

# THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

### Part LCII

#### **“Beware of False Prophets”**

#### Part One

### I. Taking 2 Weeks to Tackle a Most Serious Subject

#### A. Jesus’ Warning About False Prophets

**“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”**

**Jesus in Matthew 7:15 KJV**

**“*Watch out* for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are *ferocious* wolves.”**

**Matthew 7:15 NIV**

1. Don’t miss the meaning of His metaphors:

a. He just said don’t give holy things to “dogs”; don’t cast your pearls before “swine”.

b. But now He speaks of “wolves”; the most deadly enemy of His “sheep”.

2. The presence of a wolf is a danger for any sheep; but false prophets are particularly deadly because are not easily recognized; they come to us “in sheep’s clothing”; at first glance, they look like a sheep. And there are more of them than you think.

a. The great John Wesley was a fiery preacher and the spiritual father of the Methodist church...

**“Are false propjets an uncommon thing? Nay, God knoweth it is not. The instances of it are almost innumerable. We may find them in every age and nation. How terrible when the ambassadors of God become agents for the devil; when they who are commissioned to teach men the way to heaven do in fact teach them the way to hell!”**

**John Wesley**

3. It is interesting that there are exactly 7 specific warnings about false prophets in the New Testament, the last one in the 1<sup>st</sup> epistle of John:

**Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because *many* false prophets have gone out into the world.**

**1 John 4:1 NIV**

a. The Apostle Paul dealt with them in the Church at Corinth:

**For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.**

**It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.**

**2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NIV**

b. After Paul spent 3 years with them, notice his last words to the Elders at the church at Ephesus...

**I know that after my departure *savage wolves* will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And *men from among yourselves* will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them.**

**Acts 20:29-30 HCSB**

4. False prophets are the devil’s “5<sup>th</sup> column”; a military term referring to the enemy that strikes from *within*. The famous Roman philosopher Cicero...

**“A nation can survive its fools, and even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within. The traitor moves among those within the gate freely... He rots the soul of a nation. He works secretly and unknown in the night to undermine the pillars of a city. He infects the body politic so that it can no longer resist. A murderer is less to fear.”**

**Cicero**

- a. The Roman Empire was never conquered; it fell apart from the inside.
- b. If America ever falls, it won't be from outside, but from within.
- c. The Good News is that Jesus promised that His Church would never be defeated; He said the gates of hell will not prevail against it. But history shows us that all the serious setbacks of the church came from within; from false teachers and false prophets.

d. **All the major “Christian cults” were originated by teachers within the church.** (Joseph Smith (Mormons); Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses); Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Scientists) What is a “Christian cult”? Organized groups who seem to honor Christ; but who in effect, teach “another Jesus”.

5. The Pharisees were the false prophets of Jesus' day.

- a. In Matthew 16, Jesus compared the false teaching of the Pharisees to yeast that works from within bread dough and slowly spreads through the whole loaf...

**"Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."**

**Matthew 16:6 NIV**

- b. His disciples thought He was talking about physical bread! It took them 6 verses to figure it out!

**Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the *teaching* of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**

**Matthew 16:12 NIV**

6. Look at church history. For 300 years after the resurrection, the church evangelized the known world; until the false teaching of the Popes, the Cardinals and the councils of the Church of Rome took Christianity into the dark ages. These false prophets enslaved God's people with the demonic doctrine of "salvation by works" for a 1000 years; until a great event brought light back into the world. We call it...

## **B. The Protestant Reformation**

1. We just celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, led by a Catholic priest named Martin Luther. Sadly, the average American churchgoer today has no idea what it was all about—a deliverance from false teaching!

2. The papal system had robbed God's people of their right to read and interpret the scripture for themselves. The Pope was the final authority on what God's word said. Here is Luther's comment on Jesus' words to "Beware of false prophets"...

**"Our Lord here commands and gives all Christians the power to be judges of all doctrine, and power to judge what is right and what is not right. It is now well on a thousand years that this passage has been perverted by *false Christians*, so that we have had no power to judge, but had to accept what the Pope and the councils determined, without any judgment of our own."**

**Martin Luther**

a. The Reformation restored the right of God's people to judge false teaching and their responsibility to identify false prophets...

**"Either the Gospel lies, or the Pope and the councils do. Christ says we have the right to judge all doctrines as to keep or to reject. Here the Lord does not**

**Speak to the Pope, but to all Christians. And as the doctrine is proclaimed to all: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do even so to them;" so likewise the words exclude no one: "Beware of false prophets." From which it clearly follows that I may indeed judge of the doctrine."**

**Martin Luther**

3. The Reformation reminds God's people of their right (and the responsibility) to judge false teaching and false prophets; but how many do it? Or know how to do it? Let me offer some...

## **II. Guidelines for Judging False Prophets**

### **A. Correcting Some Misconceptions**

1. The first misconception held by many is to limit the meaning of the term "false prophet" as only pertaining to those who falsely predict the future. Actually, the term "prophet" refers to *anyone* who claims to be speaking under the inspiration of God.

**"By *prophets* here are meant, not those who foretell things to come, but those who speak in the name of God; those men who profess to be sent of God, to teach others the way to heaven."**

**John Wesley**

a. Testimony: How many times over 4 decades of ministry have I been confronted by those who say God sent them when He did not send them; or those who begin with "thus saith the Lord", when He did not say it?

**"They claim false commissions; they pretend to have immediate warrant and direction from God to speak as prophets and to be divinely inspired, when they are not so."**

**Matthew Henry**

2. The second mistake is to fail to see that you cannot separate false prophets from false doctrine. In the New Testament, the term “false prophet” is always connected with false *teaching*.

**”A false prophet is a teacher of incorrect doctrine, or one falsely claiming to have received divine inspiration.”**

**Albert Barnes**

3. A 3<sup>rd</sup> mistake is to think false prophets are easy to spot.

a. These wolves are dangerous precisely because they are not quickly recognized!

**“Any Christian can detect the man who says outrageously wrong things; but the vast majority of Christians today do not seem to be able to detect the man who seems to say the right things but leaves out the vital things.”**

**David Martyn Lloyd- Jones**

b. God’s sheep are not in danger from wolves that look like wolves!  
But, as Wesley says...

**“They come in sheep's clothing;” that is, with an appearance of harmlessness. They come in the most mild, inoffensive manner, without any mark or token of enmity. Who can imagine that these quiet creatures would do any hurt to any one? You see no reason to suspect that they desire to do any harm.”**

**John Wesley**

c. God’s people fall for false prophets because they just seem so nice; or so likeable.

**“The real difficulty about this kind of false prophet is that at first you never imagine that he is one. The whole thing is so extremely subtle that God’s people can easily be misled by it.”**

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

4. False prophets are not just those who wrongly predict the future; it is their teaching that is false; they are not easy to spot.

5. So how *do* you recognize them? Here are some clues from the Prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament.

B.

#1. A false prophet may be very popular, or even loved by the people.

**"A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way.**

**Jeremiah 5:30-31 NIV**

a. In our last study, I said sometimes tend to be skeptical of any message or any minister who seems to be “popular”; Jesus said the road to destruction is “wide” and “many” follow it. Remember, the dictionary defines popular as “pleasing to the majority”

b. Jesus was never “popular”! And His message got Him crucified.

2. There may be an overemphasis on money or a perverted message of prosperity.

**"From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain;  
Prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.**

**Jeremiah 6:13**

a. In the next to last book of the Bible, Jude refers to these...

**Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error...**

**Jude 11**

3. The message of the false prophet speaks very little or never at all about the problem of sin; the focus is always positive and upbeat...as if all we need is encouragement...

**They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace.**

**Jeremiah 6:13-14 NIV**

- a. The false prophet puts band aids on cancers.
- b. The people who follow false prophets lose their ability to be sorry for their sin.

**Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct?**

**No, they have no shame at all;  
they do not even know how to blush.**

**Jeremiah 6:15 NIV**

c. When you can live a sinful lifestyle and still be comfortable going to church, there's a false prophet in the pulpit.

4. Let me close by leaving you with the most important sign of all...

**A false prophet is one who has no "narrow gate" or "narrow path" in his presentation of the Gospel.**

a. Testimony: 40 years ago, reading Dr. Jones studies in the Sermon on the Mount, I learned something that has kept me safe ever since; the litmus test of a false prophet is not so much what he says; it is what he consistently leaves out!

**"What is wrong with their teaching? There is no 'strait gate' or 'narrow way' in it. As far as it goes it is all right, but it does not include this. The falseness of their teaching is to be detected by what it does not say rather than by what it does say."**

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**



b. You can rarely recognize a false prophet by listening to one of his sermons; because there are so many uplifting and positive things we can preach about the Christian life! But if you listen to 50 messages and never hear anything about the difficulty of following Jesus, then that is a problem.

### III. No Narrow Gate/No Narrow Path

#### A. Consider the Context

1. As we've worked our way through the Sermon on the Mount, I have tried to make you mindful of *context* when you study the Bible.

2. The immediate context of the warning about false prophets is the previous 2 verses:

**13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**

**Matthew 7:13-14 NIV**

**Then He says, v.15, "Watch out for false prophets."**

3. When you read the warning in context, you see that Jesus is teaching us that the false prophet offers a wide gate and a wide path to God! But...

**"The only true way to heaven is that pointed out in two preceding verses...**

**The true way to heaven is a narrow way. Therefore this is a plain, sure rule:**

**They who do not teach men to walk in a narrow way are false prophets."**

**John Wesley**

#### B. We Need Discernment!

1. This is a most serious matter!

**“It is scarcely possible to express or conceive what multitudes of souls run on to destruction, because they would not be persuaded to walk in a narrow way, even though it is the way to everlasting salvation.”**

**John Wesley**

2. We must not sit in the seat of condemnation in judging other men’s ministries; but we do need *discernment*!

**“Discernment is not simply telling the difference between what is right and wrong; rather it is the difference between right and almost right.”**

**C.H. Spurgeon**

3. The Christian life is the blessed life! Our primary message is Good News! We must speak of the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God, and how God is a rewarder of all who diligently seek Him!

4. But if that is all we ever speak of; if we never mention the holiness of God, the judgment of God and the fear of the Lord, woe to us!

**“The false prophet very rarely tells you anything about the holiness, the righteousness, the justice, and the wrath of God. He always preaches about the love of God, but those other things he does not mention.”**

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

5. May God grant us discernment and wisdom!

**“How do you know I am not a false prophet? You don’t! So you need to study your Bible!**

**Derek Prince**

**Closing Prayer**