

False Prophets Hide their True Nature

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By Pastor David Cox davidcoxmex@gmail.com

Matthew 7:15 *"which come to you in sheep's clothing"*

False prophets want credibility, so they want to appear as normal or even "spiritual" Christians. Their goal in positioning themselves within the body of Christ is normally to gain some kind of advantage over others. Their purpose usually centers on a few objectives. They want to exalt themselves over others to get glory. They want control over the church and the members, usually with a view towards financially gaining something. They outright want financial gain. Or some even see the potential for sexual advantages over others in the flock. (Every good pastor has a wife, and this is not considered unbiblical, to have a relationship with your own spouse.) They get a thrill of making others lives more difficult because they listen and respect the false prophet.

But God gives us defenses to discern who they really are. Although they want to hide behind a facade of "being sheep," their true identity can be discerned. As Jesus said in **Matthew 7:20** *"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."* Jesus points out in the verses before this one that every thing has a nature about it, and every plant reproduces after its kind, or character. This is the key to discernment. In other words, you accept what people say, but always compare what they pretend to be with what they actually are in their deeds and actions. What they spiritually produce with their lives. Some Christians proclaim how spiritual they are, yet their very words in saying that are saturated with envy, pride, and contention with others.

Acts 20:29 *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

The problem with false prophets is that they want to identify as a Christian. Be careful though, because they not only identify as a Christian, but as the most spiritual of the group. For them, being the most spiritual is not like Christ declared, the greatest among the redeemed is greatest servant. For them, the greatest is the person that sets the norms for the group, and makes the decisions for everybody. To disagree with them is tantamount to declaring yourself unspiritual. This is an emotional tactic to control others. Jesus did not teach that. Every spiritual Christian is first and foremost worshiping God by practicing the principles of God well in their own lives, over a consistent period of time.

When a person insists on certain things, you must see that as a priority in their lives. When they constantly return to the same wrong ad flawed things, even apologizing afterwards as a repeated bad habit, then you see their real heart peeking through the disguise they publicly want to show people. If a person causes division, strife, hate, envy, etc., then their heart (the fruit of their life) is darkness and sinful. Many a person has secretly shared gossip with somebody proclaiming their disdain for gossip or "having to repeat bad things about people," but they gleefully say it anyway. Does the fruit (end result) of that action result in anything that pleases God? Or does it displease God? With time, did it improve anybody in the eyes of God? Did it help, protect, encourage, spiritually edify, and do good to the person

they are talking about. If not, then their fruit is evil, and their heart is evil, no matter how holy and spiritual they seem to appear.

This is true with just "normal people." When a person presents himself as a minister of God, a man of God, then the standards are even higher. God hates hypocrites, people who pretend to be something that they are not (which they usually do for some kind of gain). If a minister is not a good example of Christ, then he has no business "ministering" to other people. He should first dedicate his energies to fixing what is wrong in his own life. The false prophet wants to hide his imperfections so that he can get some kind of gain or control over other people despite God's displeasure with him.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 *13 For such are false apostles, **deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.** 14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15 **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.***

The key point here is that their actions reveal their true identity. A true apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ gives the message of God. An apostle means one sent with a commission, or message or job to do. In **Revelation 2:2** John rebukes the "false apostle" because they are evil, and they are liars. What they say does not have any sincerity in their own hearts and lives. Therefore the conclusion from this point is that ALL true men of God will first find application of their teachings and sermons (exhortations) within their own lives before they give that message to another. This speaks of preaching to self on a heart level before speaking to others. A man of God never sees his sermon as an instrument to control others, but rather to bring others into unity with the will of God.

Since this is difficult, very difficult, many preachers will simply "stay away" from issues that they are not willing to change in their own lives. Nobody is sinless, but the man of God confronts sin everywhere, starting within his own life.

Acts 20:27 *For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*

A smart and discerning Christian will note that the fervor of some preachers hides their refusal to deal with delicate topics that those same preachers are have problems dealing with in their own lives. The worse sort of preacher just stays away from such topics as a general method to his "ministry." God calls, anoints, and sends preachers to confront sin, and cause moral change in people. This is the essence of salvation. When a preacher in general avoids confronting sin, and they are very light on making application of the spiritual principles they talk about, and rarely make an emotional appeal for people to change morally, then there is a high likelihood that you are dealing with a false prophet.

Moreover, some false prophets know this point extremely well. They are really good students at the art of deception. So they make extreme points of emotional appeal out of issues that are not very sound biblically. They go from one "hobby horse" to another in order to give the appearance of being a fiery, emotional, and "good man of God." But the proof is in the pudding, or as Jesus said, the proof is in the fruit of their lives and ministry.

Every person has an individual accountability directly to their Creator, and we cannot assign "blame or fault" to a person's pastor because that person decides to obey Satan instead of God. But in general,

fiery preaching will always bring revival and holiness. This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in living examples among the flock of God. While that is very difficult to discern, we know it when we see it.

Jude 1:4 *For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

There are two aspects to Jude's statement; firstly, they are not discernable from a true Christian upon a light overview of them, and secondly, they enter in a stealthy manner. While the Christian community of a church stands largely on what the people in it profess, and we should live by and honor the rule that a person's word is and should be representative of what they actually are, in a spiritual sense, we also want to see evidence in the form of words and actions that support their profession. If there are not consistent real evidences, then the person is a hypocrite.

1 Timothy 3:6 *Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:7* *Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

Paul makes the two points that a ministry (specifically a bishop or pastor of a church) should not be a novice, or somebody new to the ministry, without a proven track record of living a good Christian testimony. He also speaks of having a "good report" or good testimony even among the unbelievers of the world. Pride is a great temptation to anybody in power and in control of other people and their money (governing see **1 Timothy 3:4**).

The issue here is very important. These false prophets are very friendly in a way, worming their way into power and influence among the people of God on an emotional level rather than taking a formal professional relationship with the flock of God. The difference is that a true shepherd is not going to elevate the importance of "people personally liking them" over the job he has to do. That job is identified by Paul in 1 Timothy 3 as governing. That job is confronting sin and apathy in the Christian, rebuking those failings, and exhorting emotionally and emphatically what is the will of God.

As a pastor, our "manual of how and what to do" is the Bible. Yet so many pastors cannot give good reasoned Bible explanations with expository discourses from Scripture of what they are telling their people. Refraining from extremism seems lost in our day. As a pastor, I do not believe it is right for women to wear pants, to go to a movie theater, to drink alcohol, etc. But listening and studying sermons of other preachers on these topics, they give no Bible explanation. Simply because they say so, their people should obey them. That is not taking a correct under shepherd attitude, but being a dictator. If there are biblical explanations, why don't they share them? Even if it is a correct position for a Christian, without biblical linkage as to why it is necessary to do or why it is wrong to do, others are lost, and when the Devil presents his spokesmen with attacks against that position, the Christian with a weak foundation will fail.

2 Peter 2:1-3 *1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 3*

And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

What we are dealing with when we speak of Satan's spiritual war against God, of how and who Satan uses, we are not dealing with anything new. Even in the Old Testament the very same problem existed.

A "heresy" is simply something that divides. The Greek word *haireisis*, heresy, focuses on division rather than doctrine. The issue that divides people, the division itself. In 1 Corinthians Paul dealt with factions in that church that identified themselves as being followers of particular (good) ministers. One group even rejected the selection of the other groups, and they chose to be identified as the group "of Jesus Christ." That is not the right way, because the right way is no division but unity. But the issue is this thinking of "us against them" even among the body of Christ. This contentiousness is typical of the unsaved or unspiritual mindset. Jesus presented himself as being meek and humble.

Matthew 11:29 *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

Being completely the glorious God, he showed us the correct attitude in refusing to use pride and jealousy as the guide and motivator of your life. Instead he showed us lowliness and service. Deference to others, and putting their wellbeing ahead of our own.

There can only be a single source of unity as God presents it, and that is when two or more people are all under the authority of God, obeying God. This is very focused on the actual and specific words of God, the Bible, Scripture. Anything other than that is a false unity. So the condition of living in obedience to the commands and Word of God, is a clear understanding and practice of the Word of God. A "damnable heresy" is a division between people that ends in disapproval and condemnation from God.

What false prophets want is to divide the people of God. There is a competition between them that is highly focused on envy and pride. One is better than others, and that has to be publicly acknowledged and earthly praise given to "the winners." God presents all the redeemed as being one body in which some have one function while others have another, and there can be no pride. Different people are given different amounts of talents, and their good work or poor work is solely before their Lord. If one prides himself as an eye, an ear, a hand, does that mean that they will hurt their foot or cut it off? Never. There is a unity in purpose that keeps them united.

2 Peter 3:16 *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which **they that are unlearned and unstable wrest**, as they do also the other scriptures, *unto their own destruction.*

If you misunderstand salvation, you could risk missing salvation. Assuming a minister of Satan is giving you the honest teaching on salvation is a very foolish presumption. But Peter's words reveal the false prophet. They speak as experts on matters that they only superficially even can talk about. They are showing their ignorance. And unfortunately, so many people in our churches soak this up as the best preaching that they have ever heard. If you don't agree with them, then the divisiveness comes out very abruptly.

These false prophets are unlearned. They are without ordinary instruction. They are ignorant of the first foundational concepts of salvation. Jesus is our Savior and our moral pattern to guide us. Yet the false prophet is very often openly proud, boastful, haughty, and boasting because he is envious. These basic concepts seem to be all but lost on the false prophet. He is the best that there is because he says so.

The word "wrest" means to torture, or cause something through fear and pain, of great personal expense (of others.) The idea here is that they twist, strain, distort to gain their objective. The verse plays on the difference between Paul's preaching and Peter's. Each was given a specific ministry that was different between them, yet both in harmony with the will of God. The difficulty at times of understanding all of Scripture is the false prophet's entry point. They are experts that explain what is very hard to be understood.

So the truth is that harmonizing all Scripture and seeing and understanding the different parts to be taken as a united whole is very difficult. How do we do that then? The answer lies in stability. That which makes a person walk consistently in the will of God is what is right. Good doctrine always produces good conduct. When the conduct is sinful, out of God's will, there is a doctrinal misunderstanding somewhere causing that.

When I once studied the Branch Davidian cult in Texas, I was amazed to find that David Koresh had a sign up sheet for all the women to pick the night that they were to sleep (sexually) with "the pastor." In fact, the entire system he had was discovered by Texas officials because one couple had a young girl, and the mother wanted her daughter to take a night, and the father refused to accept it. But Koresh's deceit was that he personally was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, and when the Bible exhorts believers to "enter into the joy of the Lord," he interpreted that as sex, and sex with him since he was God incarnate. He twisted Scripture for his own personal advantage. There was no harmony between the Bible prohibition of sex with somebody to whom you are not legitimately married and his teachings and practice. But Koresh used the difficulty of understand "entering the joy of the Lord" for his own personal gain.

2 Peter 1:12 *Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and *be established in the present truth.*

Peter wanted his hearers to be well established in a spiritual sense. That stability in their Christian lives is the key. It is the "good fruit" that Jesus referred to in Matthew 7. We can understand and identify that as spiritual and physical wellbeing.

Peter's exhortation needs to be well understood. There is a big difference between facts in the Bible, and moral principles extracted from those facts and applied to a person's life. The application begins with the facts, then understanding is explained, and finally an emotional appeal that is personal application. Without the process and especially the final part, moral change, then there is no spiritual stability. Consider for a minute the typical church, and Psalms 23. God's presentation of His will in Psalm 23 is that we are to be sheep with a good feeding. That is simply calmness, and growing through feeding.

Now consider cowboys and cattle. They also feed, but the cowboys "go behind" with whips and other forms of pain and fear. The good shepherd has a tender relationship with each individual sheep and

"goes before", and his sheep want to be with him, so they follow him. Which pattern does your church tend towards? We are so busy and running in modern churches, that there can be no calm, no gentle growing. What is the end result of having sheep in a calm meadow feeding? Reproduction. In other words, only peaceful people reproduce. With you couples, a medical professional will often tell them that if they want to have children, they have to slow down on life and take it easier in order for the woman to get pregnant. No exercise is not this advice. It is calmness, feeding, and growth. All focused on stability.

Matthew 24:23 *Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. Matthew 24:24* *For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Matthew 24:25* *Behold, I have told you before.*

Returning to the example of David Koresh, many false prophets are going to assume as much as they can to be Christ. They really envy Christ's power and control over His followers. The elements in Christ's words are that **(1) attention is placed on a man**. This is subtle, but if attention is placed on an earthly leader, that he is Christ, then attention is taken off of Jesus Christ. Every pastor should be an earthly, local example of Christ for his people to see that it is possible to do. But the distraction is the point. The false prophet wants everybody he can influence to take their attention off of Christ, and place it somewhere else.

(2) False Christs and false prophets mean Satan wins. Satan really thinks he wins in any case here. If the false prophet raises a great following after himself, and in the process, he keeps his hands off of the women and out of the coffers of money, Satan still wins. How? Because that false prophet is a hypocrite, and what do you learn from a hypocrite (no matter how skillful he is in public speaking or supposed Bible exposition)? The only thing you learn is hypocrisy. People think that are saved and spiritual when they are not. The evidence of their life deny their proclaims of their own spirituality, and even deny their own salvation.

(3) The true Christian cannot be deceived on a long term basis. How does that point play out? Very simply. A truly saved person is not saved except through Jesus Christ the Savior. Therefore, being saved by Christ, they will always worship God, and when a man comes between them and God, an antichrist that takes the place of Christ, they will not see Christ in that man, and they will eventually leave that man, his ministry and influence in their lives.

Jude 1:4 *"denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."*

A sinful life, full of the fruit of sin and not the Holy Spirit, is a denial of the Savior. An identification with Christ is to humble yourself, take up your cross and follow Christ. It is not only what you profess, but how your life's evidences (works) sustain your profession.

James 2:14 *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*

Works do not save us. But a profession of salvation without the living and abundant evidences or consequences is no faith and no salvation.

2 Corinthians 11:13 *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:14* *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:15* *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.*

Satan wars against God by illegitimate imitation. What is that? It is imitation in form and not essence. In other words, outwardly it appear like what pleases God, but inwardly it is the opposite of what God wants.

The truth here is that a person is morally changed by God into the moral character image of God. That is correct moral change. That is what God wants.

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