so we aren't named among the latter.)*

E. It's Halloween time and a lot of folks are donning costumes. If some dude in a Superman outfit is stealing your jewelry or some chick in a Snow White outfit is rifling through your mail, then they aren't who they appear to be. Certainly not a super hero or a Disney princess!

F. What's our best authenticator of what's true and false? The Word of God and the witness of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we hear something and quickly we can say, "*Nope, that's contrary to God's Word!*" Other times it's more challenging. On occasion something may sound a tad bit right but deep inside our peace leaves us, there's a *check*. The Holy Spirit may prompt us to retreat back to what God's already said about a matter. [Hebrews 4:12](#) (AMP) reminds us: **12** *For the word of God is living and active and full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective]. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as the division of the soul and spirit [the completeness of a person], and of both joints and marrow [the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

**G. You already know this, but just because a preacher's on TV, has a popular ministry, flies all over the planet hawking his spiritual elixirs, doesn't mean you should drink his Kool-Aid. Like carnival barkers, they may be loud, may sound authoritative, may be persuasive, may even reference Bible verses, but if you carefully examine the Scriptures, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate them, and maybe solicit the help of trustworthy and seasoned fellow-believers, you may see wolf ears protruding through the their fleece hoodies...**

**H. Is this Jesus' only warning about false prophets? Listen to Matthew 12:33-37 (NLT) **33** *A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. 34* *You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. 35* *A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. 36* *And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. 37* *The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.***

**I. Some of you are thinking, well I'm glad I'm not a teacher or a preacher or someone who'll be held responsible for what they say or how they instruct others. But are you sure about that? I remember telling our youth way-back-when that the average person will influence 10,000 people in their lifetime. More if you're a teacher or coach or leader of some sort. While your influence may be subtle, suffice to say, people watch us, Christians particularly, with watchful eyes.**

**J. In 1981, Barbara Walters was interviewing elderly actress Katharine Hepburn. At some point Hepburn quipped that she felt like a *strong tree* in her old age. Walters then infamously asked, "*What kind of tree are you?*" Critics and late night comedians pounced. But Hepburn actually answered, saying: "*...She preferred being an oak rather than an elm, in order to avoid Dutch elm disease.*" I hope for us to be good trees bearing good fruit!**

**K. Going all the way back to the 1800s, a phrase entered our vernacular, '*pulling the wool over someone's eyes.*' Two hundred years earlier, judges in Europe started wearing white wigs. Those wigs were made of wool. Even our own Founding Fathers wore them. But the phrase itself refers to a clever and deceitful lawyer, a wordsmith who could twist and manipulate words in such a way as to trick a judge into making an errant or unjust decision, even to get a guilty person set free. Thus the notion of pulling the wool (wig) down over the judge's eyes so he couldn't see what was plainly right and true. Aren't you glad we don't have to deal with tricksters like that anymore?!**

**L. False prophets are found throughout the OT. Jesus likewise confronted them in His day and the apostles and authors of the NT faced them also. Most of the creeds and confessions of the church down through the centuries are dealing with false doctrines propagated by false heretical teachers. We'd be kidding ourselves to think these hucksters are going the way of the dinosaurs. They aren't! Here we promote this Book, so you might know truth from falsehood and be built up in this most holy faith. And so you won't have the wool pulled down over your eyes. 1 John 4:1 (NLT) exhorts us all: *1 Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.***

**M. Beware of false gospels. They are aplenty. If you hear a gospel that says you can be saved by doing good, earning your own salvation, you know that's false. If you hear a gospel that says if your good deeds in this life exceed your bad ones, you'll go to heaven, that's a false gospel. If you hear a gospel that says everybody in the end, no matter how good or bad they were, will make it into heaven, that's a false gospel. If you hear a gospel that says all religions are basically the same and all roads lead to heaven, that too is a false gospel. If those were true, Jesus would have said so; the Bible likewise. Jesus didn't and His Book doesn't either!**

**N. Galatians 1:8-9 (ESV) is about as cryptic as it gets: 8** *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9* *As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

**P. Let's close with the Gospel, shucked down to the cob, found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (NIV) 1** *Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2* *By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to **the word** I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3* *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4* *that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...*

**\* Close with Prayer...**

## **Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff**

### **Matthew 7:15-20 (ESV)**

**15** Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **16** You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? **17** So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. **18** A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. **19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

### **Hebrews 4:12 (AMP)**

**12** For the word of God is living and active and full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective]. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as the division of the soul and spirit [the completeness of a person], and of both joints and marrow [the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart.

### **Matthew 12:33-37 (NLT)**

**33** A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. **34** You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. **35** A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. **36** And I tell you this, you must

give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. **37** The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.

### **1 John 4:1 (NLT)**

**1** Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.

### **Galatians 1:8-9 (ESV)**

**8** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. **9** As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

### **1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (NIV)**

**1** Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. **2** By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. **3** For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **4** that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

### **Bonus Goodies**

**7 False Teachers in the Church Today - Tim Challies**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-vwpzQZwI4>

**False Gospels Deserve True Fury - John Piper (Desiring God)**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwGoXp\\_297Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwGoXp_297Y)

**Is the Word of Faith Movement Biblical? Pastor Nelson - GotQuestions.org**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYDwjDDel94>

**Can You Really 'Name it and Claim it?' - Dr. Charles Stanley - In Touch Ministries**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQkQTri1hyo>

**Like Trees That Bear Fruit- John Piper**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4-c0gNG-JU>

**Too Old to Covet? - Andy Farmer (Biblical Counseling Coalition)**

<https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2022/10/26/too-old-to-covet/>

**Why There Are No Insignificant Christians - Doug Eaton (Fight of Faith)**

<https://fightoffaithblog.com/2022/10/25/why-there-are-no-insignificant-christians/>

### **More Verses, Quotes, Excerpts, & Extras**

### **Luke 6:43-45 (ESV)**

**43** For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, **44** for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. **45** The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

### **Mark 13:22 (NLT)**

**22** For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones.

### **Galatians 1:6-9 (AMP)**

**6** I am astonished and extremely irritated that you are so quickly shifting your allegiance and deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different [even contrary] gospel; **7** which is really not another [gospel]; but there are [obviously] some [people masquerading as teachers] who are disturbing and confusing you [with a misleading, counterfeit teaching] and want to distort the gospel of Christ [twisting it into something which it absolutely is not]. **8** But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we [originally] preached to you, let him be condemned to destruction! **9** As we have said before, so I now say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel different from that which you received [from us], let him be condemned to destruction!

### **1 Timothy 4:1-2 (NIV)**

**1** The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. **2** Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

### **1 Timothy 6:3-10 (ESV)**

**3** If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, **4** he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, **5** and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. **6** But godliness with contentment is great gain, **7** for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. **8** But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. **9** But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. **10** For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

### **2 Timothy 4:1-5 (ESV)**

**1** I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: **2** preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and

teaching. **3** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, **4** and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. **5** As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

### **Jude 1:3-4 (AMP)**

**3** Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I was compelled to write to you [urgently] appealing that you fight strenuously for [the defense of] the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints [the faith that is the sum of Christian belief that was given verbally to believers]. **4** For certain people have crept in unnoticed [just as if they were sneaking in by a side door]. They are ungodly persons whose condemnation was predicted long ago, for they distort the grace of our God into decadence and immoral freedom [viewing it as an opportunity to do whatever they want], and deny and disown our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

### **1 John 4:1-3 (ESV)**

**1** Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. **2** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, **3** and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

### **2 Peter 2:1-3 (ESV)**

**1** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. **2** And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. **3** And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

### **Quote by John Piper**

“Fruit does not make a tree good; A good tree bears good fruit... it shows that the tree is good.”

### **Quote by John Newton**

"Remember, the growth of a believer is not like a mushroom, but like an oak, which increases slowly indeed but surely. Many suns, showers, and frosts, pass upon it before it comes to perfection; and in winter, when it seems dead, it is gathering strength at the root. Be humble, watchful, and diligent in the means, and endeavor to look through all, and fix your eye upon Jesus, and all shall be well."

- John Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, Vol. 2. p. 141.

### **Pulling the Wool Over Someone's Eyes**

Where'd that phrase come from: *Pull the wool over someone's eyes*? This term is from the early 1800s and means to fool or lie to someone and get away with it through

deception and trickery. From the early 1600s to present day, judges in Europe adorn wigs made from wool. In the United States it was a passing phase for our founding fathers to wear them. Pulling the wool over someone's eyes depicts an unscrupulous person such as a deceitful lawyer when they are successful in lying to a judge and getting away with it. This is likened to physically pulling the wig (wool) down over the judge's eyes until he/she cannot see properly to make an educated decision based on truth. The slightly earlier form of this phrase was to spread the wool over someone's eyes. - Amy Reeves, *The Goldendale Sentinel*, Goldendale, Washington, December 13, 2016.

## **8 Symptoms of False Doctrine**

By J.C. Ryle (1816 - 1900)

<https://www.jcryle.info/2017/01/8-symptoms-of-false-doctrine.html>

Many things combine to make the present inroad of false doctrine peculiarly dangerous.

1. There is an undeniable zeal in some of the teachers of error: their "earnestness" makes many think they must be right.
2. There is a great appearance of learning and theological knowledge: many fancy that such clever and intellectual men must surely be safe guides.
3. There is a general tendency to free thought and free inquiry in these latter days: many like to prove their independence of judgment, by believing novelties.
4. There is a wide-spread desire to appear charitable and liberal-minded: many seem half ashamed of saying that anybody can be in the wrong.
5. There is a quantity of half-truth taught by the modern false teachers: they are incessantly using Scriptural terms and phrases in an unscriptural sense.
6. There is a morbid craving in the public mind for a more sensuous, ceremonial, sensational, showy worship: men are impatient of inward, invisible heart-work.
7. There is a silly readiness in every direction to believe everybody who talks cleverly, lovingly and earnestly, and a determination to forget that Satan often masquerades himself "as an angel of light" ([2 Corinthians 11:14](#)).
8. There is a wide-spread "gullibility" among professing Christians: every heretic who tells his story plausibly is sure to be believed, and everybody who doubts him is called a persecutor and a narrow-minded man.

All these things are peculiar symptoms of our times. I defy any observing person to deny them. They tend to make the assaults of false doctrine in our day peculiarly dangerous. They make it more than ever needful to cry aloud, "Do not be carried away!"