



## The Devil Wears Truth

Text: 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

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1. Throughout this “The Devil Wears” series, we have been looking at the various tactics and schemes Satan uses to try to attack us. Why is important to understand the strategies of your enemy?
2. T.A.’s sermon focused on the concept of truth.
  - a. How would you define the word “truth”?
  - b. How has your understanding of what is true been shaped and formed throughout your life?
  - c. Describe a time when you realized you had been believing something that wasn’t truth and how the lie became exposed?
  - d. What place does the Bible have in your formation of truth? (not aspirationally but in reality)
  - e. How does God’s Word affect the way you live your life?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-15. Paul warns about Satan’s deception by having people on the inside. Jesus likewise warned about the danger of wolves in sheep’s clothing. (See Matthew 7:15.) T.A. gave four essential and critical diagnostic questions to discern and identify false teachers. 1) How do they view and teach the Bible? 2) What do they teach about Jesus? 3) What do they teach about the Holy Spirit? 4) What do they teach as the gospel?
  - a. Why do you think these four questions, in particular, are so critical?
  - b. What do you think Paul means when he speaks of the concept of “spiritual adultery,” and when was a time you committed spiritual adultery?
  - c. T.A. said that “Satan doesn’t care if you believe in Jesus, as long as you believe in the wrong Jesus.” What are variously “false Christs” are out there?
  - d. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. In your own words what is the gospel?
  - e. How are you personally seeking salvation through faith + something else?
  - f. What’s the difference between discernment and a critical spirit? How do we listen to sermons, podcasts, Christian music, etc. with a humble, godly discernment?
  - g. How should we respond to a person or organization who is willfully and persistently teaching error in one or more of these areas? What factors may be involved if you were to respond differently in different situations?

**Challenge:** Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. To identify counterfeits, we need to become experts in the real thing. So to combat false teaching, T.A. says we need to study Gods Word to recognize counterfeit truth. What habit do you need to begin to cultivate this week to become a greater expert in the truth of God’s Word? If you have ever tried to read and study the Bible on your own and experienced challenges, talk about that amongst your group to share words of encouragement and ideas on how you can all overcome those challenges. Come to your next group meeting ready to share an insight from something God taught you that week in God’s Word.

**Prayer:** Close your group time by praying these words out loud together as a group.

*“God help us to hold fast to the faith that has been delivered to us. Help us to hold fast to your word. Your truth ... Help us to contend for the faith. Help us to hold fast to your word, to believe it, to trust it, even when it’s not popular. God we praise you for those who’ve done that, for centuries before us, for generations before us, who at great cost to them, held fast to the gospel and passed it on from generation to generation. Please help us to do the same today. Please help us to work against false teaching in the church. Help us to proclaim and promote the gospel and the truth of your word, that those who come after us might know that truth and experience life in it. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”*

Adapted from <https://radical.net/podcast/243-contend-for-the-faith-jude-13/>.

## **STUDY DEEPER**

### **The Surprising Truth About False Teachers**

The question is not whether you ever hear the voice of false teachers. You do – probably every day. The question is whether you can discern which messages are false.

If you watch any television, listen to any radio or podcasts, keep up on the news, or interact at depth with just about anyone in modern society, you are being exposed to some form of false teaching. If you cannot identify any voices you hear as false, it’s not because you aren’t being exposed, but because you’re falling for it in some way.

For most of church history, it took extraordinary energy and effort to influence the masses. Messages had to be copied by hand, and teachers had to travel by foot or horseback. There were no cars or airplanes, and no printing presses, websites, or Facebook pages. But today just about every false teacher has a Twitter account.

How, then, does the church discern true teachers from false ones in a world like ours, where it’s easier than ever to spread false teaching?

#### **False Teachers Will Arise**

We begin by acknowledging not just the possibility of false teaching, but the certainty of it. We should not be surprised to find false teaching in the church today. Jesus and his apostles are very clear that false teachers will arise. They promise it. As Jesus says,

“False christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.” (Mark 13:22–23; see also Matthew 24:24)

Likewise, Paul warns the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:29–31) and his protégé Timothy (2 Timothy 4:3–4) that false teaching is sure to come (also 1 Timothy 4:1 and 2 Timothy 3:1–6). If we had any doubts at this point, Peter joins the refrain to add another voice: “There will be false teachers among you” (2 Peter 2:1).

So, we should not be caught off guard that false teachers have arisen throughout church history and likely have multiplied in our day.

### **Watch Their Doctrine – and Lives**

What we might find surprising – both from Jesus and his apostles – is how revealing the everyday lives of false teachers are about their falseness. They are not just false in their teaching, but also in their living.

Beneath their doctrinal error, however subtle and deceptive, we will find ethical compromises in tow. And those don't usually come out overnight; they take time. But they will come. Here's how Jesus prepares us in Matthew 7:15–20:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.” (see also Luke 6:43–44)

Jesus says it twice so that we won't miss it: You will recognize them by their fruits. His warning may sound clear and simple at first, but as we all know, trees don't bear fruit overnight. Eventually, however, the fruit (or lack thereof) will be manifest. And so it is with ethical compromise. What may begin as mere whispers in a private room will soon enough be proclaimed from the housetops (Luke 12:3). And so Paul instructs leaders not only to pay careful attention to their people and to their teaching, but also to their own lives (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 4:16).

No doubt, false teachers may be difficult to recognize in the moment. If we don't have access to their personal lives, or their doctrinal compromises haven't yet been manifest publicly in their behavior, we may find it difficult to know whether they are true. But time will tell. They will be known by their fruit – not the fruit of ministry quantity and numbers, but quality and endurance – and ultimately the quality of their own lives.

### **Allure of Money, Sex, and Power**

In particular, 2 Peter 2 is remarkable in how it fleshes out Jesus's warning about the fruit of false teaching. Peter has very little to say about compromised teaching, but he gives a litany of descriptions about compromised lives.

Verses 1 and 3 mention the generalities “destructive heresies” and “false words” – which indeed relate to teaching – but then, nothing further in this chapter focuses on their teaching. Everything else is about their lives.

We can boil it down to three essential categories – and all three are about character and conduct, not teaching:

- Pride, or defying authority (verse 10) – verse 1: they deny “the Master who bought them” (also verses 12–13 and 18).

- Sensuality, which typically means sexual sin – verse 2: “many will follow their sensuality” (also verses 10, 12–14, and 19).
- Greed, for money and material gain – verse 3: “in their greed they will exploit you” (also verses 14–15).

Again and again, Peter’s descriptions relate to greed, sensuality, and pride – or money, sex, and power. What false teachers throughout history have shared in common is not the specific nature of their doctrinal error, but the inevitability of moral compromise in one of these three general areas.

Another way to see it is that their falseness comes out in sin against themselves, against others, or against God. In their greed, they fleece the flock for material gain. Or in their lust, they compromise sexually (whether fornication, adultery, or homosexuality, which 2 Peter 2 suggests). Or in their pride, they “despise authority” (2 Peter 2:10), and the greatest authority, who upholds all authorities, is God himself.

### **You Can’t Study All the Counterfeits**

If false teaching, then, is not only about what our leaders say and write, but also how they live, how is the church to recognize and expose false teaching today? It’s easy to hear someone’s teaching online or at a large conference, but how can we know their lives are true?

The greatest defense against false teaching is a local church community that knows, enjoys, and lives the word of God – and holds its leaders accountable. Little, if anything, can be done to hold teachers accountable who are far away, but much should be realistic and actionable in the life of the local church.

Our leaders need to be held accountable, and not held in such high esteem that we give them a pass on the normal Christian life. Pastors should be with the people. Shepherds should smell like sheep, because they live and walk among the sheep, and are not sequestered from the flock. We need pastors who know themselves first and foremost as sheep, and only secondarily as leaders and teachers – pastors who are manifestly more excited to have their names written in heaven than they are to be used as vessels in mighty ministry (Luke 10:20).

### **Jesus Will Rescue His Church**

But you know what? We can have our systems of accountability (and we should), and we can do our best to watch both the lives and the doctrine of our leaders (and we should), but in the end there is no foolproof human system or effort. This is why 2 Peter 2:9, the apex of this chapter on false teaching, serves as such a sweet assurance – “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials.”

No matter how twisted the teaching, no matter how publicly shamed the church may feel over the exposé of an unethical leader, no matter how dark the days become, no matter how helpless we may feel in guarding gospel doctrine and preserving gospel-worthy lives, we have this great sustaining hope: Jesus knows how to rescue the godly.

Jesus is not only the greatest and truest teacher who ever lived, but he also is the great rescuer, who has redeemed us from sin and will keep those who are truly his from soul-destroying error. No matter how

small a minority the church becomes, and no matter how fragile we feel, the very one who is both the subject of true teaching and the model of true living is also our life-and-soul-preserver.

As God preserved Noah (2 Peter 2:5) and rescued Lot (2 Peter 2:7), so the Lord Jesus will rescue his true people from the false teaching – and false living – of false teachers.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-surprising-truth-about-false-teachers>