

# False Prophets Their Shameless, Insidious Conspiracy

And The Compromises  
That Will Ruin Your Life



Thomas P Hill

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Conspiracy

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By  
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Master Productions  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Unless otherwise shown, Bible quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my wife, Diane. She edited most of this book and offered many helpful suggestions and corrections.

Since 1990, when we began the pilgrimage that led to these studies, Diane calmed many turbulent days as I worked through them.

She maintained a steady spirit and encouraged me to press forward, sometimes with a sharp rebuke, always earned.

We pray that God will use these lessons bathed in much earnest prayer that He will manifest Himself to you in clear, glorious, and life changing ways.

Soli Deo Gloria

## Acknowledgements

Someone once said that many hands make light work. This certainly describes the involvement of several dear ones who aided in the completion of this project.

First, our dear heavenly Father impressed on me by His Spirit the gravity of this issue. The instruction and enablement of the Holy Spirit brought it together.

Second, my wife, Diane struggled with me in prayer and counsel as I labored over these studies. She worked many long hours in revising the sometimes-rough expressions to make them understandable.

Next, Dr. Bill Brown, and his wife, Suzanne spent many hours revising and suggesting corrections and improvements to these studies.

More than one restaurant excursion involved the discussion of these manuscripts, including encouragement to press on. Sometimes they even paid for our meals ... what grace.

Finally, the members of our Sunday Night Gatherings, who heard these studies and encouraged me to seek a broader audience for them.

Parts of these chapters appeared in *Wolves In Sheep's Clothing* with thousands of copies in print. This edition includes updated edits and incorporates study questions at the end of each chapter to help individual and group study.

May God use it to convict believers, correct them from following false prophets, and conform them to the image of Christ for the honor and glory of God.

## **Table of Contents**

Preface	10
---------	----

### **Conditions That Cultivate This Crisis**

Chapter One	
False Prophets Tell Us What We Want To Hear	
2 Timothy 4.1-4	16
Chapter Two	
False Prophets Give Us Something Tangible To Worship	
Exodus 32.1-6	28
Chapter Three	
False Prophets Give Us A Man To Follow	
1 Samuel 8.1-22	42

### **Characteristics Of False Prophets**

Chapter Four	
False Prophets Are Masters Of Disguise	
Matthew 7.13-20	54
Chapter Five	
False Prophets Are Ungodly Leaders	
Exodus 32.1-6	69
Chapter Six	
False Prophets Can Be Identified	
Jeremiah 5.31	86

Chapter Seven	
False Prophets Sin Against The Lord	
2 Samuel 2.12-3.1	101
Chapter Eight	
False Prophets Form A Conspiracy	
Ezekiel 22.25-31	120
Chapter Nine	
False Prophets Endanger God's Children	
Matthew 24.4-5, 23-25	139
Chapter Ten	
False Prophets Penetrate The Body Of Christ In Disguise	
Jude 1.1-25	151
Chapter Eleven	
False Prophets Encourage Ease In Zion	
Amos 6.1-7	165

### **Canons Of Scripture At Stake**

Chapter Twelve	
False Prophets Neglect Essential Orthodoxy	
Acts 20.28-31	175
Chapter Thirteen	
False Prophets Avoid Christ-centered Preaching	
1 Corinthians 1.21-24	188
Chapter Fourteen	
False Prophets Disregard The Spirit	
1 Corinthians 2.1-5	202



## **Course Of Action To Follow**

Chapter Fifteen Where Do We Go From Here?	214
Author's Profile	229

## Preface

### 6 Best Warnings That Will Help You Avoid Jesus Impostors

How tall do you think the Trojan Horse stood?  
How long was it? No exact measurements  
withstood the time since that epic battle.

Whatever its size, it fooled the people of Troy  
who took it into their city. Unknown to them, it hid  
a batch of Greek soldiers and their armaments  
inside of it.

The legend of the Trojan Horse captivates our  
imagination. According to legend, the Greeks tried  
to conquer the city of Troy, situated on the west  
coast of Asia Minor around 1200 B.C.

When the people of Troy denied them entry, the  
Greeks devised a scheme to enter the city by  
deception. They built a colossal, magnificent horse  
as a gift to the victorious Trojans.

Virgil described the scene in *Aeneid*, Book 2 as  
translated by John Drydan.

*“By destiny compell’d, and in despair,  
The Greeks grew weary of the tedious war,  
And by Minerva’s aid a fabric rear’d,  
Which like a steed of monstrous height  
appear’d:  
The sides were plank’d with pine;  
they feign’d it made  
For their return, and this the vow they paid.*

*Thus they pretend, but in the hollow side  
Selected numbers of their soldiers hide:  
With inward arms the dire machine they*

*load,  
And iron bowels stuff the dark abode.”*

Notice the warning they received.

*“[...] Laocoon, follow'd by a num'rous  
crowd,  
Ran from the fort, and cried, from far,  
aloud:  
'O wretched countrymen! What fury reigns?  
What more than madness has possess'd your  
brains?*

*Think you the Grecians from your coasts are  
gone?  
And are Ulysses' arts no better known?  
This hollow fabric either must inclose,  
Within its blind recess, our secret foes;*

*Or 't is an engine rais'd above the town,  
T' o'erlook the walls, and then to batter  
down.  
Somewhat is sure design'd, by fraud or  
force:  
Trust not their presents, nor admit the  
horse.”*

*(Virgil's Aeneid, Book 2 trans. John  
Dryden)*

When the Trojans brought the horse into their city, they never realized that enemy troops lurked inside its hollow center. At night, the Greek troops left their hiding place in the horse and captured the City of Troy.

### **Warning #1: Similarity in Christian assemblies**

In similar fashion, false prophets and teachers have invaded Christian congregations of Jesus Christ today. They have deceived many and contributed to their spiritual decline.

Jesus warned believers of this danger in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:15-20)*

This passage supplies a clear warning: “Beware of false prophets.” They have existed in every generation, and you can recognize them. In fact, if you examine the Scriptures, this is not a new warning to beware of false prophets.

### **Warning #2: Old Testament prophecies**

For example, in the Old Testament at least four stalwart men of God warned of the dangers of false prophets.

- In Deuteronomy 13, Moses talked about the false prophets who would come.

- Elijah made a spectacular appearance on Mount Carmel when he slew hundreds of the false prophets of Baal.
- Jeremiah warned about them and gave some clues that described them.
- Ezekiel warned of false prophets, too.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Bible issues warnings about false prophets and teachers.

### **Warning #3: New Testament settings**

Jesus spoke out against the Scribes and Pharisees, His contemporaries as false teachers.

Paul, the distinguished apostle, warned against them. In his letter to the Galatians, he identified their characteristics. He also wrote his friend, Timothy, and spoke against the false teachers present in the assembly under Timothy's care.

The book of the Revelation gives strong warnings and names false prophets, teachers, and leaders. Of the 7 letters to the assemblies in Revelation 1-3, 6 of them issue corrections about the false doctrine, errors, and treacherous teachers present in those congregations.

### **Warning #4: False prophets today**

Therefore, this message of the Lord Jesus provides a pertinent message for us. His warning not only proved true in that day, but we need it today.

Yes, false prophets abound in the Body of Christ. They hold prominent positions of leadership as pastors and teachers in Christian assemblies.

They profess to follow Christ but preach

unbiblical messages that captivate the minds of the unwary and lead them astray. They publish books and promote their counterfeit teachings over television, radio, and the Internet.

Their influence thwarts conformity to God's word. Therefore, the congregation of the righteous today faces great injury because of their presence and influence.

#### **Warning #5: Effects of false prophets**

Their leadership has brought us to a point where the world disrespects the Assembly of the first born. Modern cultures have no fear of Christians and mocks them without fear, making fun of the Lord Jesus, the Savior of sinners. They curse His name without rebuke or any kind of chastisement against them.

The spiritual decline of Christian congregations under the influence and leadership of counterfeit prophets has grieved and quenched the Holy Spirit and contributed to its ineffectiveness.

God has withdrawn His glorious, manifest presence. We have replaced it with hype and emotionalism, pathetic replacements for the real presence of God.

Multitudes fill our congregations who think they have experienced salvation, but, instead, have followed a damnable heresy.

#### **Warning #6: Biblical course of action**

Because of the prevalence of false prophets and teachers and their detrimental influence upon the Body of Christ, the followers of Christ must heed His warnings, identify the false leaders and their errors, and refuse to follow them.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to this imminent danger and enable you to turn from it. I pray that God will send His Spirit to correct the Christian congregation and bring to it the spiritual revival it so desperately needs.

## **Chapter One**

### **False Prophets Tell Us What We Want to Hear**

*“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;*

*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Timothy 4:1-4)*

A great danger confronts our lives today, the danger of only hearing what we want to hear. This peril threatens to control our lives. Blacklists and censorship, once thought of as outdated and abolished, rear their ugly heads once again.

It has reached a place where people attack those who do not agree with them and silence them. This danger permeates our society and threatens to control every aspect of our lives. For example, it infiltrates politics, education, finance, and even religious expression.

It has reached a point in our society where we listen to what we want to hear and prevent everything else. This danger allows the



development of false messengers who deceive the unwary with false messages because they tell us what we want to hear.

Soon after Christ completed His earthly ministry, Christ followers experienced this same kind of trouble. Leaders of Christ's opponents began their opposition to believers. At first, these men disputed the facts of Christ's Person, God in a human body, His accomplishments, and His resurrection.

In their efforts, they twisted Christ's teachings and Old Testament truths to their liking. Then, they demanded that everyone accept their views to the exclusion of those who disagreed. They infiltrated local assemblies, taught their false and insidious doctrines, and provoked spiritual decay in believer's lives. Soon, believers clung to false beliefs.

To combat the rising infiltration and spiritual decline, God raised up Saul, later named Paul, to supply leadership to combat the presence and effects of those false prophets. Paul made a habit of warning his fellow believers of the dangers of false prophets in all his writings, except Philemon.

### **False Prophets Tell Us What We Want to Hear**

In 2 Timothy, Paul wrote to his young protégé warning on how to combat the problem of false prophets and the dangers that foster them.

**Danger #1: Professing believers disavow sound doctrine.**

*“They will not endure sound doctrine.”* (2 Timothy 4.3)

Paul warned Timothy that a time would come when professing believers would disavow sound doctrine. They would seek the false and not adhere to the truth.

What does it mean when it says they will not endure sound doctrine? It means, very literally, they won't stand for it. They will not put up with it. They want something else.

What sound doctrine will they not endure? In 1 Timothy 1.10-11, Paul used the exact phrase “sound doctrine” and explained in verse 11 what it meant:

*“According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.”*

Paul predicted professing believers would not endure the sound doctrine of the gospel, the good news of the gospel that would save them and reconcile them to God the Father.

This group included not just those on the outside of the Body of Christ, but also those within it. He said that members and professing believers, who said they followed Christ, would not put up with the gospel.

To overcome the danger of false prophets, Paul urged Timothy to preach the gospel and hold firm to its truths.

**Danger Sign #2: Professing believers seek personal gratification.**

*“...but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” (2 Timothy 4.3)*

Paul warned Timothy of the danger of professing believers’ delight in satisfying their fleshly natures and desires. The phrase *“but after”* means they do not want this, but instead they do want something else.

They did not want a spiritual emphasis in their lives, but they enjoyed pursuing pleasure, which captivated their interests. Holiness, conspicuous by its absence, lacked appeal as they disavowed sound doctrine and sought personal gratification.

They did not want God's interference in their lives. Instead of the gospel and holy living, these professing Christians wanted messages that appealed to their human natures. To soothe their *“itching ears”* they chose pastors who would tell them what they wanted to hear.

Paul warned Timothy that these conditions give rise to false prophets and teachers.

**Danger Sign #3: Professing believers turn to error.**

*“And they shall turn away their ears from the truth.” (2 Timothy 4:4)*

Paul reminded Timothy of the conclusion that would arise when Christ followers disavowed sound doctrine, especially the gospel. When professing believers disavow the gospel and seek personal gratification from those who will satisfy those desires, they will turn from the truth to error.

The decline into error, Paul said, begins with the disavowal of the sound doctrine of the gospel. Then, instead these objectors seek personal gratification from leaders who will provide it to them. When they gather to themselves deceptive leaders and pastors who deny the truth, they turn to fables, imaginations, and stories. They follow error, not the Bible.

Paul's warning encouraged Timothy to proclaim the gospel truths without alteration. This proclamation would defeat those false prophets who altered the gospel and prevent the decline into error.

### **Correlation to today**

The danger that Paul confronted with Timothy permeates the Christian society today, too. Christ followers face an increasing barrage of false prophets. These men and women hold positions of influence and leadership in the greater Body of Christ as well as local assemblies.

We face a grave problem today, the misstatement of the gospel. Too often the presentation of the "gospel" does not proclaim even the elementary truths of the gospel.

For example:

#### **The sinfulness of humanity**

The modern-day presentation of the gospel evades the issue of sin, because people do not want to hear about their sins.

The preaching of the gospel without including the truth of the sinfulness of mankind eliminates the key element of the gospel.

The gospel provides salvation from sin. Sadly,

many professing believers have never come to recognize their dire sinfulness before God, an elemental part of salvation.

**The helplessness of mankind to reconcile with God.**

No one contributes anything to his/her salvation. One preacher said wisely,

*“The only thing that you bring to the salvation experience is your sin.”*

Sinners, utterly helpless and dead in their trespasses and sins, obtain salvation only by a gift of grace from God. The presentation of the gospel today often excludes this truth.

Most people assume that sinners provide something toward their salvation. However, salvation is neither a cooperative nor a synergistic experience, one where each party takes part on a sharing basis.

Sinners contribute nothing to their salvation but their sin. Because preachers avoid these basic elements of the gospel, many people have not experienced Biblical salvation.

Leaders within the professing Body of Christ today follow the same practice that Paul warned Timothy people would practice in that day.

They will not endure the gospel. They will not put up with it. They do not explain it in its fullness. This describes the first issue that Paul’s warning to Timothy emphasized, which gives rise to false prophets: people do not want the gospel.

To avoid the growth of false prophets, the Christian leaders must overcome this error and

return to a full presentation of gospel truths.

Further, the Bible expressly speaks against satisfying the demands of our fleshly natures. Paul wrote to his friends at Rome on this very issue.

*“I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.”* (Romans 7:18)

*“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”* (Romans 13:14)

This last reference refers to satisfying fleshly lusts instead of putting on Christ. To put it simply, “Do not pursue your own lusts. That is not the way you should live as a follower of Christ.” Professing believers often lack interest in the spiritual conditions of their lives.

They believe that holiness is reserved only for the devout, a possibility sought by dour believers. The preference for knowing God “...at a distance” makes the interest in an intimate knowledge of God outdated.

The popular faith does not want God’s interference in life. The discipline of walking with God, pursuing after Him in obedience and trust for life’s plans, has vanished.

To soothe their “*itching ears*” they “*heap to themselves*” pastors who tell them what they want to hear:

- lessons on struggling with stress;
- messages on managing finances;
- feel-good homilies; and

- superficial Biblical instruction.

The professing Body of Christ has entered this phase of decline. Professing believers now debate the existence of truth and exchange it for fables.

The world has debunked and degraded the gospel of Jesus Christ for generations, saying that we cannot know truth, an unthinkable thought which Christ followers should never consider.

The world has said this for a long time. The world says,

*“There is no exclusive truth. My truth is just as good as your truth.”*

Of course, the world would say that. They do not want to believe God’s truth, because it describes them as sinners in need of a Savior, and they don’t want that.

However, it becomes an entirely different problem when false prophets, who profess to follow Christ, proclaim to their audiences:

*“You can’t know the truth.”*

Their error misleads people who respect and follow false prophets. False prophets teach that everyone can know their truth but cannot know God’s truth, setting themselves above God.

Every false prophet, teacher, pastor, or leader, who makes these kinds of claims, sets up himself or herself above God. They create a “truth” that they impose which surpasses God’s truth. The false prophet or teacher who says, “You can’t know the truth” contradicts Scripture.

They sound like the serpent in the Garden of Eden who said,

*“You’ll not die. God has not told you the truth. I am telling you the truth. Believe me. Don’t believe God.”*

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus gave a series of messages to His disciples on the Holy Spirit recorded in John 14-16. Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth and told how the Holy Spirit would guide believers into the truth.

Christ told them:

*“... when He comes, He will guide you into the truth. Many things I cannot tell you now, because you cannot understand them, you will not endure them, nor will you understand them. You cannot grasp them now. But when He comes, He will guide you into the truth.”*(John 16:13)

Further, Jesus said about Himself,

*“I am the truth...”* (John 14.6)

In His prayer in John chapter 17, Jesus prayed to His Father,

*“One thing you will do Father; you will sanctify these people in the truth.”* (John 17:17)

The Bible presents each member of the Triune God, the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit,



as providers, teachers, and revealers of truth.

To declare that no one can know spiritual truth defames the triune God and leads professing believers into error.

## **Implications**

Paul's warning to Timothy applies to Christ followers today, too. In fact, he described the conditions and causes within Christian assemblies that give an open door to false teachers.

These conditions allow false prophets to foster their fallacies and errors and enable them to step into the vacuum where they can assume positions of leadership and lead people astray.

The whole sequence presented in 2 Timothy 2.3-4 describes recently published Christian magazines, books, and television and radio broadcasts. Many counterfeit spiritual leaders produce books and internet articles and preach to vast crowds all over the world.

Organizations have risen in the last few years for the sole purpose of presenting error as true Christianity. Deceitful teaching looms dark over contemporary Christian assemblies.

To prevent the presence and growth of false prophets in Christian assemblies, we must heed Paul's warning to Timothy and turn from the practices that foster false prophets. Christ followers must reject the popular trend toward the disavowal of the gospel to satisfy fleshly desires, which results in decline into error.

Untrustworthy teachers welcome the opportunity to encourage their followers to enjoy an easy and false doctrine. They do it subtly, carefully,

and persuasively, so that error sounds like the truth.

To elude the support of false prophets in the Body of Jesus Christ, believers must reject the errors of the false prophets and pursue the truth after the knowledge of Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit Whom the Father and the Son sent to reveal it.

I urge you to bring these issues to the throne of God. Seek Him and His wisdom and stand for the inspired, inerrant, infallible, sufficient truth of the Word of God.

Professing believers, open your eyes to the truth. We can know the truth, and it will set us free from fostering false prophets.

### **Questions For Reflection and Application**

01. Who can you identify that fits Paul's description of a false prophet?
02. What organization(s) and churches follow the pattern that Paul explained?
03. Do you presently attend an assembly that fits the description of Paul's warning to Timothy?
04. Can you recognize untruth when you hear it from the pulpit?
05. Do you follow the deceitful teachings of a false prophet(s)?
06. Has it caused you to consider that you cannot know the truth, that God does not demand of you total obedience and surrender of your rights in total submission to Him?
07. Do you pursue God and His righteousness above everything else?

*Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your great*

*grace in making provision for Your children by giving them warnings.*

*In giving the warnings, You present that which is true and that which is false and the consequences of that which is false.*

*And, Father, by Your Holy Spirit, apply these truths in our lives, that we might be taught by them, encouraged by them, strengthened by them, reaffirmed in the truth by them, corrected by them, conformed more assuredly and more completely to the truth.*

*We will give to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all the glory for what You accomplish.  
Amen.*

## **Chapter Two**

### **False Prophets Give Us Something Tangible to Worship**

Make no mistake, false prophets affect our lives. They exist as a common part of everyday life. Newscasts, internet sites, books, and seminars allow them to promote their error filled messages to us.

For example, we hear them lecture on financial matters, recommending investments and forecasting future economic conditions. These false financial gurus give us faulty advice which affects the monetary conditions of most of us to our loss.

These same media promote false forecasters of the next big health solutions that require only 1 pill a day. You've seen their ads, maybe even followed some of them.

I read one ad the other day that promoted its pill a day would cure over 30 different health problems. Yup, it advertised a multi-vitamin.

We cannot escape the constant barrage of false messengers, yet we often fall for their "too good to believe" messages, don't we?

However, we do not need to follow every person who tries to lead us. Not every supposed leader deserves a following.

Sad, but true, we even fall for false prophets proclaiming untrue religious messages. Every culture allows these frauds to promote their heresies. We can identify some of them because of their obvious errors.

But, some of us follow deceptive messengers unaware of their deceitful messages, even purported Biblical, Christian messages.

Why do false “Christian” prophets fool us? In the Bible, God's message to humanity, we find solid direction on how to identify them and avoid them.

### **False Prophets Give Us Something Tangible to Worship**

Many of us know the Bible story of Aaron's making a golden calf for the Israelites to worship. (Exodus 32.1-6) What preceded these events recorded in Exodus 32 may surprise you.

God brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt where they had lived for about 400 years. A brief time prior to the golden calf, God met with Moses on a mountain and gave him the Law as recorded in Exodus 20.

Exodus 24 describes how Moses, Aaron, Aaron's 2 sons, and 70 elders of Israel went to worship God on that same mountain. As they worshiped, they saw God standing on sapphire stone, and they ate and drank with Him. (Exodus 24.9-11) Out of that group, God called Moses to come up to His presence.

Before Moses and his helper Joshua went up to God, Moses told the others in the group to wait for Joshua and him to return. If the leaders in the remaining group needed help before Moses returned to them, he told them that they could ask Aaron and Hur for counsel. (Exodus 24.14)

These events precede the disastrous events in Exodus 32. Those Israelite leaders who met with God, saw Him standing on a sapphire stone, and observed His wonder, majesty, and beauty. Yet they cried for new gods and new leadership.

This rebellion of Israel and Aaron's role in their rebellion provides a clear picture of the conditions that give rise to false prophets and teachers.

### **Dissatisfaction for delay**

Few, if any of us, like delays. We want "Jack-in-the-box" responses to our needs and wants. The Israelites responded in the same fashion. When Moses delayed his return from his time with God on the mountain, the children of Israel grew restless. (Exodus 32.1)

They rebelled against God and Moses, impatient to wait upon God for His directions for them. These restless wanderers had seen the idols that the Egyptians worshiped.

The Israelites decided that they wanted the gods they had seen in Egypt. They sought something tangible to worship. So, when they came to Aaron with their demands, Aaron yielded and made them an idol like the ones in Egypt.

The restlessness of the Israelites and their failure to wait for God led them into grievous sin as they demanded something tangible to worship.

### **Disobedience of God's commands**

When the Children of Israel demanded Aaron to make the idol, they disobeyed God's commands. God had told them not to make any graven images of birds, anything on earth or in the heavens, or especially of God. They must worship God and Him alone.

Even though the Israelites swore allegiance to God to worship Him only, they cried to Aaron to make them gods to go before them. They violated the First and Second Commandments.

Their disobedience caused God to bring severe judgment upon them for their sin.

### **Deification of a man**

Amid their displeasure and disobedience, they deified Moses: “He brought us out of Egypt.” They failed to wait for his return from his visit with God, yet they attributed to him that which God accomplished. God brought them out of Egypt.

- He parted the Red Sea when Moses stood there quivering and wondering before God: “What am I going to do?”
- God made the bitter waters at Mara sweet so that they could drink them. Moses threw the tree into the waters, but God made them drinkable.
- God provided the manna every morning for six days each week, not Moses.
- God caused the pillar of fire to guard them by night and the cloudy pillar to guide them during the day.
- God provided the water out of the rock when Moses spoke to it.

The Scriptures record numerous accounts of God’s supernatural works on behalf of the children of Israel. But, they attributed them to Moses. They deified Moses and elevated him above God. Although God used Moses in spectacular ways, Moses was not God.

Their deification of Moses caused the Israelites to take their eyes off of God and to look to Moses for direction.

### **Disdain for Godliness**

Exodus 32 describes the Israelites as wondering what had happened to Moses when he went up the mountain to see God. (Exodus 32.23)

They knew where Moses went. He obeyed God's call to him to come up to meet with Him, which they knew.

Their leaders had met with God, too, saw Him standing on a sapphire stone, and beheld His glory. They knew that Moses had gone to meet with that God.

However, they preferred that Moses had stayed with them. They never considered what it meant for Moses to meet with God.

On that mountain, God met with Moses and gave him instruction for the Israelites. This time alone with God brought Moses into close fellowship with God.

The Israelites devalued Moses' time alone with God, unaware and uncaring of the influence it would have upon Moses, their leader. They rejected the impact that God would have upon Moses, and upon them, too.

### **Denial of glory to God**

After Aaron fashioned for them the golden calf from the gold that they brought to him, they worshiped it and said,

*"These be the gods that brought us out of Egypt."* (Exodus 32.4)

They saw the wondrous displays of God, His nature, and His supernatural works on their behalf.



No one could explain the deliverance from their Egyptian enemies, the parting of the Red Sea, and the provision of water except by God's grace, mercy, and power.

Yet, they took a chunk of gold, worshipped it, and said, "That brought us out of Egypt." They denied God the glory that He alone deserved. They gave it instead to a hunk of gold.

When Aaron submitted to the Israelites' demands, he led them into false worship of something tangible. It pleased the people, but angered God.

### **Correlation**

This setting of Aaron's making the golden calf provides clear examples of the circumstances that encourage false prophets who follow in the footsteps of Aaron.

#### **Dissatisfaction for delay**

The Israelites' attitude toward delay emerges as one of the great evils present in the professing Christian Assembly today: an unwillingness to wait for God.

We want God to respond yesterday to today's demands. The desire for instant gratification dominates our Assemblies' plans:

- the longing for numerical growth now;
- the desire for spiritual growth now; and
- the need to fill leadership positions now, even with unqualified people rather than wait for God to provide qualified ones.

The Scriptures relate dire illustrations of the disasters that come upon those who do not wait.

- King Saul's judgment from God for his rejection of Samuel's command to wait for him before offering sacrifices; and
- Abraham and Sarah's refusal to wait for God's promised son, which resulted in the birth of Ishmael and the subsequent pain and suffering instead of joy.

In contrast, the Scriptures teach the immense value in waiting. For example, God promised,

*"They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."* (Isaiah 40.31)

Again, Isaiah records another example of God's instruction about waiting:

*"Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him."* (Isaiah 30.18)

Like the children of Israel who expressed dissatisfaction for delay for Moses and God's directions for them, the Body of Christ today does not want to wait for God. We want instant

gratification.

### **Disobedience of God's commands**

God never changed the first and second commands. They apply to us today, too. Yet, professing believers today use religious paraphernalia, images, or other kinds of tangible items and replicas that we design “to make it easier to understand, to think about God, and to feel Him.”

Again, like the Israelites, we want something tangible to worship, contrary to God's commands. We introduce objects as part of our “worship”: icons, draperies, figurines, etc. This emphasis has experienced a sudden increase among professing believers today.

People flock to assemblies that make these things available as part of their “worship” in their vain and evil appeal to human nature.

Although we do not worship a golden calf, similar practices detract from the true nature and character of God and degrade Him into things made with hands.

Excuses and explanations for these false practices abound.

- “If it only brings in one lost soul, isn't it worth it?”
- “Anything is worth one soul, isn't it?”
- “They make me feel closer to God.

The professing Body of Christ accepts almost any means that will bring about the desired numerical growth or the “success” of other special projects, even to the extent of violating God's law.

The Lord Jesus, in John 4.23-24, said to the

woman at the well,

*“Those who worship me must worship me in spirit and in truth.”*

What did He mean by that statement? God desires that we avoid anything in the worship of Him, i.e., tangible items, that would detract from His true nature and character. Nothing that we make can represent Him in His fullness nor draw us to worship Him.

He manifests Himself to His children in glorious ways beyond our imaginations, without resorting to religious paraphernalia. Can we make anything that can show the infinite God? No.

### **Deification of man**

In a similar fashion today, the professing Body of Christ deifies its leaders.

- We desire leaders with glorious, wonderful personalities.
- We want pastors and teachers who will draw in the masses.
- We want preachers who sway us with magnetic personalities and wonderful message delivery.

That describes what people want for their leaders. They have deified man and elevated him to the position above God.

The professing body of Christ replaced God with a popular man. The want ads in the back of Christian magazines that advertise for pastors and Christian leaders illustrate this practice.

Rather than looking for Godly characteristics and experience with God, they instead concentrate upon relevant work experience, education, ability to manage a multiple staff, and other human qualifications.

In essence, they seek a man. The Christian community today places its emphasis upon man. Man runs and directs the Body today, not Christ, the Head of the Body.

In the minds of the children of Israel, Moses brought them out of Egypt. That pattern repeats now among professing believers.

We want someone to lead us into the new millennium, deifying a man and rejecting God.

### **Disdain for Godliness**

Look again at the magazines that advertise for pastors and leaders of Christian colleges and organizations. These ads do not declare that they want a man who meets with God.

They do not say,

- “We want a man of prayer.”
- “We want a man who will come and spend hours on his knees beseeching God to meet with us.”
- “We want a man who walks with God, who knows Him intimately, and can share that with us and guide us into that same pursuit.”

Several years ago, my wife served as a secretary in a large church. One time, the pastors of that assembly gathered to pray. While the pastors met in prayer, she received a phone call from a member

who asked to speak with one of the pastors.

My wife replied, “Oh, I’m sorry. He cannot come to the phone right now. He is in a prayer meeting with the other pastors.”

The caller replied, “What do you mean he is in a prayer meeting? He ought to be working.”

That description depicts the attitude of many in the Christian congregation today. Few members realize the absolute necessity of their leaders spending time alone with God.

Worse yet, few pastors and leaders recognize its importance. Too often, schedules, demands, and activities have a higher priority than time with God.

Several years ago, I served on a pastoral search committee of the assembly that we attended at the time.

As the committee met, we established a list of criteria for the new pastor, which emphasized the very issues mentioned earlier in this study.

At that time, I joined in the chorus of agreement with the list...until we met one of the candidates, Rev. Robert Hobson.

I will never forget him. It was, I am sure, God’s appointment to bring that man in as a candidate just for me, because that interview changed my life.

I will never forget sitting in that meeting. As the committee questioned him on every conceivable issue, he replied in the same fashion.

After every question, he gave his answer to the question and finished his answer with this statement:

*“...but the most important thing is this.  
What are you doing with Christ? Are you  
walking with Jesus? Have you yielded your*

*life to Christ? Is He working and functioning in your life on a day-to-day basis? That is the most important issue.”*

At the end of the session, God had used Bob’s statements to change my life. That congregation rejected him as the pastor because of these responses to the committee’s questions.

One of the “respected” leaders on the committee swayed the congregation with this telling statement,

*“Well, you know, we really do need a whole lot more than just hearing messages about Jesus.”*

That attitude permeates the professing Bride of Christ today. It does not want a godly man. More than any other qualification:

- Christ’s called out ones today need leaders and pastors who know God;
- Christ’s called out ones need to hear from those who have an intimate relationship with God, who spend time on their knees and on their faces before God beseeching Him on behalf of the congregations, trying to know Him, trying to understand Him.

That describes the Godly leaders and pastors the Christian Assembly needs today.

### **Denial of glory to God**

How does the professing Christian congregation follow this pattern today? It gives honor to programs and people for the “successes” they

“delivered.”

Too often, when a congregation increases in size with multiple programs, it honors the programs and the pastor that fostered the growth, adding praise to the wonderful personality who leads the programs.

God receives no glory.

The Bible warns believers that God will not share His glory with another. Thousands of years ago, the Israelites denied glory to God for His works, and the Body of Christ today follows them.

In that day, God judged them for their sin. In this day, He, too, has withdrawn His glorious presence and begun to judge the house of God.

### **Implications**

Why do we follow false “Christian” prophets? This setting of Aaron’s making the golden calf provides clear examples of the circumstances that encourage false prophets and our following them.

The signs present in that day,

- dissatisfaction with delay,
- disobedience to God’s word,
- deification of man, and
- denial of glory to God,

have become increasingly predominant in this day.

Christ followers must awaken to this condition, reject false “Christian” prophets, avoid them, and seek God for direction and spiritual revival of His glorious manifest presence among the children of God.



## Questions For Reflection and Application

01. What caused the sons of Aaron and the 70 elders, who saw God in His glory, to decide they wanted new gods?
02. What does the modern evangelical Church want?
03. In what ways do you see disobedience to God's word in the Church you attend or in the churches near you?
04. What does John 4.23-24 mean?
05. How did the Israelites deify Moses?
06. How does today's Church deify their leaders?
  - a) How does that harm pastors?
  - b) How does it harm the congregation?
  - c) How does it harm nationally known "spiritual" leaders who appear on television, write best selling books, and speak at large conferences?
07. What reasons does the average Church have for failing to seek out Godly, praying men of God with Biblical qualifications to shepherd?
08. How do we, as individuals, fail to give God a place of glory in our lives? How does that reveal itself?

*Thank you, heavenly Father, for this example that you have given us in your Word. I pray that you would teach us from it and conform our lives to the truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## **Chapter Three**

### **False Prophets Give Us A Man To Follow**

I will never forget the day my dream died. I had just completed my seminary master's degree in Church ministry.

My prior business experiences led me to the Church growth movement. Fascinated with its similarities to business, I read the latest research on the successes of the movement. I had found my niche.

The Church growth movement became the pattern for Christian congregations in this era. What began as an experiment by Bill Hybels at the assembly that he started soon exploded in size.

As a result, pastors and leaders in Christianity flocked to him to learn the methods that he developed. His pattern mushroomed into a world-wide phenomenon.

Hardly a local Christian fellowship has avoided the influence of Bill Hybel's program. Some adopted it completely, while others applied parts of it.

No doubt you know of the Church growth pattern that he started. Maybe you attend a fellowship that follows its paradigm.

Even if the Christian assembly where you attend does not follow it and shuns it, you possess an awareness of it.

### **False Prophets Give Us A Man To Follow**

I confess that the Church growth movement attracted me. I began to study these methods and

those that others modified. I chose the steps that I would follow to implement its strategies.

As I planned, a strange dilemma developed as I attempted to harmonize my Church growth discoveries with Scripture. The more I tried to merge them, the farther they moved apart.

At last I realized that rather than improve the Church, the Church growth beliefs foster false prophets in the Church.

In fact, they reminded me of the Old Testament Judge/Prophet Samuel.

**Popular church growth secrets foster false prophets: give us a man to follow.**

Samuel's life began with his miraculous birth. His mother, Hannah, could not bear children. She prayed earnestly for a son, and God gave her Samuel.

At an early, tender age, she took him to the Temple. He grew up in the Temple under Eli the High Priest. He and his sons died in shame. (1 Samuel 8.1-9)

With an absence of leadership, the people of Israel cried for a king. Their circumstances provided a legitimate time to look for another leader.

But the comments of the people offer a glimpse into their real desires. They did not ask for a prophet. They did not ask for a Godly man.

Instead, they wanted a king, someone to go out and fight their battles. They wanted a leader who would wear a crown and dress in purple robes. They wanted a champion that would lead them as other neighboring, pagan kings in their day.

Throughout their history, God had sent Israel Godly leaders. When they lived in Egypt, He sent

them Moses, who led them out of Egypt through the wilderness to the brink of the Promised Land.

Then, God replaced Moses with another godly man, Joshua. He led them in victorious battles to take possession of the Promised Land.

The time of the judges came after the death of Joshua. During that era, God raised judges to rule and defend the Israelites.

The book of Judges records many times that God lifted up judges, giving them unique abilities and strengths for the welfare and direction for Israel. God used them to bring the Children of Israel back to Him.

Then Samuel the prophet came to lead God's people. Samuel led Israel many years until Israel called for a king.

Samuel rehearsed to them what would happen, if they raised up for themselves a king. (1 Samuel 8.10-18) But, they turned aside from his warnings:

*“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.”* (1 Samuel 8.19)

Israel rejected Samuel's warning. They did not want a Godly leader like those who had lead them in previous days.

They turned aside from choosing a man of God who would lead them to follow God to emulate the peoples around them.

They saw their neighboring nations that had kings. They wanted a king, too, just like them. They sought for a man to follow who would protect them and cause them to flourish.

**Popular Church growth secrets foster false prophets: give the majority what they want**

Israel made its decision for a king based upon popularity. As you read the whole passage in 1 Samuel 7-9, mark the frequent references to “the people.”

En masse, the people of Israel came to Samuel and demanded a king. All the elders demanded a king. They represented the desires of the people.

The people rejected the counsel that God gave them through Samuel. The popularity of their demands justified their actions in their cry for a king. (1 Samuel 8.1-22)

**Popular Church growth secrets foster false prophets: give us modern methods**

The Children of Israel cried, “We want a king.” Where did they get that idea? In their history, they had never had a king. They wanted to imitate the world around them.

They wanted a king just like all their neighboring nations. They sought someone who would fight their battles and solve their problems.

The Israelites saw how the world managed their affairs and preferred it to God’s way. (1 Samuel 8.19-20)

This long history of ungodly kings reveals the disaster that Israel brewed when they demanded a king.

**Correlation**

These events from Israel’s history in the times of Samuel the prophet describe the professing

Christian Church today, which follows a similar pattern.

### **Give us a man to follow**

As in the days of the fledgling nation of Israel, professing Christian congregations want a man to lead them.

In place of a godly man, it wants a “king” to fight its battles. The choice of a man brings sorrow and spiritual decline. Man does not rule by grace, mercy, or justice.

As Christian congregations have turned aside from seeking godly leaders. A new list of characteristics for their leaders show their drift away from choosing a Godly leader.

Now the Church growth methods demand a particular kind of leader to implement its methods.

Christian congregations now demand a counselor, a conciliator, and a good businessman with pizzazz and a personality to match.

Professing believers, influenced by the Church growth methods, no longer desire a man who communes with God.

Like the Children of Israel, Christian congregations today disregard godly men for its leaders, choosing rather a “king” to lead them.

### **Give the majority what they want**

Again, like Israel, the professing Christian Church believes that popularity equals God’s way.

In fact Church growth methods rely upon popular acceptance and approval by the congregation for their adoption and “success”.

In this movement, popularity equates to God's will.

A Church that I attended several years ago had a practice that describes this custom.

When it came time to select candidates for various Church leaders, they sought candidates from each of the adult Sunday School classes and groups within the Church.

They wanted to make sure that they had representatives from every group of people in the congregation.

Rather than selecting leaders based upon the Godliness of the candidates, they wanted to please every Church group, hoping to secure cooperation among the people.

Soon, this congregation followed the siren call of the Church growth movement.

Such practices produce wolves in sheep's clothing who lead the sheep astray. They give the people what they want.

The people are satisfied with such leaders and encourage them to assume positions of leadership in the Church.

That is not how Jesus the King governs His Body, the Church. It is an organism, nor an organization.

The Body of Christ does not need CEOs, champions, or powerful persuasive personalities as our leaders like the world and Church growth methods foster.

Christ's Church is not a democracy. His way is not decided by majority vote or by a committee gathered from various groups within a congregation.

The Christian Church has a King in charge, Jesus. He rules as Head of the Church, His body. We need to discern what King Jesus wants to do,

not what the people want to do.

The Church needs leaders filled with the Holy Spirit, ones who spend time calling upon God and seeking the face of Christ, because it sometimes takes time to discern Christ's will for His Body.

When that kind of leader stands before the Church and says, "This is the way. Walk ye in it," the congregation can trust their Godly leaders.

### **Give us modern methods**

At the risk of repetition, that describes the Christian congregations today. Its leaders try to exceed one another in their pursuit of discovering the world's latest methods and incorporating them into the activities of their local congregations.

They want to follow the world's practices. I have heard Christian congregational leaders discuss the world's methods and how to adopt them.

They assume that if it works for big business, it must work for the Church. In its practices, the Christian congregation incorporates the methods of the world as its formulas for growth.

In fact, the Church emulates the world to such an extent it looks and acts just like the world.

Like the Children of Israel, the professing believers today want to fit in and appease the world. We have believed the error that to win the world we must look and act like the world.

God does not work that way. The Scriptures tell us to come out from among the world and be separate. (2 Corinthians 6.17)

Scripture never encourages believers to copy the world to find out how to live as Christians.

Further, Scripture never encourages believers to compromise with the world in order to win the



world. The Church stands against the world and exposes its darkness.

Believers should walk as children of light, not as children of darkness.

## **Implications**

These truths, demonstrated in Israel's cry for a king, suggest serious implications for the Body of Christ today. The Apostle John issued a serious comment regarding the relationship between God and the world.

He said,

*“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* (1 John 2.15)

Church leaders and pastors ignore this warning by pursuing the world's methods and manners while at the same time trying to receive God's blessing over their plans.

To love the world's methods and practices, and to continue to pursue them and their adoption, casts doubt upon the activities of these leaders.

It calls into question the true nature and existence of their love for God.

Jesus warned that you cannot serve two masters. He will have no competitors in the operation of His Body.

Scripture warns us of the true nature of the world:

*“For all that is in the world, the lust of the*

*flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*” (1 John 2.16-17)

James in his epistle described the distinction between earthly, sensual, devilish wisdom and God’s wisdom.

He began the passage with these words:

*“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.”* (James 3.13)

He then described worldly wisdom, after which he concluded:

*“This wisdom (worldly wisdom) descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.”* (James 3.16)

After he described worldly wisdom, James listed the qualities of the wisdom that God sends.

At the very top of the list, he identified purity, which literally means that purity is the number one characteristic of God’s wisdom.

Purity does not deceive. Purity does not a lie, nor conflict with Scripture. Purity is truthful, and honest.

The world’s wisdom differs from God’s wisdom. We need to recognize and pursue God’s wisdom.

The Christian congregation must heed God’s wisdom. By so doing, we will reject the plans and

purposes of the false prophets today, who pursue and promote the world's methods and wisdom through their adoption into Church growth methods.

Scripture tells us that God will not share His glory with another. As you read Scripture, you will find repeatedly that God always does things in such a way that only one person will receive the honor and the glory, God.

In Zechariah 4, we read God's message to Zerubbabel, who faced a difficult challenge. God assured him,

*“This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.” (Zechariah 4.6)*

When Jesus the Head of the Body wants to accomplish something, including growth, He will do it by the power of His Holy Spirit.

This example of the Children of Israel provides sobering insight into the circumstances that foster the rise of false prophets and leaders.

We erroneously think the crowd must be right. We imagine that so many people cannot be wrong. Yet, might does not necessarily make right. The paths that seem right lead to destruction.

The Scriptures say that God perfects His strength in human weakness. (2 Corinthians 12.9) His strength does not come alongside man's strength.

We experience the fullness of God's strength, power, and ability in utter human helplessness and weakness.

The state of the Christian Church requires this

kind of Godly leaders.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see the truth, draw you into the truth, and encourage and strengthen you with it.

I pray that you will walk as a child of light and not as a child of darkness.

### **Questions For Reflection and Application**

01. What “kingly” attributes does the Church see in a new pastor?
02. What kinds of activities lead us to love the world?
03. How does the world’s wisdom differ from God’s wisdom?
  - a) In Education?
  - b) In Marriage?
  - c) In Politics?
  - d) In the Church?
04. How does the Church receive the message from Jesus, the Head of the Church, regarding His wisdom?
05. How does Christ communicate His will to His Church?
06. List warning signs that a Church has acquired a king instead of a shepherd as pastor?

*Father, thank You for this setting of the people crying to Samuel for a king. It so clearly illustrates to us the forces that we see at work within those who profess to be followers of Christ today. They serve to us as a clear warning: That is not Your way. That is not how You do things.*

*Therefore, we can eliminate and reject those temptations, urgings, and promptings that we may*

*have and pursue after You and permit You to reign over us as king.*

*Teach us, Father, by Your Spirit, how to follow the King, how to hear His voice through Your Spirit, how to tell the difference, how to discern the truth.*

*There are so many voices today. Help us to hear Your voice and to follow it.*

*Father, we want to honor and glorify Your name in all that we do.*

*We will give You praise, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for what You accomplish in our lives to the glory of the Father and of his Son and of Your Holy Spirit.*

*Amen.*

## **Chapter Four**

### **False Prophets are Masters of Disguise**

You've seen them. They appear everywhere promoting the latest health solution, money-making plan, or the "newest scoop" on popular people, complete with anonymous sources. These flim flam artists fool multitudes of gullible folks every day.

Which one just caught you? The one on television with the hot air cooker? The one at the mall with the sharpest knives that cut the toughest foods like a hot knife through warm butter? Or the one that guaranteed retirement income that will last a lifetime, without any risk?

You have seen them and even succumbed to a promise too good to resist. These false prophets entice ordinary people like you and me to trust their messages. The risk-free return offer goes unused. Hardly a day passes that we do not hear the siren call of a false prophet.

False prophets even appear in the Bible, of all places. Throughout their Old Testament history, the Israelites encountered numerous false prophets.

Moses identified several of them in the Israelites' exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.

King Saul met with the witch of Endor for advice in a time of difficulty.

Soon after the successful reign of King David, the nation split into 2 smaller nations because of the influence of false prophets. which resulted in disaster after disaster.

Most of the books of the Old Testament describe the trials and hardships that the Israelites experienced because of their following false prophets. In fact,

*“The people who were honored in the Bible were the false prophets. It was the ones we call the prophets who were jailed and driven into the desert.”* (Noam Chomsky)

The Bible describes the harmful consequences upon God's people because they followed false prophets. Even as the Israelites followed false prophets to their loss God warned His people through His true prophets of the presence of evil leaders and how to identify them. His counsels went unheeded.

### **False Prophets are Masters of Disguise**

“What does that have to do with me?”, you ask. Everything. Do false Christian prophets exist today? Yes! The technological advances of our day make it easy for evil men and women to broadcast their false messages.

You have seen religious preachers on television promote their enticing messages. These speakers always encourage you to order their books and literature with appealing promises of the favorable impact these materials will have upon your life.

Sometimes they offer them free. How can you resist free, Huh? With few exceptions they deliver false messages.

The world-wide internet makes it even easier for imposters to distribute their damnable heresies.

Email messages link to their web sites and book offers. How many of these emails do you receive? I know, their offers are hard to resist.

Why do we follow false prophets? What traits separate false prophets from a true prophet of God? How can we identify them? Jesus warned that they would come.

Near the end of His famous Sermon On The Mount, He declared:

*“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matthew 7:13-20)*

#### **False prophets: their occurrence**

This warning from the Lord Jesus confirms their existence and cautions their potential harm to believers. The Lord cancels all doubt regarding their presence.

They will and do exist, and He commands His disciples to watch out for false prophets and to guard against them.

#### **False prophets: the duty of examination**

Since the Lord Jesus said, *“Beware of false*



*prophets,”* we dare not set aside that command. As followers of Christ, we have a responsibility to heed His caution for our own spiritual welfare.

According to popular error, no one has the right to examine another person, especially his/her religious beliefs. The advocates of this fallacy believe that the Bible forbids it.

They mistakenly apply Christ’s teaching at the beginning of Matthew 7 to this issue, imagining that Scripture forbids judgment.

However, a careful reading of Matthew 7.1-5 shows that Jesus did not forbid judging but instead gave direction on the manner of judging.

In fact, the Bible frequently gives guidance in Romans, 1 Corinthians, I Timothy and Revelation on how to examine others and ourselves.

We must approach it carefully, knowing that He will judge us in the same manner that we judge others.

Believers have a duty to examine those who come to them as teachers and assume church leadership positions. We must scrutinize their fruits to ensure their authenticity, so that we do not follow false prophets.

The devil’s deceits and the pressure of the world have blinded our eyes and pulled us away from that responsibility.

We must examine our leaders thoroughly, because Jesus warned us that false prophets would come. If we ignore this duty, we open the door to deceitful leadership.

### **False prophets: their deceit**

Notice that in His warning, the Lord Jesus did not refer to a blatantly wicked, evil person. Jesus

did not warn His disciples about diabolically evil men and women who blaspheme God. We recognize them.

Instead, He talked about those who purport to follow Christ. These false leaders say they follow Christ and come in His name.

They claim to follow the truths of Scripture. They declare, *“I teach you what the Bible says.”* They may even exhibit many characteristics of Christ followers.

However, we must scrutinize our leaders because counterfeit teachers, false prophets, come disguised as sheep. They look like sheep but hide their inner wolf natures.

I do not know a lot about raising sheep. But I do know that no shepherd wants a wolf in his flock. As soon as a shepherd sees a wolf in his flock, he destroys it in order to protect his sheep.

That describes the warning of Jesus. Wolves do not march into a congregation identifying themselves as wolves. They come disguised as sheep, professing to follow Christ.

Paul identified these kinds of false prophets in his day. He warned his friends in Corinth in a fashion similar to Christ’s warning:

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

When satan tempts you, he does not always come in a frightening fashion, like the picture of the red devil with the pitchfork in his hand. Sometimes

he disguises himself as good, even as an angel of light, a wolf masquerading as a sheep.

We need to evaluate teachers, pastors, televangelists, and radio hosts. We have a duty to examine them lest we follow false prophets to our spiritual harm.

### **False prophets: their discovery**

Jesus taught us how to identify false prophets. Jesus' picture of fruit provides the basis on how to recognize them. He said:

*“Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?”* (Matthew 7.16)

This is obvious isn't it? Fig trees produce figs, and thorn bushes produce thorns. Then, Jesus went on to say:

*“Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”* (Matthew 7.17)

Jesus could not have made it plainer. Good trees bring forth good fruit, not bad. Bad trees bring forth bad fruit, not good fruit.

With this simple picture Jesus gave His followers the method to discover false prophets:

*“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”* (Matthew 7.20)

The discovery of false prophets begins with the

examination of their fruit. The presence of bad fruit from a leader identifies him/her as false and does not come from God, regardless of the extent of his/her skills and abilities.

Good trees do not bring forth bad fruit. Bad trees bring forth bad fruit.

When He said that we would know false prophets, He did not say we might know them, or we could know them. He said we will know them; more literally, it means we shall fully know, without a doubt.

### **False prophets: their teachings**

A logical question follows: “What qualifies as good fruit? How can we discern the good fruit from the bad?”

This shortened list identifies crucial criteria for spiritual leaders whether man or woman.

### **What does (s)he propose as doctrinal truth?**

True Biblical doctrine includes:

- the sovereignty and transcendence of God;
- the deity of Christ and His substitutionary atonement for sinners; and
- the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible and its final, fundamental authority.

This doctrinal teaching demonstrates good fruit. If the person under examination does not hold to these basic, primary doctrinal beliefs, you should suspect a false prophet.

### **What character and nature of life does the teacher or pastor you follow reveal?**

Examine the character and nature of the life of the teacher or pastor you follow. What persistent pattern and character of his/her life do you perceive? Does (s)he exhibit a thirst for the lusts of the world, the flesh, and the devil? What prominent role do the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life play?

A check of these matters will help you to evaluate the character of this person. Remember,

*“Bad company corrupts good character.”* (1 Corinthians 15.33; *New International Version*)

### **How does this person view the world?**

- Does (s)he love the world and its standards?
- Does (s)he want to conform to the world’s behaviors?
- Does (s)he encourage you to live like the world, to conform to the world and its values to win the world?

Television and radio personalities and many authors proclaim messages that emphasize these elements.

They teach that as a Christian you can have all of the world’s goods, and they encourage you to pursue them, because you are entitled to them.

They imply that it is your right and privilege as a child of God to have all of the abundance of the world, because God loves you and wants you to

have it all.

Please note these warnings from 1 John:

*“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1 John 2:16-16)*

The wrong attitude toward the world can provide a glaring signal of bad fruit.

**What characterizes this person’s attitude toward the flesh?**

Another character issue that signals bad fruit includes a person’s attitude toward the flesh.

- What does (s)he say about the flesh?
- Does this leader purport himself or herself in a fleshly manner of life?

The Bible describes the works of the flesh and someone who lives to satisfy the passions and lusts of life.

*“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying’s,*

*murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like...*” (Galatians 5.19-21)

Following that section, it says: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is...*” The passage that follows then lists nine qualities of someone who lives under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit:

- love;
- joy;
- peace;
- longsuffering;
- gentleness;
- goodness;
- faith;
- meekness; and
- temperance.

The difference between the two lists is like night and day. At the end of that whole passage, Galatians 5.24 says:

*“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”*

Do you see the works of the flesh in the life of this person? If you do, that signals bad fruit. On the other hand, if you see the fruit of the Spirit exhibited in this person, it shows good fruit.

**Does this person indicate any influence of the devil in his/her life and ministry?**

The Scriptures describe the devil in a variety of ways. One calls him the prince of darkness.

Ephesians chapter six provides the hierarchy of the devil and all of the various powers under his power and authority.

One of them pinpoints the powers of darkness. Do the characteristics that you observe in this leader suggest to you that this person has a dark side?

John in his first epistle tells us:

*“This then is the message which we have heard of him [the Lord Jesus], and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5-7)*

Jesus said in John’s gospel,

*“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12)*

Does this person walk in the light or in darkness? Beware of one who walks in darkness, one of the fruits of false prophets.

**What kind of fruit does this leader produce in others?**

How would you describe the followers of this teacher?

- Do their lives differ in any way from the



lives of unbelievers?

- Do they show an interest in leading holy lives?
- Do they demonstrate obedience to God?
- Do they show their love for Christ?
- Do they ever acknowledge or exhibit the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives?

Fruit reproduces itself. Peach trees replicate themselves in peach trees. Thorn bushes bring forth other thorn bushes.

Examine the fruit of the followers of this leader. It will give you insight into the nature of the leader and help you avoid false prophets.

### **Does what the leader says or writes match up with Scripture?**

This suggestion comes from Isaiah.

*“When they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isaiah 8:19)*

Observe what this leader says and writes.

- Does it match up with the balance of Scripture, not just one or two verses taken out of context?
- Does it fit what the Bible teaches?

If it does not, it is because there is no light in them. These are bad trees, bad fruit, false prophets.

Godly prophets speak and write truths that conform to scripture. You can trust them.

### **False prophets: their destiny**

Jesus concluded His teaching on false prophets with an awful warning.

*“Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”* (Matthew 7:17-20)

False prophets face a certain future. Like the corrupt tree that does not bring forth good fruit and gets destroyed, so Christ at the judgment will destroy the false prophets.

Jesus described their fate in this text and also in the verses that follow it.

*“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”* (Matthew 7:21-23)

At that day, many will appear before Him, stand there, and say, *“Lord, look at all the wonderful*

*things we did in your name.”*

Jesus will say to them: *“Depart from me. I never knew you.”*

## **Implications**

False prophets profess to follow Christ and portray themselves as His sheep, even saying some of the right things and doing wonderful works in the name of Jesus.

They deceive many from their true identity, wolves in sheep’s clothing. Jesus said that we would know them by their fruit.

Faithful followers of Christ must examine their pastors, television and radio broadcasters, and authors of the books that they read. Do they reveal good fruit or bad fruit?

Upon examination we may find false prophets, whom we must reject no longer follow.

## **Questions For Reflection and Application**

01. The Bible says we should examine false prophets. What criteria should we use to scrutinize them?
02. When you suspect a person who claims the role of a Prophet of God, but is in fact an unbeliever, how can you prove it in your mind and heart?
03. Describe “good fruit” in the life and ministry of a Godly prophet.
04. Describe “bad fruit” in the life and ministry of a professing believer or false prophet.
05. List examples of good doctrine.
06. Describe a false prophet’s world view.

07. What emotional reaction do you have when you hear God say to an admired leader or to you: “Depart from me, I never knew you?”

*Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for this warning that You have left for us to beware of false prophets. We see many of them in our day. You told us they would come. You told us we would know them, that we could spot them, that we could examine them and discern the true from the false.*

*Father, as we have examined this passage of the Lord Jesus teaching us, there is so much there that only the Spirit of God can open our eyes to see all of it, to understand any of it, and to apply it as we examine and follow the advice of the Lord Jesus.*

*I pray, Father, that You would pour out Your Spirit upon each one of us individually to teach us, to open our eyes to see the truth, and to discern light from darkness, good from evil, false from true, that we might know the truth, that we might follow after the Lord Jesus.*

*We will praise you Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for what You accomplish in our lives, Amen*

## Chapter Five

### False Prophets Are Ungodly Leaders

Why do people fail? Unfortunate circumstances? Sometimes. Poor training and lack of experience? Sometimes. Lack of sufficient finances? Often.

The famous self-help book *Think and Grow Rich*, by Napoleon Hill, lists 30 reasons why people fail. His list includes these four reasons. However, he did not identify one prominent reason for failure, following faulty leaders. Following faulty leaders? Yes, many times, and more than we want to admit.

Unqualified leaders have no trouble attracting followers. I know, I fell for them often in my youth, especially professing Christian leaders. So much so that I created a policy to protect me from following the wrong people. I decided to raise a “red flag” whenever I observed a Biblically faulty trait in a leader, no matter how seemingly insignificant.

Sometimes it was a non-essential factor which would not exclude that person. But sometimes the red flags revealed a serious Biblical fault and/or they accumulated which resulted in my rejecting that leader. I continue this practice to this day. It has spared me from those who would lead me astray into sin and heresy.

Without a doubt, following faulty “Christian” leaders results in more failures than we want to admit. After all, we fall in love with those whom we follow. Since they give us what we want, we have great difficulty dismissing them. We rationalize their behavior even in extreme circumstances, turning errors into benefits.

How do you decide which Christian leaders you will follow? How many false prophets in the Church of Jesus Christ can you identify? None? One? Several? In fact, with few exceptions, false prophets inhabit every Christian congregation. They fool the unwary and gain leadership positions even as pastors in assemblies of believers by deceit, prestige, and promises.

The Bible describes many faulty leaders and the false prophets that accompany and support them. They directed their followers into disaster every time. Examples abound in every Biblical era. For instance, the times of the Kings provide clear illustrations.

After the death of King David, the Old Testament records disaster after disaster because of faulty, unGodly leaders. King Solomon started well but soon fell into debauchery and idolatry.

After his death, the Kingdom split into two separate kingdoms, the northern Kingdom and the southern Kingdom, because of the influence of false prophets. The northern Kingdom never had a Godly king and followed false prophets. This sinful pattern soon resulted in their captivity to their enemies.

The southern Kingdom had mixed leadership, but Godless kings together with sinful prophets overruled the Godly ones. They, too, ended in captivity to their adversaries.

Starting with the warnings from Christ, the New Testament alerts Christians to the presence and danger of false prophets. In that day as well as in our day, false prophets and leaders confuse people and lead their followers into sin.

The Body of Jesus Christ faces a crisis in leadership today. Many evidences confirm that false

prophets exist today. For example,

- Even a casual observer sees spiritual decline in the Church and in the lives of believers.
- Believers evade walking in holiness and conform themselves to the world.
- Preachers concentrate upon psychology and the emotional ills of mankind which turns the Bible into a psychology textbook.
- Preachers disregard theology and doctrine. The importance of Biblical doctrine has fallen into disrepute.
- Omitting the challenges and corrections of sound doctrine, pastors instead emphasize a feel-good religion centered upon humanity and emotional feelings rather than about God and His righteous demands upon us as His creation.
- Those who attempt to bring correction to the leadership of the Church today suffer condemnation as out of step, rocking the boat, creating dissension, and causing confusion in the Church.

### **False Prophets are UnGodly Leaders**

False prophets and their failures play a significant role in the spiritual decline of the congregation of the righteous. These errors grieve the Spirit of God and quench His work among Christ followers. We lack God's glorious presence, and the supernatural authority and ability that only His Spirit can bring to His people.

The Bible provides an account when the

Children of Israel followed faulty, unGodly leadership. They had fled Egypt by God's strong hand. They saw His glorious presence on Mount Sinai. Then, Moses went to meet with God and stayed there for 40 days. In his place, Moses left Aaron and Hur in charge of the people. (Exodus 24.12-15)

While Moses talked with God on the mountain, the Children of Israel down below went into idolatry. They turned aside from God Who had displayed Himself on the mount and had revealed Himself to them with His law, and in physical, tangible ways. They turned and demanded an idol.

*“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*

*And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.*

*And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up*



*out of the land of Egypt.*

*And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” (Exodus 32.1-6)*

### **Aaron dreaded man.**

Although this circumstance does not describe the totality of Aaron’s leadership, it describes how easily one can become an unGodly leader, a false prophet, even for a short time of life. Aaron displayed a dread of man.

Although Moses left both Aaron and Hur in charge when he went up the mount, the text refers only to Aaron. What happened to Hur?

The Scriptures do not describe for us what happened to Hur. However, Jewish historians describe what they believe happened to Hur. When the children of Israel rebelled and wanted to make an idol, they went to Hur first.

But, he stood up for God, refused to make their idol, and in his actions said, “No. We worship God. We will not make an idol contrary to God’s law. We will not disobey and rebel against God and form an idol.” As a result, the people killed him.

Next, they came to Aaron and gave him the same message, “Make us gods.” Aaron gave in to their demands, making the idol they demanded.

Whether this account of Hur occurred or not, Aaron displayed a dread of man. Because of his

dread of man, Aaron fell into a snare. Ultimately, he made an idol for the people, the famous Golden Calf.

**Aaron doubted God.**

Aaron showed another characteristic of false prophet's faulty, unGodly leadership: he doubted God. Aaron failed to trust Him. In those six verses describing Aaron's plans, he fails to mention God at all. He did refer to the idol as though it was God.

Prior to this occasion, Aaron participated in numerous examples of God's miraculous power alongside Moses. He was Moses' spokesman. But, as far as making any reference whatsoever to the almighty, true, and living God on this occasion, Aaron did not refer to Him.

**Aaron depended upon the world's methods.**

To satisfy the crowd, Aaron devised a plan to get gold for the idol. Then, he used his own skills and abilities to make the idol. Finally, he tried to imitate reality by calling the idol, God, as if it came into existence by miraculous means.

Throughout the whole experience of Aaron with the Golden Calf, he relied upon the world's methods and means. He simply followed the world's way of doing things, the manners and practices of the world, perhaps ones he learned in Egypt.

He doubted God. Instead, he looked upon the world's methods that would somehow solve the problem.

**Aaron departed from truth into false doctrine.**

Aaron exhibited another characteristic of a false

prophet's faulty, leadership: departure from truth into false doctrine. Towards the end of the text he declared, "Tomorrow is the feast unto the Lord. These gods brought you out of Egypt. We will worship this god."

A few commentators describe the idol as one of the many idols that the Children of Israel saw in Egypt. Aaron copied it to comfort them. Others explain the idol as an attempt by Aaron to make an image of the true God.

In either case, like all false prophets, Aaron led the people into false doctrine in their disobedient worship of the idol.

### **Aaron displaced the truth for the sake of peace.**

Aaron wanted peace at any price, even when it required that he sacrifice the truth about God. He wanted unity, not contention and strife. Therefore, Aaron set aside the truth to avoid controversy.

However, neither peace nor unity resulted. Instead, the Children of Israel fell into debauchery. They made a mockery of worshiping God, giving glory to a dumb idol.

The peace that Aaron sought turned into chaos and riot.

### **What Purpose Did These Events Afford For The Children Of Israel?**

Prior to the people's demand for an idol, God revealed to the Children of Israel His demands upon them. Since God redeemed them out of Egypt, He asserted His rightful status above them. Genesis 20.1-17 records the 10 commandments that God

required of them.

**God commanded Israel to have no other Gods except Him. (Genesis 20.1-3)**

In making the Golden Calf, Aaron and the people denied the exclusivity of God. God Who delivered them from Egypt and Who revealed Himself to them in miraculous ways now demanded His sole status as their God.

He required the Children of Israel to reject all other gods including the ones they saw the Egyptians worship.

They must worship Him and Him alone.

**God commanded Israel not to make any images of worship nor to bow down to them. (Genesis 20.4-6)**

When Aaron made the Calf for the Children of Israel to worship, he violated not just the first commandment, but also the second commandment. God decreed that they not make an idol in the form of any of God's creatures: neither animals, flying creatures, nor creatures in the waters.

In obvious disobedience, Aaron made a likeness of a cow. The fact that he made it of gold did not somehow make it acceptable.

This command included a warning of long-lasting judgment upon Israel's children, the children's children, and unto the third and fourth generation. In fact, Biblical scholars describe the punishing plague that God sent upon them for their disobedience as lasting for generations.

When Aaron made the Golden Calf to meet the people's demands, he facilitated their disobedience of the first two commands which led to God's

judgment upon them.

What purpose did these events have for Israel?

- It reminded them of God's exclusive claim upon them. He demanded that they worship and revere Him to the exclusion of all other gods.
- No mere replica of one of God's creations could ever reveal the totality of God and thus become worthy of worship.
- Further, God used this occasion to teach them the danger(s) of following unGodly leaders, false prophets, who will lead them astray from His commands into sin.

## **Correlation**

At first glance, you may doubt that any correlation exists between then and now. Our “enlightened” times entice us to think that we surpass those days. Today’s technological and educational advances have transformed our world in significant ways beyond the days of Aaron.

However, we share similar dangers from the rise of unGodly leaders. In fact, with few exceptions, false prophets inhabit every Christian congregation. They fool the unwary and gain leadership positions even as pastors in assemblies of believers by deceit, prestige, and promises.

How do you decide which Christian leaders you will follow? How many false prophets in the Church of Jesus Christ can you identify? None?

One? Several?

**False prophets dread man.**

Like Aaron, they fear mankind and adopt practices to relieve that fear. Fear of man appears in different forms:

- **a physical fear**, where we fear for our very lives. We dread that some kind of physical harm could come to us, perhaps even death. That is a very real kind of fear. Perhaps Aaron felt this kind of fear.
- **an emotional, psychological fear**, prevalent in the Body of Christ today. It reveals itself in this fashion. Our leaders today, like false prophets, display a fear of man that causes them to give in to mankind's demands because they do not want to lose friendships or families from the congregation. They want a crowd, so they will yield whenever they need to yield in order to encourage people to stay and visitors to come.
- **A conformity to culture**. Too often Christian congregations yield to the siren call of culture out of fear. In a misguided belief, unGodly leaders adopt the fallacy that to win unbelievers to Christ requires compliance with the culture. These influencers fear culture's influence upon people and modify the gospel to suit the world's impact.

The Scriptures remind us,

*“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” (Proverbs 29.25)*

False prophets display a fear of man which affects their leadership and leads them into unGodly ways. The dread of man has reared its ugly head. That describes a very real, common experience in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

**Like Aaron, false prophets doubt God.**

The Scriptures tell us frequently that when we rest upon the arm of the flesh we sin against God, doubting Him. God reminded His children of this truth in Isaiah 31,

*“Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help.” (Isaiah 31.1)*

In Scripture, Egypt always pictures the world and the flesh. “Don’t go down to Egypt for help,” He said. “They have horses, yes. They have manpower, yes.” However, God in essence said, “I am your defender. I am your protector. I am your provider. Trust me.”

Trust in God demands that we seek Him. Perhaps you, like many people today, emulate the Church and false prophets that pay lip service to seeking after God. We start all of our services and meetings with prayer. After all, this is a church function, and we should pray.

Therefore, we give God His due, almost like a pledge of allegiance to the flag. We will say our one or two minutes of prayer, which describes lip service. God told His people to seek Him with all

their hearts:

*“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”*  
(Jeremiah 29.13)

To trust God and to find His presence and plans, we must seek for Him with all of our hearts. God does not reveal Himself to the flippant. He reveals Himself to the sincere in heart, those who come to Him seeking Him with all of their hearts.

False prophets reveal their unbelief when they fail to take time to seek God for themselves and on behalf of those whom they lead.

**False prophets depend upon the world’s methods.**

Aaron’s solution to the demands of Israel followed the world’s pattern. Come up with an exciting plan, convince the people to accept it, then they will give to make it happen. It worked, but God was not in it.

Like Aaron, false prophets trust the world’s methods when they emphasize worldly schemes in place of Godly measures. They develop their plans according to the world’s patterns. They leave God out of the picture, and that describes Aaron’s sin.

Thus, they lead Christ’s followers to trust the ways and means of the world. They think that if it works in the world, it will work for the Church. As a result, we follow these false prophets and adopt the world’s practices.

Then, we ask God to bless our efforts, and attempt to give God the glory. When it works, we attempt to give God glory for our success. But, at no



point do we truly trust God and seek His will and purpose. As a result, God did not/does not bless methods that He did not/does not order.

False prophets stress the world's methods without seeking God's plan(s) and purpose(s).

**False prophets depart from truth into false doctrine.**

Aaron erred when he taught Israel that the Golden Calf depicted the god that brought them out of Egypt. His delusion led them astray into sin and God's judgment.

False prophets today follow the same pattern. It often begins when they water down the truth so that they might appeal to the crowd. They fear that if they stand for the truth, they will offend people. Then, people will leave, because they dislike the preacher and his messages. They will not respond to him.

This fear causes false prophets to set aside the truth. Instead, they cater to mankind because of fear, and they want to satisfy the crowd instead of God.

Today, many church leaders display this clear sign of an unGodly, false prophet. They fail to adhere to God's truth, giving way to popular, but unbiblical false doctrines.

**Like Aaron, false prophets displace the truth for the sake of peace.**

Today, false prophets lead Christians into false doctrines in the same fashion as Aaron did. They push for peace at any price, even if it means sacrificing the truth. Many leaders push for unity and want it so badly that they set aside truth to get

it. We do not want contention and strife.

Therefore, we set aside the truth to avoid controversy and contention. However, neither unity nor peace occurs. It is merely a cessation of strife. When you set aside the truth, you lose the basis for unity and true peace, which rests upon the truth.

Righteous ends do not sanctify nor make holy unGodly means to attain them. Scripture shows that Jesus did not make peace at any price. In fact, He often brought division among people by inserting the truth.

Jesus said,

*“I came not to send peace, but a sword.”*  
(Matthew 10.34)

The Lord Jesus demands the truth. Granted, the search for the truth and insistence upon it might bring temporary discomfort. However, God’s truth ultimately brings freedom, peace, and unity based and founded upon the truth, not a false foundation of peace at any price.

The Scriptures confirm this certainty. The Lord Jesus warned His disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees, the false prophets of His day, talking about their false doctrine. He said,

*“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.”*  
(Matthew 16.6)

The false doctrines of the Pharisees infected the whole culture of Christ’s day. He did not cater to it. Instead, He declared the truth, even when it meant that the crowds left Him. (John 6.66)

False prophets disregard doctrinal truth and

replace it with popular but unbiblical commentary that they vainly believe will promote peace.

## **Implications**

Because he dreaded man, Aaron satisfied the cries of the Israelites by following the world's methods. His doubt led him to fail to trust God. His departure from the truth caused him to take a further step from God when he fashioned an idol for them to worship.

Our text reveals a clear picture of false prophets and their faulty, ungodly leadership, which brought about the horrible circumstances of Israel and the Golden Calf. Aaron's faulty leadership permitted it to happen and contributed to it.

The Body of Jesus Christ today is satisfied with an Aaron, an unGodly false prophet. Believers want someone who will give them what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear. Therefore, they suffer.

The intrusion of false prophets and their false doctrines into the Church requires Christ followers to reject them and their insidious errors.

In His letter to the Church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, Christ praised the Ephesians, because they put out those from among them who followed error and false doctrine. They stood for the truth and received commendation for it.

Later in that same chapter, the Lord Jesus pronounced judgment upon the Church of Thyatira. They permitted false doctrine to exist within the Church. God does not want peace at any price. He wants the truth first. Then, unity and peace will come as consequences of the truth.

That, however, runs contrary to the Church today. Following the lead of false prophets, we want peace and unity at any price. We even call those who demand the truth troublemakers. Instead of welcoming those who stand for the truth, we often times want to remove *them* out of the congregation instead of rejecting the false prophets and their ruinous doctrines.

If you have done any baking, you know the effect of a small amount of yeast. When you put yeast—just a very small amount of yeast—into a baking recipe, it affects the whole recipe. And it doesn't take very much.

The Scriptures warn us that a little leaven, a little false doctrine, leavens the whole loaf. When we permit false doctrine to permeate the congregation, it affects the whole body. Following false doctrine evidences the presence of false prophets in leadership.

The book of Jude calls Christ followers to contend earnestly for the truth. (Jude 3) We must stand up for the truths of God's Word and resist false doctrine.

Further, the Scriptures tell us that we are to speak the truth in love, not anger, or contention. Rather we stand for the truth in love, demanding that our leaders speak the truth. We must hold Church leaders accountable as God holds them accountable to the truth. We must require them to teach us the truth, calling to their attention their failure to lead us into the truth.

The Church of Jesus Christ must reject false prophets and follow godly leaders, without dread for man, who trust God, and who will lead us and guide us into the truth. The Church must avoid false

prophets and choose leaders who will tell the truth and minister God's truth with love.

We can learn from Israel's failure how to spot false prophets and refuse to follow them.

### **Questions For Reflection and Application**

01. What prompts false prophets in the present Church to challenge believers today? Why do they do that?
02. Aaron displayed a dread of man when the people of Israel demanded an idol. Have you ever experienced fear of man in a church setting? How did you deal with it?
03. At this time, Aaron also failed to trust and believe God. Most believers experience doubt at some time in their spiritual journey. What do you do when you when your faith is weak?
04. Spiritual leaders face many problems and temptations. What can you do to encourage your pastor to trust in God?
05. What do you think is the role of the love of money in relation to false doctrine taught by false prophets.
06. If the church's desire for peace and unity is leading to false doctrine, what should believers do? How can they demonstrate love without compromise?

*Dear Heavenly Father, Open our eyes to see the unGodly leaders that we admire and follow. Grant us discernment and the desire to flee from these false prophets.*

*May we seek your Face. May we search for your plan and purpose with all our hearts. Amen*

## **Chapter Six**

### **False Prophets Can Be Identified**

No segment of our society boasts more false prophets than politics. You hear them. Commonly called pundits and politicians, they abound. Every day these false prophets predict the rise and fall of people and policies that affect you and me.

The world of sports possesses nearly as many false prophets as politics. Sportswriters and sports' broadcasters, or false prophets, predict the winners, losers, and point differentials of every sport imaginable.

The news media garners its share of false prophets, too. Their predictions fill print publications, broadcasts, and the internet. They predict everything in our society by manipulating reports of events to their satisfaction in the attempt to dictate future events according to their agendas.

False prophets in almost every area of life gather followers who esteem them. It seems that the wilder these provocateurs' proclamations, often based upon nothing more than imagination, the more they enhance their popularity. Their presence has increased to significant numbers today.

False prophets within Christianity flourish, too. Their numbers swell to include pastors as well as denominational leaders. Even conservative groups, previously immune to such leadership errors, now boast of their "adaptation" to culture by implementing "trailblazers who will lead the Church into the new century."

Popular authors and speakers shape our doctrinal positions and ministry emphases more

increasingly in line with cultural beliefs at the expense of Biblical truth. Apparently, the Bible does not sell.

Now, false prophets even preside over seminaries that train the next group of leaders. We have reached a sad day so that when you or your local congregation search for a leader from a professing Christian seminary, you take the risk of finding a false prophet.

The subtle yet significant spiritual decline of Christian congregations, perhaps even a description of your spiritual life, develops under the evil influences of false prophets.

The stories of religious false prophets pervade the pages of the Bible, too. During the time of God's anointed prophet, Jeremiah, Israel progressed deeply into sin, rejecting God's laws.

God called Jeremiah to ministry during the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Josiah, the 14<sup>th</sup> King of Judah. (Jeremiah 1.2) Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh, led Judah into great wickedness. The evil that he established exceeded the evil abominations of the nations that God drove from the Promised Land under Joshua. (2 Kings 21.2) The discovery of the Law of God in the Temple during Josiah's sovereignty did not occur until the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his rule. (2 Kings 22.3-8)

In chapter five of his book, Jeremiah recounts the injustice, hypocrisy, idolatry, and adultery present in Judah. These conditions, which began under the reign of King Manasseh, existed at the time Jeremiah began to prophesy.

At the close of Jeremiah 5, the prophet identified the underlying cause of the people's wicked condition:

*“The prophets prophesy  
falsely...”* (Jeremiah 5.31)

The false prophets and priests of Jeremiah’s day fostered the spiritual decline of Israel. As Jeremiah bewailed the spiritual condition of Israel, he described the characteristics of the false prophets that furthered it.

### **Characteristics Of False Prophets**

#### **False prophets declared a false message.**

When they said, “God said,” they lied. They spoke their own messages. Further, when the priests failed to correct the prophets, the priests gained support from the prophets for their lavish, wicked lifestyles. Moreover, the people loved it that way. (Jeremiah 5.31)

#### **False prophets derided God's word.**

The shameful practices of Israel’s leaders resulted in the people viewing God’s word to them with derision. (Jeremiah 6.10) When God spoke to them through His prophets, the Israelites rebelled against Him and departed from His word without fear. Every level of society, rich and poor, defied God. His warnings fell on deaf ears and hard hearts.

They had no interest in God’s word. They traded God’s word for the messages of the false prophets and priests. Naturally, this brought about a dearth of the knowledge of God. Doubt and unbelief followed.

#### **False prophets desired possessions.**



Jeremiah 6.13 identifies another characteristic of the false prophets, the desire for possessions. The false prophets of Jeremiah's era loved money and sought positions of prominence. Their unbounded indulgences of the flesh drove them to dishonesty.

Their sin infected everyone, from the poorest to the richest, so that covetousness contaminated their whole society. No one denied his or her own selfish interests.

**False prophets disregarded their duties.**

False prophets in Jeremiah's day disregarded their duties. Verse 14 of Jeremiah 6 talks about healing the hurt of God's people slightly.

Imagine a physician treating someone with a broken bone piercing through flesh. Rather than taking the time and effort to set the bone straight, this doctor merely wraps it and puts a band-aid on the injury.

This is an appalling thought, isn't it? Instead of really fixing the hurt, he just patches it up and hopes it heals a little.

As inexcusable as this sounds, it describes how the false prophets in Jeremiah's era treated the spiritual ills of Israel. They made no attempt to apply God's word to the people, which would bring healing to the spiritually suffering. Instead, they pronounced false messages to them.

**False prophets declared a false peace.**

In addition, God accused the false prophets and priests of saying, "Peace, peace," when no peace existed. (Jeremiah 6.14) The priests and prophets attempted to cover up their failures by proclaiming that everything was good enough.

But God said that no peace existed despite the declarations of Israel's leaders. Their problems underwent only a slight repair.

Scripture records in other instances where God warned the leaders of Israel of their similar failures to address the true problems of His people.

- Jeremiah 23: God likened the false prophets and priests to shepherds who scatter and destroy their sheep.
- Ezekiel 34: God described them as shepherds who fed and cared for themselves but left the diseased and broken sheep without care.

The false prophets of Jeremiah's day declared peace when none existed.

#### **False prophets defied God's ways.**

When God chastised these false leaders, who had forsaken God's ways for their sinful acts, they responded with defiance. They experienced no shame for their sins. In fact, when their behavior failed to bring satisfactory results, they felt no disappointment or perplexity for their failures nor did any sense of humiliation lead them to repentance. They did not even blush. (Jeremiah 6.15)

#### **False prophets denied God's ways.**

The errant prophets and priests of Jeremiah's day showed their true colors by a denial of God's ways. In Jeremiah 6.16-17, God instructed them through Jeremiah to return to the old ways and walk in them, but they rejected His demands.

In addition, they refused to heed the warnings of the watchmen He sent to warn them. They refused to walk in God's way.

### **Why Did God Include This Story To The People Of Judah?**

God sent Jeremiah to prophesy to Judah of their wickedness and danger of judgment. God had warned His chosen people that if they deserted His commands, He would punish them through their enemies who would enslave them. God said He would become their enemy, remove them from their land, and scatter them among the nations. (Leviticus 26.14-39)

But God also promised them that if they repented of their sins, He would remember His covenant with them in their favor. (Leviticus 26.40-45)

Through Jeremiah, God reminded them of His promise of judgment and His determination to judge them for their wickedness. (Jeremiah 6.18)

### **Correlation**

Similarities abound between the times of Jeremiah and our present circumstances. False prophets within Christianity flourish, too. False prophets thrive with their deceitful messages. They permeate all levels of Christian communities:

- pastors;
- denominational leaders;
- authors;

- seminaries and “Christian” colleges and training schools;
- TV personalities; even
- Sunday School teachers.

They disseminate unbiblical theories that conform to the culture about us, not the Bible. They reject the authority and truths of the Bible, proclaiming false doctrines instead. Biblical truth is not popular. One preacher told me to avoid the Bible's negatives...preach a “positive” message.

These deceitful merchants of heresies “pastor” the largest churches, produce the most popular TV programs, and sell the most books.

Sadly, the subtle yet significant spiritual decline of Christian congregations, perhaps even a description of your spiritual life, develops under the evil influences of these false prophets.

**False prophets declare a false message.**

False prophets abound today with their deceitful messages. They void previously sacred, Biblical doctrines:

- doctrines of salvation;
- the sinfulness of humanity;
- the authority of the Scriptures; and
- the nature of God.

These represent only a short list of the doctrines they avoid in order to please people. Their disregard for truth has made their preaching a sham.

In similar fashion to Jeremiah’s day, pastors and Church leaders today defend their erroneous beliefs

for financial gain. They gain authority by the influence of human effort. Like Jeremiah's day, the Church seems to approve and applaud them.

Scores of people find satisfaction and security in these fallacies. Countless Church members cannot discern the difference between the true and the false.

Many who call themselves followers of Christ do not want to hear the truth. They would rather hear stories and problem-solving techniques than messages on sin and the great doctrinal truths of Scripture. They have an aversion to sermons on the Lord Jesus, the holiness of God, and His demands upon them.

To satisfy their desires they look for teachers who will make them feel good. These erroneous endorsements further encourage the deceptive prophets to continue their sinful ways. (2 Timothy 4.3-4)

#### **False prophets deride God's word.**

In our day, we reflect the same attitude as Jeremiah's day, but in a different fashion. We have replaced reliance upon God's word with cheap imitations to instruct and guide us in our lives:

- books;
- retreats; and
- seminars.

Without exception, when people consult me with problems in their lives, they ask me to recommend a good book that will help them. I do not reject books. I read them, but with caution. Persuasive false prophets urge us to buy their

publications and attend their meetings, with glowing promises that offer solutions to all of life's problems.

A friend of mine shared this experience with me. As a young man, new to the realities of life in Christ, he went to the one whom God had used to introduce him to these truths and asked him for a good book to read.

After some deliberation, the man's teacher wisely replied, "I recommend a book that usually comes in a black leather cover entitled, 'The Holy Bible.'"

The mere writings of man cannot replace the Bible, God's self-revelation and His word to humanity. He provided all that we need for life and godliness in its pages. Further, His words are alive. The writings of Godly men and women can help us, but nothing can replace God's word.

God has not promised to authenticate man's writings, but He has given the Holy Spirit to illuminate our minds to understand His word and its role in our lives.

As disciples of Christ, we must return to God's word and let the Holy Spirit instruct and edify us that we may grow in Christ.

### **False prophets desire possessions.**

As in Jeremiah's day, this characteristic helps identify false prophets today. No doubt, you observe distinctive and well-known preachers on television and hear them on the radio. Have you noticed how many of them, almost without exception, urge you to prove your devotion to God by sending money to them?

It is interesting that they insist on money; no

other demonstration of devotion to God will suffice, e.g., service or volunteer work. Further, these teachers entreat people to give money to *them*, not your local congregation, as proof of your devotion to God.

Then, they “prove” God's goodness to them with their lavish lifestyles, bought and paid for with your “gifts to God.” Such practices have become common in the Church today.

**False prophets disregard their duties.**

A legitimate spiritual leader, or prophet of God, demonstrates to God's people how to cleanse their hearts, eradicate sin, and set straight their errors in order for the Church to be healthy and strong.

The spiritual ills of God's people require attention. No simple message or notice suffices. More often than not, pastors in our day view their “calling” or “ministry” only to preach, mostly one sermon a week. They relegate to others the attention that the hurting lambs in their congregation require, shirking their duties as pastors.

I remember the long hours that my father and father-in-law spent in their responsibilities. Both of them ministered to large congregations. But both of them:

- preached 3 times a week plus the study time necessary for preparation;
- taught a Sunday School Class;
- organized an evening calling night, working with members of their congregations on home visits to visitors and the unfaithful attenders;

- called on potential new visitors;
- visited the ill in the hospital; and
- counseled troubled members.

I know of one pastor presently who fulfills all of these responsibilities. One!

As inexcusable as this sounds, it describes how the false prophets in Jeremiah's era treated the spiritual ills of Israel.

They made no attempt to apply God's word to the people, which would bring healing to the spiritually suffering. Instead, they pronounced false messages to them.

This same, sad example repeats in our day.

### **False prophets declare a false peace.**

Today, many pastors and teachers follow the same pattern. They proclaim the same message: "Peace, peace. Everything is successful. There are no problems here."

By avoiding the emphasis upon sound doctrine, God's people have become spiritually sick and malformed. Seldom do you hear a pastor, or preacher over television or radio point out sin and call for repentance and reformation of life in conformity to God's demands.

They heal the wounds of God's people only slightly, providing false help and hope. As in Jeremiah's day, this deceit fails to minister to the real hurts of God's people.

### **False prophets defy God's ways.**

As in Jeremiah's day, this same characteristic helps to identify corrupt leadership today. They indulge their appetites for money and possessions as



if they deserve them. They defend their practices by misusing Scripture.

When their sin finds them out, they make mournful excuses for their behavior and strike repentant poses while continuing their lifestyles. They reveal a disinterest in correction and repentance.

Many defend themselves with the mantra, “The ends justify the means,” as if stated spiritual aims can justify evil practices. They can’t and don’t.

### **False prophets deny God's ways.**

In our day, pastors, and popular television and radio teachers prefer the world’s methods to God’s ways. In their quest for crowds, they adopt worldly schemes that contradict God’s word.

They teach that “our new times” demand conformity to the mores of our culture in order to reach the current populace. They reject the old ways of God and replace them with tactics from business and politics. Calls for reform from Godly leaders who preach a return to Biblical teaching go unheeded.

Some say, “That example from Jeremiah is Old Testament. That doesn’t have anything to do with us.” To a certain extent that is true. We are studying Old Testament Scripture where God dealt specifically with the sins of Israel and of Judah at the time.

He pointed out how the priests, prophets, and kings:

- failed to seek God;
- led the people astray; and
- set up idols to worship.

But God has not changed. He observes the same failures present today. The abundance of false prophets today and the masses who follow them describe the woeful spiritual condition of God's people.

We take God's mercy and longsuffering as approval, to our loss. God does not approve of our wickedness any more than He did in Jeremiah's day.

## **Implications**

### **God will judge false prophets.**

Although this prophecy pertains specifically to a time in the history of Israel, it gives us a glimpse into the heart and mind of God. He will judge the false prophets and Church leaders of our day just as He did then.

- He will not long endure the foolishness that is going on presently in the Church.
- He is not smiling and patting the heads of the pastors and teachers of our day who abuse the sheep.
- He is the same today as He was back then.

God will hold accountable the false teachers, pastors, and spiritual leaders of our day for their sins. They have led people astray and refused to repent of their sinful behavior. They have not healed the hurts of God's people, and He will judge them.

### **God will replace them.**

As this story from Jeremiah unfolded, it describes the present condition of the Church of Jesus Christ, too. The Church today desperately needs spiritual revival.

A few years ago, I talked with a pastor of a large church who spoke casually about revival. He said, “I have read a couple of books on revival, isn’t it interesting?” Then he asked me “Why do you think we do not see revival?”

I responded, “The pastors of our day do not want to make the sacrifices necessary for revival to come.”

He turned his head a little bit and moved the discussion to another topic. It takes sacrifice to stand up for the truth.

The day will come when God will remove the false prophets from the Church. He will raise up shepherds who will feed the sheep and not themselves, who will fully heal the hurts of people. They will take care of believers and seek after the lost, too.

I yearn for the day when He will install true shepherds in their places. It will mark a day of revival.

### **Questions For Reflection And Application**

01. What dangers arise from believing false prophets in the political or sports arenas?
02. What dangers arise from believing false prophets in the spiritual realm?
03. Why do false prophets fool professing believers so easily?
04. Review these signs of a false prophet,

examining them against a current spiritual leader.

- a) Does (s)he declare a false message? Can you find Biblical support for what (s)he says?
- b) Does (s)he minimize the value of reading and studying the Word of God?
- c) Does (s)he desire money and want to appear prosperous?
- d) Does (s)he fail to fulfill expected duties of a spiritual leader?
- e) Does (s)he seem to pretend that “everything is all right” when it clearly is not?
- f) Does (s)he tolerate sin? Does (s)he skip God’s demand for repentance?
- g) Does (s)he practice worldly methods to accomplish God’s purposes?

*Dear Heavenly Father, we face a crisis in the Church today. Its believers follow in the footsteps of the false prophets of Jeremiah’s day. I pray for mercy. I ask You to dethrone the false leaders and raise up those who seek after You and Your ways. I make these requests in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

## **Chapter Seven**

### **False Prophets Do Not Know The Lord**

*“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” (George Santayana)*

Bill Gates modified it:

*“It is fine to celebrate success, but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure.”*

Many have said it, but it bears repeating: those who fail to learn from history repeat it. Scores of failures litter the pages of history because of their failures to learn from the past. We have not changed since the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden in Eden.

Despite familiarity of this truth, like Adam and Eve and all their progeny, we continue to follow the siren call of those who promise much but do not deliver on their promises. Countless people have failed to learn from the past and follow false prophets to their calamity.

The Bible offers numerous warnings against following *false prophets*. It gives vivid examples of them to confirm God's warnings against false teachers and illustrates their characteristics. The story of Eli and his two sons provides one of those pictures. (1 Samuel 2.12-3.1)

#### **Hophni and Phinehas did not know the Lord.**

Eli served as high priest over Israel following the era after the judges and before Israel's first king, Saul. He had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who

served with him as priests in the Temple. Their stories indicate their true natures which led to their ultimate failures as spiritual leaders of Israel.

*“Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.” (1 Samuel 2.12)*

This word “knew” has two different meanings.

- One expresses factual knowledge, e.g., book knowledge, understanding, or some kind of insight into a subject. You can recite information about different matters with some degree of mental acuity, and a level of intelligence. With this knowledge, acquired by observation and reflection, you can say, “I know it.”
- Another meaning depicts an intimate, personal relationship with a person, an intimacy of knowledge by experience, a fellowship. This denotation defines “knew” in this verse. Hophni and Phinehas lacked this category of knowledge of God. They had no intimate, experiential knowledge of Him.

The first kind of factual knowledge does not define the kind of knowledge meant by “knew” in this verse. In fact, the second definition describes it.

Therefore, Hophni and Phinehas did not know the Lord. They may have known some facts about Him, e.g.:

- God’s appearing on the mount to speak to Moses, and give him the law;
- God’s bringing the Children of Israel out

of Egypt, across the Red Sea, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land.

They could tell some things about God, but they did not experience a personal knowledge of Him. They did not truly worship or obey God. The text calls them sons of Belial, worthless, evil, unGodly. (*Strong's Concordance*)

### **Hophni and Phinehas abhorred the Lord's offerings.**

In violation of God's decree, Hophni and Phinehas had utter disregard for the law of God as well as for the people offering sacrifices. They dishonored, abhorred the Lord's sacrifices and failed in their responsibilities before God. (1 Samuel 2.17)

Hophni and Phinehas violated these requirements as given by God to Moses.

- They demanded their portions prior to sacrifices. (1 Samuel 2.13-15)
- They stole parts of the sacrifices for themselves after they completed them. (1 Samuel 2.16)

Eli's sons disobeyed God's word in the manner of the sacrifices that the people offered. God stipulated the acceptable offerings, the sequence of the offering, as well as the portion of the offering reserved for the priests after the completion of the sacrifice. No wonder God judged them for their sins.

### **Hophni and Phinehas adopted an entitlement**

**attitude.**

Eli's sons saw their offering of the sacrifices as an opportunity to satisfy their shameless desires with gratification of luxury. They took more of the sacrifices for themselves than God's law stipulated. They demanded the choicest portions of animals before completing the actual sacrifice of the animals.

It became a common practice of Eli's sons. They demanded their portions and even excess for their own pleasure.

Hophni and Phinehas esteemed themselves above the people whom they served. They satisfied their own lusts without regard for God's law. Eli's sons gratified their cravings as fitting for their positions, which led to their failure.

**Hophni and Phinehas indulged in debauchery and sexual immorality.**

Up to this point in the story of Eli's sons, their disregard for time to know God, their neglect of God, and their disobedience of God's law qualified them for destruction. Yet, their wickedness does not end with these crucial failures.

The Bible expands the depth of their sinfulness:

*“Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.” (1 Samuel 2.22)*

In that day, the women helped in the Temple, cleaning, sorting, organizing, and helping the priests. Some came to pray and worship. We read



about Anna the prophetess who was in the Temple when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to complete the law of circumcision and to present Him to the Lord according to the Law. She is one who came to the temple to serve, honor, and worship God.

Eli's sons used their positions to take advantage of these women and abuse them sexually. Their sexual immorality became common knowledge among the people of Israel. Hophni and Phinehas lost the respect of those who brought their offerings to God at the Temple. Eli's sons failed long before their demise.

### **Hophni and Phinehas disdained discipline.**

After Eli heard some of the stories and reports that came back to him of his sons' behavior, he said to them:

*“Why do you do such things, for I hear of your evil dealings by all the people? Nay, my sons, it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another the judge shall judge him, but if a man sin against the Lord who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father.” (1 Samuel 2.23-25)*

When Eli questioned his sons, they responded with disdain for discipline. They did not care for their father's warnings and rejected his attempts to correct them. In so doing, they disregarded God's Law and His rule over them.

Eli had let his sons function as a law unto themselves in their roles as priests. He had become

ineffective as a High Priest and as a father. He lacked moral authority to enforce Biblical practice upon his sons. They rejected their father's warnings and correction, hastening toward failure.

They ignored the impact of their behavior upon others and rejected the messages of those who attempted to correct them

### **Hophni and Phinehas furthered the dearth of the word of the Lord.**

1 Samuel 3 begins the story of Samuel's residence in the Temple with Eli, the High Priest. Samuel's dwelling with Eli resulted from his mother's prayer for a son and her promises to give that son to God.

*“And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.”* (1 Samuel 1.1-2.11)

The dearth of the word of the Lord describes these different conditions fostered by *Eli's sons*.

- **dearth of the word Of God: scarcity**

When it says that the *“word of the Lord was precious in those days,”* it literally means scarce. Scarcity of something helps to determine its value. For example, people all over the world view gold as a precious commodity. They do so because of its scarcity and high quality.

In Eli's day, he and his sons deprived the Children of Israel of God's word. In fact, they disobeyed it with impunity.

They failed to propagate God's word, and it became scarce and of little value to the priests and the people.

As a result of their sinful behavior, the Children of Israel experienced the deprivation of God's Word to them. The void of the life-giving sustenance of God's word brings certain failure.

- **dearth of the word of God: a lack of vision**

Because Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas deprived the people of God's word, the people did not have any open vision to guide them. The revelation of God and His purposes for His people came from the spiritual leaders to whom God gives a vision of His plans and purposes.

No one stood up and said, "*Thus saith the Lord. Go this way.*" This dire circumstance followed the failed leadership of Eli and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas.

## **God's Purpose For Israel With This Story**

God instituted the Priesthood for Israel as the means by which He would teach Israel His precepts. As priests, they had the sole right to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people of Israel for their sins. The priests held a sacred position with God as intermediaries between God and mankind.

Therefore, God could not give Eli and his sons a pass on their sinful behavior. God did judge them severely as described in 1 Samuel 2.27-36.

This story served as a warning to priests. It alerted them of their sacred duties and of God's demands upon them. God prescribed exactly how to offer each sacrifice to make it effective before God.

He made forethought for the priests from the sacrifices of His people. The priests would receive some of the sacrifices as part of their provision.

They held a holy position that required holy lives of the priests. God would hold them responsible for their obedient practice of the sacrifices on behalf of Israel's people. God would not view disobedient priests as guiltless and would judge them for their disobedience and sexual immorality.

The story also warned of the effects of unGodly leadership upon the people of Israel. The people suffered because of Eli's and his sons' disobedience. Israel suffered the consequences of the dearth of God's word. His word to them became scarce, and the people lacked Godly vision.

God used this story to identify the seriousness of spiritual leadership among His people. Those endowed with this privilege must understand their responsibilities before God and to those whom God places under their care. Serious consequences result from either failure.

### **Correlation**

You and I share similarities in our day to the story of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas. Like them, false teachers occupy leadership positions among God's people today. We can use the wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas as criteria to help us identify false spiritual leaders in our day. Therefore, we can

benefit from their failures and not repeat them.

**False prophets do not know the Lord.**

The example of Hophni and Phinehas warns Christ followers of those in authority in the Church of Jesus Christ who do not know God. These acclaimed leaders may know about God, can describe facts about Him, and recount stories from the Bible about Him.

But, they do not know Him in an intimate, personal manner. The priorities and practices of *false prophets* reveal it. Like Eli's sons, whose behavior disproved a sincere heart for God, they spend little if any time in intimate fellowship with God.

Further, the content of their preaching and teaching, their programs and policies for the people they lead, as well as the absence of the unction of the Holy Spirit upon them confirms their lack of knowledge of God. They do not know Him. One cannot teach what one has not experienced.

**False prophets disobey God's word.**

Today's ministers do not make offerings on behalf of God's people. That practice ceased with the advent of the New Covenant in Christ. However, by their disobedience to God's law in the manner in which they executed their obligations, Hophni and Phinehas showed contempt for the sacrificial offerings that God commanded.

Disobedience to God's word has become a common practice among false teachers today. I mention just three important examples.

- False prophets avoid the demand of a

changed life as the effect of saving faith in Christ. They reject a popular emphasis upon the role of works in salvation. Granted, no one can achieve salvation by good works. True saving faith in Christ produces a changed life.

*“Faith without works is dead.”* (James 2.26)

*“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5.17)

*“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* (Ephesians 2.10)

A changed life proves that someone has become a child of God. False prophets evade this demand of God's word.

- False teachers avoid the demand for repentance. Christ taught sinners to repent and believe the gospel. (Mark 1.15) Repentance means to turn from one direction to go in the opposite way. Repentance corresponds with the demand for a changed life. Christ demands repentance: turning from self-reliance and sin to trust Him for salvation from sin unto a new life.

False teachers fail to demand repentance

as God's word commands.

- False prophets avoid the demand for personal holiness. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount the necessity of righteousness. (Matthew 5.20) This Sermon illustrated numerous areas where Christ commanded personal holiness.

In addition, the balance of the New Testament teaches the commands of personal holiness in believers in Christ:

- to become servants to righteousness unto holiness (Romans 6.19);
- to cleanse their lives from sinfulness unto holiness (2 Corinthians 7.1);  
and
- to follow not uncleanness but holiness (1 Thessalonians 4.7);

The demand for personal holiness, without which no man shall see God, embodies these three areas in which false prophets today disobey God's word. (Hebrews 12.14) They fail to emphasize them in their proclamations in disobedience to God's demands.

**False prophets adopt an attitude of entitlement.**

Similar to Hophni and Phinehas, an **attitude** of entitlement exists among false teachers today. Contrary to Christ's command of humble service, these *false prophets* believe they deserve special treatment because of their positions.

- They demand and enjoy lives of luxury.
- They command sizeable salaries and spend Church funds on expensive vehicles and palatial homes.
- Their opulent clothing and life styles draw attention to their pride.

Often, they claim a special authority and anointing from God for them to indulge their impious desires. These *false prophets* satisfy their cravings with purchases from funds offered by believers who trusted that they made an offering to the Lord.

Like the sons of Eli, the *false prophets*, teachers, and preachers of our day take these offerings for themselves, beyond actual need. As a result, people have come to abhor offerings and view them with disdain, just as they did in the time of Hophni and Phinehas.

**False prophets indulge in debauchery and sexual immorality.**

Remember that those who fail to learn from history repeat it? The immoral practices of Hophni and Phinehas did not end with them. No doubt, you, like I, have read of some in leadership positions in the professing Church today who have illicit sexual relationships with women in their congregations. Sexual abuse in the professing Church has attained significant extents.

Members of their families indulge their illicit sexual desires, too. Sexual trysts occur between staff members who travel together to meetings that promise to “glorify and honor God.” When implicated, they lie about their immorality and



justify it as a means for their victims to come closer to God.

Just like Hophni and Phinehas before them, they are *false prophets*, teachers, and pastors. They, too, will experience God's judgment upon them, unless they repent.

### **False prophets disdain discipline.**

Time and time again, this pattern recurs in the lives of *false prophets* today. Churches split over pastors' refusal to accept discipline for their moral failures. Popular teachers ignore the warnings from those who love them and seek to correct their sinful lifestyles. Yet, they continue in their "ministries" without remorse or repentance.

Like Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas, today's *false prophets* plunge headlong into failure and take many along with them. The "I am different" attitude of Hophni and Phinehas describes the *false prophets* in our day who have elevated themselves to a status beyond correction. They do not function in the Church the way God designed it:

- setting themselves above Biblical Church structure;
- rejecting correction;
- declining direction and guidance from Godly servants;
- deceiving others in financial matters; and
- violating the tax laws of our land, to mention only a few examples.

When admonished for their practices, these *false prophets* fail to repent of their sins of disobedience

to God and their violation of the trust of others. Like Hophni and Phinehas, they claim special anointing of God and disregard the correction of others.

**False prophets give rise to a dearth of the word of God.**

1 Samuel 3 begins the story of Samuel's residence in the Temple with Eli, the High Priest. Samuel's dwelling with Eli resulted from his mother's prayer for a son and her promises to give that son to God as recorded in 1 Samuel 1.1-2.11.

*“And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” (1 Samuel 3.1)*

The dearth of the word of the Lord describes three different conditions fostered by false prophets.

- scarcity  
False prophets and teachers fail to concentrate upon God's word as the basis for their proclamations. Books by popular authors replace God's word as the foundation for messages. Exciting Church programs supplant God's word for direction on Church practices.

In Eli's day, he and his sons deprived the Children of Israel of God's word. As a result of their sinful behavior, the Children of Israel experienced the deprivation of God's Word to them.

The void of the life-giving sustenance of God's word brings certain failure.

- **lack of vision**

The statement, "Thus saith the Lord, go this way" has become the mantra of false prophets who seek to move people in their direction. It has little Biblical foundation anymore. False teachers' get their plans and purposes from the latest cultural phenomena and seek to conform their followers to the cultural mandates.

These false leaders have no Biblical revelation of God's plans and purposes for His people. The latest and greatest suits them.

- emphasis upon lesser issues

In our day, the lack of vision exhibits a different aspect that results from a dearth of the word of God. Good has replaced best. Pastors and teachers today concentrate upon lesser life issues rather than Biblical doctrine and gospel exposition:

- psychology;
- emotional disturbances: and
- "How To..." messages on money and health.

This emphasis, having only slight Biblical basis, has replaced the greatest good: sermons on foundational Biblical

doctrines and personal holiness.  
These *false prophets* abandon preaching  
the word of God for “talks,” making no  
clear statement of God’s truths.

Thus, under the leadership of false prophets, even  
prominent, popular ones, the Church careens as a  
rudderless ship, without direction or standards. No  
wonder the professing Church experiences spiritual  
decay.

And it does.

### **Implications**

The failure of Hophni and Phinehas brought  
spiritual decay to Israel. Their spiritual failures  
reappear in the *false prophets* of today, who  
influence the spiritual decline of the Church.

Dr. Ainsley Barnwell, a former mentor of mine  
before his death, counselled me,

*“Tom, water never flows above its source. A  
spiritual leader can never take people above  
his level of spirituality. They will reflect  
their leader. If you maintain a low spiritual  
quality, so will the people that you lead.  
They will never rise above you. If you are  
not a man of God, your people will not be  
people of God.”*

In the third chapter of his epistle, James warns  
believers of the responsibilities of leadership. Those  
who lead in the Church have great liability for their

actions. Leaders face greater condemnation for their failures, because the spiritual condition of those who follow them will reflect the leaders' condition.

The examples of Eli and his sons provide a vivid picture of the causes of the failure of *false prophets*. Therefore, we must examine those who lead us to escape the same destiny of those who followed Eli and his sons.

May God, by His Holy Spirit, open our eyes to distinguish between truth and error, to identify the *false prophets* among us, and to escape their failures that threaten to destroy us.

### **Questions For Reflection And Application**

01. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, did not know God. How does this happen:
  - a) to preacher's kids?
  - b) to deacon's kids?
  - c) to Sunday School teacher's kids?
  - d) to your own kids?
02. Is it right to call people who strive to follow God's law, "legalists?"
03. How can you obey God's voice in your life without assuming that your good works earn you points with God?
04. How do modern day false prophets evidence their attitude of entitlement?
05. How does the church determine whether the demands of their pastors are necessary to live in this society or are born of a desire for luxury?
06. Does your church have a plan in place to deal with the possibility of sexual immorality on the staff of the church?
  - a) How does your church follow-up incidents

that give rise to doubt regarding church staff?

- b) Is it ever right to disregard such immorality?
07. Do you cause your spiritual leader to stumble by treating him as though he were above and superior to others in the church?
  08. Do you show him respect and appreciation without treating him as a “star?”
  09. Most churches state in their constitutions that the Word of God is the sole provider of wisdom and truth from the hand of God. Believers in these churches often read more of the latest popular books about Christianity or books with ethereal prose about communion with God than they read the Bible. Does your pastor discourage such choices and promote the reading of God’s word both in the church and in the home?
  10. What is your personal plan for learning to know God and know His word?

*Thank you, heavenly Father, that You have provided for us ways in which we can observe and heed Your warning to us to beware of false prophets. Thank you for ways in which we can examine them and come to some kind of evaluation and understanding of whether these men and women truly are men and women of God.*

*Help us to reject the false and to pursue the truth. I pray that You will open our eyes by Your Holy Spirit to see the truth, to understand it, and to grasp it.*

*Grant us by the power of the Holy Spirit to conform our lives to the truth, to come to know You intimately, and to fellowship with You intimately.*

*We will give You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,*

*honor, glory, and praise for what You accomplish  
with the truth in our lives.  
Amen.*

## Chapter Eight

### False Prophets Form A Conspiracy

“Conspiracies do exist.”

Umberto Eco, the Italian novelist, called it right. Despite their bad name and frequent misuse, conspiracies do exist.

Take for example The Newburgh Conspiracy. Evan Andrews, writing for the History Channel, describes it.

*“The little-known Newburgh Conspiracy unfolded in March 1783 as General George Washington’s battle-weary Continental Army wintered in a camp at Newburgh, New York.*

*“Despite having the upper hand in the Revolutionary War, Washington’s troops had grown frustrated with the fledgling Confederation Congress’ inability to compensate them with back pay and pensions. As the discontent spread, several high-ranking officers began circulating a letter written by an anonymous author calling himself “Brutus” (later revealed to be Major John Armstrong).*

*“The missive included a chilling suggestion: if Congress and the states would not pay up, the military might abandon the war effort and force their*



*way into government coffers at gunpoint. Though he was sympathetic to his soldiers' plight, Washington knew that any uprising could have potentially disastrous consequences for the revolution.*

*"When the rabble-rousing officers met in an unsanctioned meeting on March 15, 1783, he made a surprise appearance and asked to address the crowd. After condemning the letter as unpatriotic and foolhardy, Washington urged the men to remain patient with Congress.*

*"Straining to read a letter near the end of his talk, he produced a small pair of spectacles and apologized, saying, "I have not only grown gray but almost blind in service to my country..." The impassioned speech paid off.*

*"Struck by Washington's devotion to the war, the officers voted to put their "unshaken confidence" in Congress. Washington would go on to negotiate a ceasefire with the British only a month later." (1)*

### **Biblical Conspiracies**

The Bible describes another famous conspiracy. King David's infamous son, Absalom, devised it. Because of his father's failure to punish David's son Amnon for the rape of Absalom's sister Tamar,

Absalom set in motion a plot to overthrow his father.

He schemed with his fellow Israelites to follow him instead of King David. He even included his father's counselor Ahithophel in his mob. Absalom's conspiracy succeeded in driving David from Jerusalem. But it ended with Absalom's death in the ensuing battle for supremacy. (2)

Soon after their exodus from Egypt, false prophets arose among the Israelites and split them into factions and conspired against Moses and Aaron. In Israel's history, this pattern emerged on repeated occasions.

Since the beginning of mankind, conspiracies arose behind false prophets who beguiled the unwary and mobilized rebels to follow their plots. All false prophets gather followers whom they influence with their falsehoods.

Again, the Bible describes another occasion of an unGodly conspiracy. During the time of Jeremiah and Daniel, God sent Ezekiel to prophesy to Israel to tell them of God's judgment against them for their sins.

At that time, Ezekiel lived in Babylon after taken captive by the Babylonians in their battle against Israel and Judah. False prophets had led the Israelites to reject God, separate from Him, and conspire against God's rule over them.

Ezekiel 22 describes why God judged Israel and the punishment He would send upon them for their sins.

**False prophets developed a conspiracy with the priests and the princes of Israel.**

In his God-given message to Israel, Ezekiel

identified the source of their sin.

*“And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto her, Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof...” (Ezekiel 22.25)*

Several false prophets joined together and led Israel into sin. These fraudulent leaders formed a conspiracy against God. In their treason, they agreed and performed together evil acts and led Israel to follow their wicked designs.

Because of their sin, God withheld rain from them in judgment, the beginning of God's wrath against them.

#### **False prophets' conspiracy devoured souls.**

Ezekiel said in 22:25, 27,

*“There is a conspiracy of the prophets in the midst thereof like a roaring lion ravening the prey.”*

*“Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain.”*

No doubt you have observed videos of lions pursuing their prey. Once they capture their prey, the pride of lions ravages the victim. That describes the action of the false prophets in Ezekiel's time. The history of Israel reveals several ways that they devoured souls.

In the most obvious way, they destroyed true prophets. False prophets often killed true prophets who contradicted them with God's messages. Hebrews 11 recounts some of the ways they destroyed them with cruel mutilations:

- they cut off their heads;
- drove swords through their bodies; or
- sawed them in half.

Their murderous plots created many widows among the Israelites. (3)

**False prophets' conspiracy divested people's property.**

The false prophets of Ezekiel's era made a practice of divesting the people of their goods and property. Ezekiel said they had "...*taken the treasure and precious things.*" (Ezekiel 22.25)

Because of their lies and positions, they stole from the people. They extorted money and property from them, especially widows. By their deceptions, they pillaged the land and people of their possessions and valuables.

**False prophets' conspiracy disregarded God's law.**

Ezekiel described the priests as led by false prophets:

*"Her priests have violated my law."*  
(Ezekiel 22.26)

They disregarded Jesus's law and His word. They viewed God's word as a history book. They

did not regard its demands upon life as important. They nullified certain passages of Scripture involving the commandments. They set aside parts of God's word, because it did not fit into their current culture and desire.

Their misconduct resulted in their defiance against God and the disobedience of Israel.

**False prophets' conspiracy disowned the distinction between the holy and the profane.**

God established restrictions that prevented the unclean people from entering certain sections of the Temple. The priests of Ezekiel's day took no notice of those distinctions. Anybody, holy, clean, or unclean, could go anywhere in the Temple that they desired.

In addition, God established a series of animal sacrifices for the people to atone for their sins and to worship Him. This distinction separated clean sacrifices from the unclean. He demanded only the clean and the best of their animals. The false priests set aside God's rules so that the people could bring the sacrifices that they wanted to bring, sickly, lame, or malformed at birth.

The priests of Ezekiel's day rejected God's requirements, which distinguished between the holy and the profane, and clean from unclean sacrifices.

**False prophets' conspiracy deserted true worship of God.**

The priests of Ezekiel's day not only desecrated God's holy things. They failed to worship God truly.

*“[They] have hid their eyes from my*

*Sabbaths.*” (Ezekiel 22.26)

This sin developed because the priests rejected God’s law regarding the Sabbaths. God instituted several Sabbaths, not just the one that occurred every seventh day. He did set aside that day as a day of rest and worship.

He also established special Sabbaths associated with feasts and ceremonies, which called for the people of God to worship and celebrate His goodness to them at various times and seasons. At these times, the people honored, worshiped, and glorified God.

But, the false prophets together with the priests set aside the Sabbaths that God instituted for His people to honor, glorify, and worship Him. Therefore, true worship of God disappeared. Because of the influence of false prophets, the Children of Israel in the day of Ezekiel violated God’s requirements.

They ignored God’s requirements for His people and designed methods and requirements of their own.

**False prophets’ conspiracy dishonored God.**

The priests in Ezekiel’s day set aside the distinctions between the holy and the profane, clean and unclean, and the true worship of God. In the end, their disobedience profaned Him.

The word *profaned* describes a painful process. A person drilled a hole in an object with a bow drill: a drill wrapped around with the bow string and twisted around by moving the bow back and forth while simultaneously pressing the drill down into the object thus spinning the drill to create the hole

in the object. (4)

The sins of the false prophets and the priests drilled a hole in God's heart with their wickedness.

(5)

**False prophets' conspiracy defended each other's evil practices and iniquity.**

The false prophets of Ezekiel's day defended evil for personal gain. Ezekiel described it this way:

*“And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar.” (Ezekiel 22.28)*

These fraudulent prophets daubed the executors of wicked acts with untempered mortar, whitewash. In that day when they made plaster for walls or structures, they used straw as a binding agent to help hold the material together and provide strength to it. Untempered mortar did not contain the substances that strengthen the mortar, so it would not work. Their plaster became nothing more than whitewash.

That helps us understand Ezekiel's picture. When he said that the prophets “daubed them with untempered mortar,” he meant that the false prophets propped up, supported, and defended the priests, princes, and each other and covered their evil actions with whitewash. They did it for their own advancement.

The rulers became like ravening wolves, shedding blood, destroying souls, and profiting from dishonest gain as they proclaimed that God had given them directions to aid them in this manner. (6) They followed the examples and teachings of the fraudulent prophets and became

oppressive leaders.

They developed into thieves, murderers, and deceivers who led the people into servitude, because of the sin and iniquity in their own lives.

Their degradation affected the people as well. (7) They followed the leadership of the land and became like them. They, too, became oppressors, thieves, and murderers who destroyed the poor and the needy by failing to care for them.

Because of the evil leadership, God could not find anyone to stand in the gap before Him to Israel to prevent judgment against them.

### **God's Purpose For This Message To Israel**

In Ezekiel 22.31, God gave this message to Ezekiel to give to Israel detailing the judgments that God planned for Israel and its causes.

*“Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God.”*

God stated in great detail the sins of Israel that brought His judgment. This segment from Ezekiel declares the specific role of false prophets in their wickedness. These 8 sins led Israel from the glories of God's presence in their midst to rampant iniquity, led by the false prophets.

The vivid description of false prophets and their role in Israel's demise served as characteristics of



false prophets. These markers would help Israel identify false leaders and to reject them, avoiding God's judgment and assuring God's blessings upon them.

This message from God to Israel also served as a reminder of God's nature. He hates sin. For many years He had treated Israel with mercy and a slowness to anger. However, God's mercy does not mean approval of the behavior for which He shows mercy.

This message shows God's wrath upon sin. He always punishes sin. He rebuked Israel for their sins which also warned future generations to obey God.

The lack of one to stand in the gap points to the One Who would come and stand in the gap on behalf of God's chosen people. God promised a Serpent Slayer as well as a Redeemer Who would atone for the sins of His people. This setting provided a reminder to Israel of God's promises to them.

As Ezekiel explained to Israel their sinfulness, he specifically identified the presence of a conspiracy of prophets and their sinful leadership.

He described the behavior of the false prophets, princes, leaders, and the ruling people. They

- killed many husbands, making many widows;
- violated God's Law;
- profaned God's holy things;
- failed to distinguish between holy and profane things;
- made no difference between clean and unclean things;

- hid their eyes from God's Sabbaths;
- profaned God among the people; and
- like ravening wolves, they shed blood and destroyed souls for dishonest gain. (8)

### **Correlation**

Christian's today can profit from this account in Ezekiel. In our present day, similarities exist in Christianity to these conditions from Ezekiel's era. As in that day, false prophets and teachers conspire with pastors' and Church leaders in sinful ways that foster spiritual decay. Like then, Christianity now sits on the brink of God's judgment.

#### **False prophets and teachers develop a conspiracy with pastors and Church leaders.**

Since Israel provides a vivid picture of the Church, we can learn by studying God's dealings with Israel. As with Israel, the Church today suffers from the disastrous impact of false prophets who emulate those during Ezekiel's day.

The present condition of the Church mirrors the condition of Israel described in our study passage. Like Israel, we experience a famine of spiritual rain because of sinful leadership. We have fallen into the same patterns as Israel.

#### **This modern-day conspiracy devours souls.**

Although many believers throughout the earth suffer persecution for Christ's name, we do not experience physical attacks against us from our spiritual leaders. Therefore, we do suffer from spiritual lifelessness. False prophets and teachers

lead us in a false pursuit of cultural acceptability and conformity.

This pursuit avoids the proclamation of the Biblical gospel and concentrates upon societal issues, e.g. today's hot button topics of social justice, critical race theory, and the normalizing of homosexuality. It eliminates Biblical commands as outdated and unimportant. It evades all mention of sin and shuns preaching on righteous living.

The Christian community lacks spiritual vibrancy...a sure sign of spiritual death. The faulty leadership from false prophets and teachers along with complicity pastors and leaders brings decline in the Church. Some praise the Christian community as a mile wide, but an inch deep. I find evidence of either option lacking. We are neither a mile wide nor an inch deep.

We suffer from spiritual decay that borders on spiritual death. Yes, this conspiracy devours souls.

**This modern-day conspiracy divests people of their property.**

They do so in an insidious manner, making it seem like a spiritual transaction. Today, many false leaders practice a deceit that divests people's property as did the false prophets. In our day, they ask their audiences a series of questions.

For example:

- “Do you experience financial difficulty?”
- “Do you have debts that you cannot pay?”
- “Do your expenses exceed your income so that you do not have enough money to cover all of your expenses and your cost of living?”

Then they say, “If that describes you, I have wonderful news for you. If you will send me a gift in the amount of your debt, Jesus will bless you.” Some include a promise that God will send them money equal to 100 times what they send to them.

In this way, these modern-day false prophets divest millions of people of their money and property.

The Lord Jesus specifically spoke woe in Matthew 2 about this very sinful practice. The Pharisees of His day devoured widows’ houses. These false religious leaders went to those least able to defend themselves and extorted from them their goods, lands, and their property.

These things happened in the time of Ezekiel, in the time of Jesus, and they happen today as well. Do not follow such leaders.

Yes, God did promise to provide for the needs of His children. However, when you hear or read someone who makes this kind of offer that requires you send them money in expectation of “God’s blessing,” turn them off and destroy their publications. God will make a way for you, as you trust Him.

**This modern-day conspiracy disregards God's law.**

Many modern-day false prophets follow the same pattern as in Ezekiel’s day. They, too, disregard Jesus’s word and misrepresent its application. They relegate whole portions of Scripture as relevant for years past, but not for today in our “new era.”

A theory of progressive revelation and

conformity to culture writes off fundamental Biblical doctrines. They take a *part* of the complete doctrine and say, “that’s the whole doctrine.” However, denying part of the truth results in untruth.

Ezekiel’s explanation of the priests in his time describes errant leaders of today. The Christian community once again faces a battle for the inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy and sufficiency of the Bible for all of life and practice. When they set aside the authority of Scripture, they violate God’s word.

**This modern-day conspiracy disowns the distinction between the holy and profane.**

In our day, false prophets fail to separate the holy from the profane. Although we do not have the same set of rules for Temple worship and sacrifices, some leaders today fail to distinguish between the holy and the profane.

Specifically, they fail to identify and condemn sin. Preachers from the pulpits of our churches and from television programs, as well as popular authors, stay away from the whole issue of sin. We renamed sin and called it “a mistake or an error in judgment.”

The desire for popularity controls the issues. Some popular preachers present the “gospel” solely as a free pass to heaven and never even mention the sinner’s transgressions that need repentance and forgiveness. As a result, the failure to identify and condemn sin contributes to the spiritual decline and decay of the Church.

As in Ezekiel’s day, we fail to distinguish between the holy and profane, the clean and the

unclean. But God's demands for holiness of His people require that spiritual leaders preach on sin to lead believers to repent of their sins. We desperately need preachers who proclaim God's holy demands.

**This modern-day conspiracy deserts from true worship of God.**

Jesus commanded His followers to worship Him in spirit and truth. (9) Yet counterfeit pastors and teachers of our day set aside this command. Much of what passes as worship today has become nothing more than hyped emotionalism, manufactured by stirring orchestral accompaniments led by enthusiastic choral leaders.

It differs little from what occurs at rousing motivational seminars or exciting athletic events. Some have even recommended a return to the use of objects and ceremonies as part of worship of Jesus.

The contemporary Church has set aside the importance of worship. We trivialize the manner in which we acknowledge the holy, sovereign, creator God and His Son. By their dismissive attitudes, they diminish the sovereign God.

Just as in Ezekiel's day, true worship of God and Jesus has declined and virtually disappeared. We need a reformation of true worship of Jesus, giving Him the honor, glory, and praise that He deserves.

**This modern-day conspiracy dishonors God.**

This sin permeates the professing Church today. We call it pluralism, which means that each person worships his own God in his own way. We accept any form of worship. Some believe that people in other cultures may worship as they please, no

matter whom they call “God.” In another way, I have often heard the phrases, “The god I worship is .....,” or “I like to think of god as...”

Some prominent preachers and teachers even state that every religion has its own “Jesus.” They proclaim that Jesus has other ways of salvation and will accept those of other religions based upon the sincerity of their beliefs, even if contrary to the truths of Scripture. They suggest that it is unnecessary to reach the followers of pagan gods with the gospel of Jesus.

In all of these instances, we dishonor the true and living God Who is no longer worshipped but profaned. He has revealed Himself to us in creation, our natures, and in His Son, Jesus. He disclosed Himself to us in His Word, which we can read and study to learn of Him. He reveals Himself to us and requires us to worship Him and Him alone.

**This modern-day conspiracy defends false prophets and teachers, pastors, and leaders for their sinful acts.**

The offenses Ezekiel described sound as current as today’s television, radio, and print publications. Ungodly men and women, who proclaim themselves as God’s messengers, support one another in robbing the Church of Godly leadership.

For example,

- Boards of Directors close their eyes to sin and corruption in the ministries they direct.
- These same Boards support figureheads who dangerously weaken the Church.
- Church boards defend pastors whose lives do not reflect the purity and grace of Jesus.

- False messages of peace and prosperity flood our nation and other countries as well.
- Religious television and radio broadcasts proclaim an untrue message of hope.
- Books and magazines publish these misleading messages.

## **Implications**

The false prophets of Ezekiel’s day formed a conspiracy that resulted in the destruction of the land. Their actions give us insight into similar evil practices today. They serve as a warning to help us determine the true from the false.

If the Church fails to heed the warnings from Ezekiel, we will endure a similar judgment from God that Israel experienced. In fact, spiritual decline permeates the Church today. God has withdrawn His glorious, manifest presence from the Church.

We must heed the warnings from Ezekiel. Our time of danger demands the truth. I pray that the Spirit of God will open our eyes to discern and reject the presence of the conspiracy of false prophets in the Church today.

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- Bible;” “profane”.
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  06. Ezekiel 22.27
  07. Ezekiel 22.29
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  09. John 4.23

### **Questions For Reflection And Application**

01. What is a motive that bonds false prophets together?
02. In what ways do false prophets injure the ministries and the comforts of true prophets in our time?
03. What makes it easy for any Church or Bible Study Group to believe that their group is successful in their ministry for Christ, even when the evidence says the contrary?
04. Do you have spiritual guidelines which determine your method of giving to the work of the Lord? What prevents you from supporting false prophets erroneously?
05. What is the danger in determining that a *part* of holy Scripture is not relevant for this age? If it comes to that, who has been delegated by God to make such determinations?
06. List several areas in which Christ followers demonstrate a lack of distinction between the holy and the profane.
07. What are the requirements for worship? If you were the “worship leader” for an announced appearance of Jesus Christ, how would you design group worship of the King?
08. Those who support “pluralism” (each person worships his own God in his own way) are in

danger for their souls. Why?

*Dear heavenly Father, I want to thank You for this record that You have provided and preserved for us from Your dealings with the Children of Israel in the time of Ezekiel. You have preserved it so that it will warn us and encourage us to examine our lives to see many of these same things present in our day as well.*

*I ask you, heavenly Father, to send forth Your Holy Spirit to teach us the truth, to open our eyes to see what Your Word describes for us, and to enable us to discern the false in our day, so that we may pursue after the truth.*

*I pray that we will see how we need to conform our lives to the truth, to obey, follow, and to worship You.*

*May your Holy Spirit lead us to You, to an understanding and knowledge of You and the Lord Jesus. I pray, Father, that You will enable us to reject the conspiracy of false prophets to the honor and glory of Your name.*

*Amen.*

## **Chapter Nine**

### **False Prophets Endanger God's children**

Chicken Little popularized it. You know the famous story of Chicken Little (Henny Penny), the chicken who warned everyone at school that the sky was falling in. In the end, nothing serious happened to Chicken Little nor any other of the animals.

More often than not, warnings of severe trouble fail to come to fruition. One only looks at the weather forecasters for an obvious example.

Our daughter Julie coined a weather law: “The severity of the storm is directly opposite to the hype that it receives.”

But even her law fails at times. The storm does occur as predicted and sometimes even worse.

In Biblical times, God’s warnings through His prophets always occurred just as prophesied. The Old Testament records the many times that God alerted His people to coming judgments. The people whom God warned neglected them at their own peril.

It equally chronicles every time that God fulfilled His warnings. Those who heeded them withstood the judgments. Those who neglected the warnings suffered dire consequences.

In the New Testament, God continued to give warnings to His children regarding dangers ahead. In fact, every New Testament book includes these warnings, except Philemon. Even Christ delivered warnings of false prophets and false messiahs that would come to test His followers.

### **Christ’s Warnings Of False Prophets**

Matthew 24 follows chapters 21-23. Sounds like simple math, but the setting of chapter 24 bears explanation. In Matthew 21, Jesus entered Jerusalem as the heralded King complete with crowds waving palm branches. Matthew 22 describes Christ's cleansing of the Temple followed by His teaching in the Temple in Matthew 22-23.

As Jesus and His disciples exited the Temple, He continued His teaching the disciples on the Mount of Olives. That teaching on the Mount of Olives concluded the overall emphasis of Jesus on the coming judgment to Israel, which importance He began in chapter 21.

At the start of His teaching in Matthew 24, Jesus began with a warning of coming false prophets and messiahs.

*“Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” (Matthew 24.4-5)*

### **Christ’s warning of false prophets: a precaution**

When Jesus warned His followers of false prophets, He used the phrase, “Take heed.” This phrase gives the warning, “Beware, look out for...” It also means “Discern.” His caution to His disciples took both forms: the usual warning to beware as well as counsel to discern the appearance of false prophets.

### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their presence**

Jesus did not say that they *might* come. He said

they “...shall come.” He described their coming as a certainty. Jesus reiterated their sure coming in Matthew 24.11 and 23-25.

He warned that false christs, i.e., false prophets, would arise and test the disciples.

### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their prevalence**

Someone might have imagined that these imposters would appear occasionally – a few “kooks” and “nuts” with emotional instabilities. In that case, they might just dismiss them easily.

However, Christ warned that many would come.

### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their presumptions**

Christ cautioned His disciples against those who would come “*in His name.*”

*“Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ.”* (Matthew 24.5)

Some imposters will state that they come as the *messenger* of Jesus, claiming validity for their messages through the use of His name. They would say, “I come to you in the name of Jesus...”

Others would claim that they were the Christ, the promised messiah.

### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their persuasiveness**

With their impressive manners, they would sway multitudes. Jesus warned His disciples that these false christs would deceive crowds that will clamor after them. Their deceits will prove so

effective and winsome that they will mislead many.

*“Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” (Matthew 24.4-5)*

### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their power**

Jesus continued His warning to His disciples in Matthew 24.23-25.

*“Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo here is Christ, or there; believe it not. 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. Behold, I have told you before.” (Matthew 24.23-25)*

The imposters of which Christ warned would display great powers to confirm their presumptions and lend persuasiveness to their false messages.

What does Jesus mean by this description?

The word “great” holds two meanings. One of them describes quality, like a great meal, tasteful as well as healthful. It also means quantity, abundance. Thus, a great meal can include the quality of the food as well as the amount of the food.

In like manner, false prophets will provide signs and wonders of high quality and in abundance. They will not produce a trick or sleight of hand, but many, high quality demonstrations of power.

What does the word “signs” mean?

It describes some unusual occurrence that transcends the common course of nature. These

false prophets will do magnificent things, beyond the ordinary. They will use those displays as evidence of their calling.

Jesus warned that not only will they have attesting signs but wonders, too. “Wonders” speak of the miraculous. Moses described this very thing in Deuteronomy, thirteen centuries before Jesus’ birth, long before this dreadful error arose.

Moses issued this warning:

*“If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee saying, Let us go after other gods and let us serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams...” (Deuteronomy 13.1-3)*

Moses’ warning combined with Christ’s caution would help the disciples know how to discern between the false and the true, the true messenger of God and the false prophet of God. Moses instructed God’s people to examine the message(s) the prophet declared.

### **Christ’s warning of false prophets: their prominence**

These false prophets will enjoy great popularity. In fact, Jesus warned them that even true Children of God will almost fall for their deceptions. It would seem like the whole world would follow these imposters of whom Christ spoke.

### **Christ’s Purpose In His Warning**

Christ proved to His disciples His deity and messiahship during His earthly ministry. They saw it first-hand, and they believed Him. But Jesus also knew that His followers would face grave temptations after He ascended into heaven.

He promised them the Holy Spirit, Who would reside in them and guide them into the truth. But He wanted them prepared for the coming onslaught of imposters. His warning would ring in their minds as they faced the doubts and fears of the future.

### **Correlation**

How does this warning of Christ to His disciples correlate to you and me?

#### **Christ's warning of false prophets: a precaution**

Biblical and Church history confirm Christ's warning to His disciples. God's people have always faced false leaders, centuries before Christ and after Him as well. They still exist today.

Jesus loved His disciples, and He gave to them a warning, which Christian's must heed today, too.

*“Take heed that nobody deceive you. For many shall come to you with my name saying, ‘I am Christ.’” (Matthew 24.4-5)*

#### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their presence**

Like in the days following Christ's warning to His disciples, false prophets, pastors, and teachers abound today. They influence multitudes with their decepts and apparent confirmations from God. The



evil one uses them to divide and destroy the Church.

**Christ's warning of false prophets: their prevalence**

The condition of today's Church not only verifies their presence but their prevalence. Many false teachers and leaders confuse believers and try to lead them astray.

**Christ's warning of false prophets: their presumptions**

You can see how they will sway many people to follow them. No wonder many will conclude:

*“This Christian leader coming in the name of Jesus is so good, so clever. The messages we hear are often about Jesus. We see wonderful miracles that could only be of God. This person must assuredly be a prophet of God whom we can admire and follow.”*

Other false prophets come who claim to be Christ. Throughout history, many have made this claim. They take the name of Jesus for themselves, yet reject, deny, and denounce the Jesus presented to us in Scripture.

The Bible describes the characteristics of the promised Savior and Messiah that only one person fulfilled, Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. No one else has fulfilled all of the signs, prophecies, and predictions given to us in the Bible regarding the Messiah except the Jesus described for us in Scripture.

Further, historians recorded His life and

described Him exactly as the Bible described Him. Scriptures confirm that Jesus satisfies all criteria. Anyone can assume the title of the King of Kings, but none fulfills the criteria except Jesus. Jesus as described for us in Scripture is the true Messiah.

Everywhere that men and women have proclaimed the gospel of Christ, it has produced the same response, without regard to color, nationality, social standing, education, or wealth.

People throughout history, who have called upon Jesus as described in Scripture, have experienced the exact same life change, without variation, always, always, always. He alone is our Deliverer, the Savior of sinners like you and me.

### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their persuasiveness**

Note the point that Moses made. When someone comes in the name of Jesus and instructs you to follow his/her teachings, examine not only the supernatural demonstrations, but also the actual teachings of this person.

- Do the teachings lead you to Christ?
- Does (s)he develop the doctrinal truths of Scripture and point out to you what the Bible says?
- Does (s)he give another gospel, something not presented in Scripture?

Isaiah the prophet counseled God's people on this issue. He said,

*“And when they shall say unto you, Seek*

*unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony.” (Isaiah 8.19-20)*

When Isaiah mentioned the “law and the testimony,” he meant the Scriptures, referred to as the law and the testimony in that day. In essence, Isaiah instructed the people of God to go to the Scriptures.

*“If they (the false prophets) speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isaiah 8.20)*

The Word of God becomes the final authority. Take the messages proclaimed by the attractive false prophets and evaluate whether they agree with Scripture.

What do they say about the gospel? Their interpretation of the gospel identifies the first point of error with the following deviations:

- they reject the cross;
- they reject salvation through Christ alone;
- they reject salvation through His blood; and
- they reject the payment of the blood of Jesus for the penalty of sin for people like you and me.

Many offer a “salvation” outside the authority of Scripture. Jesus warned against the deceits of powerful false prophets who would deceive many.

Their presentation of the “gospel” provides the first clue to their deceptions.

### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their power**

A false Church leader may have the ability to perform apparent miraculous and supernatural things. Some false prophets will exhibit astounding manifestations and claim a special anointing of God upon them.

Especially in our day, false prophets and teachers use this mantra to make danger to the helpless and gullible. For centuries, they have fooled multitudes to follow their errors. No one can calculate the damage false prophets have inflicted upon not just Christians but also nonchristians.

### **Christ's warning of false prophets: their prominence**

I have seen the reality of this in my lifetime. I have watched men and women practice their deceitfulness to huge crowds. In city after city, multitudes swarm their meetings with enthusiastic responses, following them like sheep to the slaughter.

Their books climb the bestseller lists. Some have even formed international denominations. Without question, the warning of Christ applies to our day as well. We must heed it.

## **Implications**

False prophets come in the name of Jesus saying,

*“I am the messenger of Christ. I am His*

*prophet, His apostle, and His teacher.  
Observe what I can do and see that I am an  
anointed messenger of God. Follow me.”*

We live in such a day. These imposters abound and deceive many, maybe even you. The Bible records their presence and popularity even though it provides ample warnings against them.

In our text from Matthew 24, Jesus issued prominent warnings about false prophets. With increasing faith in the Word of God, the followers of Christ must regard His warnings.

We need to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern the false prophets from the true, so that we may again experience God’s glorious manifest presence in our lives.

### **Questions For Reflection And Application**

01. Do you believe false prophets are active on our present Christian landscape?
02. Do you think they know their own deceitfulness or are they merely misled or mentally unstable?
03. List some of the features by which you can identify them.
04. Where do false prophets get the power to perform signs and wonders?
05. What particular risks do false prophets bring to the Church?
06. Do Christ-followers have one final authority on which to stand? What is it?

*Thank You, Lord Jesus, for giving us this lesson and preserving for us these instructions that You gave to Your disciples hundreds of years ago. They*

*still apply to us today, and they serve to warn us that we might discern that which is false from that which is truth.*

*Open our eyes, Holy Spirit, to see the true and the living Christ as revealed to us in the Scriptures. We ask You, Spirit of God, to bring that forth into our lives for I pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.*

*Amen.*

## **Chapter Ten**

### **False Prophets Penetrate The Church In Disguise**

*“I can't disguise myself with a wig and dark glasses - the wheelchair gives me away.”*  
(Stephen Hawking)

Too often, we think of disguises only for a party that features them. Or, famous people attempt to disguise themselves when in public to avoid unwanted attention. Even parents sometimes hide an odious task for their children within a hidden desirable one.

Famous Bible characters used disguises to hide their personas. For example, King Saul put on other raiment when he went to see the woman at Endor, seeking a familiar spirit. (1 Samuel 28.8) Jacob put on fake garments to fool Isaac to think that he was Esau. (Genesis 27.15-17) King Ahab died in battle because he attempted to hide his royalty. (1 Kings 22.29-35)

Often, disguises portrayed in the Bible do not end well. That describes the result to Christian's fooled by false prophets. Jude, a brother of Christ, wrote a letter to Christians sometime between 70 – 80 AD. (1) His great concern for them over the presence of false teachers in the Christian Church prompted his epistle.

He recognized that false teachers had penetrated the Church under the guise of following Christ. They did not follow Christ in reality, but they came to destroy His true followers. In his warning, Jude

described several characteristics of these false believers who came to disrupt the Church.

## **Jude's Warnings To The Early Believers**

### **False prophets: depravity of conduct**

Jude described their depravity of conduct.

*"...certain men crept in unawares."* (Jude 4)

These false prophets snuck into the Church. People did not notice them because these fakes called themselves Christians. However, they portrayed a false image which hid their true character. Their duplicitous ways hid their deepest thoughts with clever words and actions. Their hypocrisies contradicted their pretenses.

They did not trust Christ.

Jude called these hypocrites ungodly men. Not only did they behave in a false manner, they also perverted the grace of God. Jude said that they had turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. (Jude 4)

Further, Jude described the wickedness of these imposters who lived after the satisfaction of their own lusts: they copied those who lived in...

*"...Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh"* (Jude 7-8)



These false prophets lived to satisfy their own fleshly desires and used their positions of influence and authority to subvert and entice the unsuspecting. They crept into the Church and, in essence, said, “Because of God’s grace and His goodness, He has saved me. Therefore, I can live any way I want to live.”

#### **False prophets: disrespect for authority**

These deceptive leaders rejected the Lordship of Christ. In addition, they spurned authority. (Jude 8) To satisfy their lusts, they indulged in all manner of sexual immorality and perversion, contrary to God’s law. Their behavior caused them to defile their own bodies.

They became a law unto themselves, answerable to no one in the Church. The false prophets set their own rules and did not submit themselves to authority within the congregation or from other Church leaders.

#### **False prophets: deficiency of knowledge**

Jude identified another trait of faulty leadership, a deficiency of knowledge. He explained it this way,

*“But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.”* (Jude 10)

They never learned the truths of God, so they tried to explain Scripture without knowledge of it. Jude called them brute beasts. They followed their natural instincts and behaved in ways that seemed

normal and natural to their humanness in the same way that animals live in accordance with their natures.

Therefore, they spoke falsely. Not knowing God, they spoke evil of things that they did not understand. They did not see things from God's perspective nor understand His will and ways. They call good evil and evil good, because they really do not know the truth.

Jude gave a warning. He said these men crept in unawares.

### **False prophets: destitution of character**

In a series of pictures, Jude described the false prophets as destitute characters. He gave a lengthy list of characteristics to illustrate their destitution. These vivid descriptions explain their lack of character.

*“Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.” (Jude 11)*

Jude identified three men in the Bible who carried out notorious acts.

- Cain killed his brother.
- Balaam attempted to prophesy against the Israelites as they traversed the wilderness toward the Promised Land. He gave counsel to Israel's enemies on how to lead God's people into immorality, which succeeded.
- Korah (Core) attempted to overthrow Moses, God's chosen leader of Israel. God

judged him by causing the earth to open up and swallow alive Korah and his followers.

Jude urged his fellow Christ followers to reject false prophets who commit dishonorable acts against God's law and government.

*“These [people] are spots in your feasts of charity...”* (Jude 12)

The false prophets attended Israel's feasts, boldly acting like Godly men. The literal meaning of this verse portrays them like rocks hidden under the water. They posed a danger to God's people, because, without shame, these hypocrites waited for the opportunity to cause believers to slip as if on rocks hidden under water.

*“...clouds they are without water, carried about of winds, trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”* (Jude 12)

What good is a cloud without life-giving, refreshing water? It is worthless. That explains the true worth of false prophets. He also depicted their worthless character by calling them trees without fruit. Obviously, a fruit tree without fruit is valueless and succumbs to the axe.

*“...raging waves of the sea...”* (Jude 13)

The waves of the sea move in response to the wind. They move in whatever direction that the wind blows. The strength and direction of the wind

determines the ferocity of the waves.

The false prophets formed their messages and direction upon the whims of man, fluctuating like the wind, which drove them like wild wind-driven sea breakers.

*“...wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.”* (Jude 13)

Stars in the heavens have a fixed path. Here, Jude used a Biblical type of using stars for leaders. However, these stars wandered, following no fixed path. Thus, God’s people could not follow them, because the leaders did not know their direction, leading the flock one way this time and different way another time. Jude’s friends could not rely upon their leadership.

*“These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage...mockers walking after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not having the Spirit.”* (Jude 16-19)

Jude categorized the false prophets of his day as hypocrites, worthless, and ungodly. His lengthy list of the poverty of character of these corrupt leaders describes their sinful practices.

### **Purpose of Jude’s Warning**

Jude wrote his letter to his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. At first, he wanted to write to them of their common salvation. (Jude 3) However, his great concern for them over the presence of false teachers in the Christian Church altered his design.

He recognized that false teachers had penetrated the Church under the guise of following Christ. They did not follow Christ in reality, but they came to destroy His true followers. In his warning, Jude described several characteristics of these false believers who came to disrupt the Church in order that he might protect them from spiritual danger.

### **Correlation**

Jude's concerns thousands of years ago apply to the professing Church of Jesus Christ today.

#### **False prophets: depravity of conduct**

Throughout history, false teachers have followed this pattern. For example,

- They claim to have made a “decision for Christ” at some time in their lives, but the experience produced a temporary feeling, not a life changing faith in Christ.
- Others have made no choice at all. They assumed the role of a Christian, thinking that one becomes a Christian by behaving like one.
- Some come as messengers of the evil one intent upon destruction of the Church.

All of these various types of “Christians”

inhabit the Church. Some possess positions of leadership. Like Jude's description, many people today give the impression that they follow Christ yet pursue a lascivious lifestyle.

They say, "I am free in Christ." By that, they mean this:

*"Since I have made a decision for Christ, I can do anything I want and live any lifestyle I choose. No one can criticize my behavior, because I have made a decision for Christ. One day I will inherit eternal life. Once saved, always saved. I am free in Christ."*

Such an attitude fails to describe true Christ followers. The Bible teaches that when you become a follower of Christ, you become His servant. Your lifestyle changes, and you become increasingly more like Christ.

Therefore, if we follow Christ, we cannot live any way that we please. Those who trust Christ do not have the freedom to live selfish, licentious, lascivious lifestyles. We cannot pursue the gratification of our own fleshly lusts and desires. In Christ, we become new creatures; the old, sinful things pass away. (2 Corinthians 5.17)

Jesus did not live His life according to His own will. He lived after the pattern, dictates, and commands of His Heavenly Father. He lived a holy, just life. He commands those who truly trust Him to live holy lives, too.

Though written thousands of years ago, Jude's description of the false prophets in the Church of his day depicts conditions prevalent in the Church today. Many pastors and Church leaders live self-

seeking lifestyles. They mislead unknowing multitudes into a condition of false security and hypocrisy.

Jude's warning rings true now, too. The depravity of the conduct of false prophets leads them to deny Christ. They claim to follow Him, but, by their deportment, they reject Him. Their actions betray their speech. They deny His authority over their lives. You cannot claim to follow Christ and reject His authority over your life at the same time. If Christ is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.

Many untrustworthy teachers today separate salvation from lordship. They preach that someone can come to faith in Christ and, at a subsequent date or perhaps not at all, come to recognize Jesus as Lord. They teach the error that professing Christians can live as they please.

Yet, Jesus never separated these issues. Christ's disciples must deny their fleshly lusts, the world's enticements, and submit to His lordship over their lives and His commands for their behavior. Jesus rejects all others. (Matthew 16.24-25)

### **False prophets: disrespect for authority**

Today, many false leaders in the professing Church follow the same practice as Jude identified. They do not submit to any authority in their congregations, or from other leaders in the Christian Church. Some hold a virtual dictatorial position in the churches that they lead.

This resistance to authority affects their response to government, too. It is not unusual for false leaders to refuse to submit to government. Too often, it shows itself when the government sets restrictions on religious organizations and the lavish

lifestyles of their leaders.

The pursuit of money has blinded the eyes of false prophets so that they have lost control of their behavior. It saddens me to see prominent Church leaders hide behind the Church to reject legitimate government authority. Paul in Romans 13 admonishes believers to obey government and give respect to its officials.

But government does at times overstep their bounds. Peter and John faced a dilemma with government edicts soon after Christ's ascension into heaven, as did Daniel and his three friends in Babylon. Their examples remind us to stand for God's commands when governments demand that we obey them instead of God.

On occasions of direct conflict between man's law and God's law, we must submit and follow God's law. However, Jude's warning centuries ago that disrespect for legitimate Biblical authority marks a false teacher, an often-overlooked characteristic in our day.

### **False prophets: deficiency of knowledge**

The Church today experiences a dearth of leaders who know God. You cannot know God by osmosis. You cannot know God unless you spend time with Him in study of His word and in prayer, conversing with Him.

Praise God, there are a few people in positions of leadership who know God and spend time with Him. They stand in stark contrast to the many who try to represent the God they do not know. Do not follow them or listen to them. They talk about things they do not really understand, because they do not know God.



We need leaders who take time to know God and to study His word. They do not give a brief lecture on the goodness of man or a few steps on how to cure emotional ills. They tell you something about God and what they have come to know about Him by experience. They encourage their listeners to pursue after God in intimate fellowship with Him.

### **False prophets: destitution of character**

Today, the professing Church elevates to positions of authority and responsibility men and women who fit these same descriptions. Some leaders commit notorious acts against other believers and the government without repentance

In brazen behavior, they act like believers but live lives of hypocrisy. They are like clouds without water, trees without fruit, without value and worthless in character. These false prophets conform to the changeable winds of the culture.

They form their messages and direction upon the whims of man, fluctuating like the wind, which drives them like wild, wind-driven sea breakers. Thus, God's people dare not follow them, because these false leaders do not know their direction, leading the flock one way this time and different way another time.

Jude categorized the false prophets of his day as hypocrites, worthless, and ungodly. His lengthy list of the poverty of character of these corrupt leaders describes the sinful practices inherent in false prophets of our day, too.

## **Implications**

We can learn from Jude's first century warnings. His explanations provide guidance to us in our quest to ferret out the errant Christian leaders in our day. Thousands of years ago, Jude gave his warning out of love and concern for his friends and for God's honor.

As he exhorted his fellow Christ followers, I, too, urge you with this same caution.

- Do not follow those whose character and practices coincide with these warnings.
- Do not listen to them.
- Do not buy their books.
- Do not watch them on television.
- Do not subscribe to their magazines and newsletters.
- Do not send them money as "seed faith offerings."

They will not lead you to God, because they do not honor and exalt the Lord Jesus in their own lives. I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see the truth of God's Word as revealed in Jude's warning to his friends.

God has provided it for your protection, too. He loves His own, those who know God and have trusted Christ Who cares for them like a shepherd cares for his sheep.

Heed these warnings from Scripture on false prophets. Listen to the Spirit of God Who will instruct you to identify the false and to follow the true. I pray the Spirit of God will do that for you and lead you to fullness of joy, the rightful possession of the children of God.

## References

1. *The Ryrie Study Bible*. Ryrie, Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Th.D, Ph.D., editor. "Introduction To The Letter Of Jude." Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL. 1976, 1978. p. 1890.

### Questions For Reflection And Application

01. Is it possible for a person to believe (s)he is Christian, when (s)he is not? If so, how does this happen?
02. How can these people be identified and helped?
03. Do these people fulfill church needs such as Sunday School teachers, worship leaders, youth leaders, deacons and/or elders? Why or why not?
04. What does it mean to be "free in Christ?" How can misuse of this truth become dangerous?
05. Why is it necessary for church leaders to submit to authority? In the local church, how can "authority" be provided through the congregation?
06. How does a church leader learn the truths of knowing Christ?
07. List some activities in which false prophets demonstrate dishonorable acts against God's law and government.
08. When someone and/or the church congregation identifies a false prophet, what responsibility do(es) (s)he and/or they have?

*Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your great love for us, which You have demonstrated in so many*

*ways. You have preserved this letter from Jude to his friends warning them of false prophets and urging them not to follow them, with clear descriptions of what they would look like and how they would act.*

*Father, that description fits our day as well. I ask You to send forth Your Holy Spirit to us to open our eyes to identify false prophets, to turn from them, and to seek after that which is true. Help us to recognize the true messengers whom You have sent so that we might learn from them; come to know and trust You more fully, and to experience that joy and peace that is ours in Christ because we are Your children.*

*We will give You thanks, praise, and honor, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for what You accomplish.*

*Amen.*

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **False Prophets Encourage Spiritual Ease**

Remember your favorite Kodak moment? Christmas? A birthday celebration? The birth of your first child?

After years of leading the photography business, Kodak's bankruptcy in 2012 brought no Kodak moment. Instead, Kodak's failure became the topic of business researchers to determine the causes of its demise.

Among the many reasons given, an insidious cause surfaced: complacency. Kodak became at ease with their successes.

Too many of us know the insidious dangers of ease as skills diminish with the passage of time. We no longer type 80 words a minute. We cannot run across the street let alone around the block. A good brisk walk eludes us because of the years of ease.

An old Bible story yet a timely one describes the dangers of ease. It happened after the death of King David, Israel's most illustrious king. Israel split into two nations: Israel to the north, Judah to the south. Israel had its king, Jeroboam II, while Uzziah governed Judah.

Amos, a shepherd and sheep breeder, served God as a prophet in Israel and Judah at that time. During Amos' prophetic ministry, both Israel and Judah rebelled against God and rejected Him. They maintained a formal appearance of worshipping God, while continuing to worship idols. Their simultaneous worship of idols and God resulted in denial of Jehovah God, Who will not share His glory.

In addition, both nations pursued materialism. The Biblical record describes the wealthy who lounged at their tables and on cots of ivory. They amassed great and sumptuous possessions and found pleasure and security in the abundance of things. (Amos 6.4-7)

God sent Amos the prophet to these self-satisfied people with this message:

*“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!”* (Amos 6.1)

Zion, another name for Jerusalem, served as the chief city of Judah. The mountain of Samaria lay in Israel. As an evidence of God’s grace, He sent Amos to startle both nations and awaken them out of their false sense of contentment.

### **False Prophets Encourage Spiritual Ease**

**False prophets rested on inferior peace.** (Amos 6.4-6)

The people enjoyed safe and luxurious lives with an abundance of material possessions. They did not fear attack from enemies. Their lives of ease gave them confidence that they needed nothing.

A strict definition of “ease” gives a better picture of their true condition. It literally means recklessness, carelessness. Therefore, amid their prosperity with goods and possessions, they showed a careless attitude. They lacked concern over things which should have concerned them. They enjoyed a manufactured peace, endorsed by the misleading

messages of the evil prophets.

Judah and Israel displayed smug contentment. They took pride in their “goodness.” After all, they lived in peace and prosperity, but it degenerated into pride. They did not confront any severe conflicts. Their religious accomplishments contributed to a false sense of divine approval which resulted in apathy.

Contentment and apathy do not translate into peace. Judah and Israel rested on something they thought firm and safe. They did not realize the fragile weakness of their faulty foundations.

Israel and Judah turned from God, the only source of true joy and peace. They traded His glorious manifest presence for an inferior peace.

### **False prophets relied upon imitation power.**

(Amos 6.1)

The northern kingdom, Israel, trusted in the mountain of Samaria, which served as their headquarters. They worshiped God on that mountain and felt secure as long as they held possession of it. However, the extended prophecy of Amos describes that their enemy came in and took possession of their sacred mountain. Their mountain provided no safety for them in their time of need.

In similar fashion, the southern kingdom, Judah, trusted in the safety of Zion, or Jerusalem. The thick walls surrounding it with only 12 entrance gates made them feel secure. There came a day, however, when their enemy destroyed those walls, broke through the doors, captured Jerusalem, and laid waste to them. Their walls provided no protection to them in their time of need.

Amos commented about those named *the chief*

*of the nations*, to whom the house of Israel is come. These people were the aristocracy, the leaders, and the elders. This broad group also included the kings and patriarchs of Israel and Judah.

In each of their histories, God had blessed them greatly with men of God, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. They had a wonderful heritage to pass on to their children. (Amos 6.1-2) Both kingdoms rested on their heritages. They thought that their past godly leaders exempted them from existing and future problems. They placed their confidence in their history, not in God.

In Amos' day, they had a degenerate leadership, which neither followed God nor pursued Him. Instead, they sought false prophets and listened to them. Their incorrect hopes and reliance on their heroes failed in the time of hardship.

**False prophets resorted to intentional protests against God.** (Amos 5.21-26)

The false prophets and priests of Amos' day deliberately opposed God. The spiritual failure of the people came as a direct result of their evil leadership. They mixed the insincere worship of God with the worship of idols made of wood and stone by their own hands, complete with sacrifices and the celebration of feast days.

This man-made worship comfortably mixed with their natural cravings and pursuit of materialism. Their pluralistic worship made God only one among many gods.

These nations lost touch with the sacred. Their governmental and religious leaders failed to tell the people the truth. Leadership preached soothing messages that encouraged people to abandon God



and believe the false messages of peace and goodness.

Thus, leaders failed to encourage the people to examine themselves in the light of God's word and His demands. Trusting their leaders, Israel and Judah saw no need to make changes in their lives. Repentance no longer described God's obstinate people.

### **Purpose Of God's Message Through Amos**

The children of God in Amos' day forgot God. God sent Amos to them to convict them of their sin.

- They followed the false prophets who declared pleasant things to them.
- The people basked in luxury and laziness but forgot the afflicted among their midst.
- They rejected God and became idol worshipers.

God sent Amos to warn Judah and Israel of impending judgment upon them for their sin. He would send enemies against them and overcome their false security.

In this fashion, God also revealed certain aspects of His nature:

- His sovereignty over all nations, including Judah's and Israel's enemies;
- His grace and mercy in sending Amos to warn them to repent and to turn to God;
- His judgment upon sin;

- His holiness in His demands that they worship Him and Him alone; and
- His care for the afflicted among them.

## **Correlation**

Professing believers today replay the conditions of Amos' era. We have not learned from history.

### **Rest upon an inferior peace**

Many today rest upon an inferior peace. A false sense of security in a falsely presented gospel has led many to believe that they do not need to make any changes in their lives. Religious leaders of today fail to preach the necessity of repentance from sin as integral to the gospel message.

Further, false prophets, pastors, and leaders of local Christian assemblies do not teach the promised effects of conformity to Christ that results from true salvation, i.e., a new creature in Christ. Others live as they please because of a misleading view of freedom in Christ.

Immorality and, worse yet, amorality exists because so called Christ followers have lost touch with the sacred. A false understanding of the Biblical truth of "once saved, always saved and safe" produces a false sense of security and brings rampant sin into professing believers' lives.

### **Reliance upon an imitation power**

Today, professing believers and their professing Christian assemblies embrace practices that demonstrate unbelief in God's power. Counterfeit teachers and preachers urge believers to yield to

culture's mores in the vain attempt to create peace and security.

Some appeal to human reason as the viable means of gospel presentation. Mankind's hope does not rest upon good arguments. It rests upon the invisible ministry of the Holy Spirit to regenerate sinners and to convince them of Biblical truth.

Too often cultural appeasement leads pastors and religious leaders away from the counsel of God. This tragedy produces a dependence upon gimmicks, advertising, and promotion to increase and retain attendance. The deceit of excitement and enthusiasm for the reality of God's glorious manifest presence leads to further spiritual decline.

Thus, many present-day preachers dilute the pure gospel of Christ by leaving out crucial elements and presenting part for the whole. In the hope that the world will find their message appealing, these misleading pastors fail to call their sinners to repentance or knowledge of grace that saves sinners.

### **Resort to intentional protests against God**

Professing believers today rest on inferior peace and an imitation power, because we have rebelled against God, willfully following false prophets and their deceitful messages. Though results look attractive, they rest upon shaky foundations. They do not rest upon God alone by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The professing Christian Church emulates Israel and Judah, at ease, fooled by an inferior peace and imitation power. It resulted from an underlying intentional protest against God.

## Implications

This passage from the prophet Amos provides a serious warning to us. False leaders of our day fail to teach the people to pursue God just as the false prophets did in the days of Amos. The severity of the warning should prod us to examine our circumstances, because we, too, have many possessions and live self-satisfied lives.

Faulty leadership of our day has lulled us to sleep with their mantra that “all is well in the Church.” We must recognize our true condition and heed the message that God gave to Amos thousands of years ago. We identify, in the message of Amos, symptoms that relate to us, warning signs that will help us to turn from reliance upon uncertain things to pursue after God and the firm foundation that He offers.

We need, once again, to restore the dignity of the Holy Spirit. We have set Him aside and refused to listen to His voice. Our hope rests on God Who, by His Holy Spirit, overcomes attacks on the truth, and convinces unbelievers of the truth when proclaimed.

We must remember what God said to Zechariah, when he faced a difficult time. Later in his life, Jerusalem lay in ruins, and Zechariah began to rebuild it. From a human standpoint, Zechariah faced an insurmountable task. God assured him with this promise,

*“It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord.” (Zechariah 4.6)*

If it is wrong to call the works of the Holy Spirit

the works of men, and it is, it is equally sinful to call the works of men the works of the Holy Spirit. That describes our trouble. We identify the works of men as the works of the Holy Spirit.

To experience once again the glorious manifest presence of God by His Holy Spirit, we must repent of our sin and return to the pursuit of God.

I call upon you and the Church of Jesus Christ to heed these warnings in the book of Amos and realize that we stand on the brink of judgment. We must examine to see whether we have substituted ease, contentment, and imitation power for the true peace of God.

We must restore, once again, the dignity of the person of the Holy Spirit of God.

### **Questions For Reflection And Application**

01. How did Israel and Judah demonstrate their recklessness and carelessness?
02. How do you see the current professing Christian church living in a reckless and careless manner?
03. How has a false sense of security based upon a falsely presented gospel lead many to believe that they have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life?
04. What do you think led God's people to trust in geography instead of the omnipotent God of the universe?
05. Describe a food recipe guaranteed to fail because of mixing things together that were not meant to go together.
06. Describe a game that failed when the players followed different sets of rules.
07. Where have you experienced a false sense of

- security?
08. How would you know it if it happened? What do you use as your compass or foundation?
  09. How does compromise with the current culture affect your spiritual stability?
  10. Have you ever experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?
  11. How can you recognize the work of the Holy Spirit?
  12. What steps can you take to develop your relationship with the Holy Spirit that offers the true peace of God rather than an inferior peace that the world gives?

*Heavenly Father, thank You for this record that You have given to us through Your man of God thousands of years ago, Amos, who called his people to pursue after You and to forsake that which is false.*

*I pray that You will use these same warnings in our day to cause us to awaken to the true circumstances where we live, to turn from them, to repent from them, and to pursue after You.*

*Help us to forsake our sin and to forsake those false leaders and prophets who would lead us astray. Enable us to seek after the truth of your Word so that we might rest upon true strength and power. Grant that we might experience the reality of Your peace.*

*We will give You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, honor, glory, and praise for what You accomplish in our lives. I ask these things, Father, in the name of Jesus Your Son.*

*Amen.*

## **Chapter Twelve**

### **False Prophets Neglect Essential Orthodoxy**

Many experts call him the greatest professional football coach in history. (1) Vince Lombardi, the legendary football coach of the Green Bay Packers and the Washington Redskins, enjoyed many victories in his career.

While head coach of Green Bay, he won 5 NFL Championships and the first two Super Bowls before retiring from the Packers in 1967. (2) He never had a losing season as an NFL coach.

One Lombardi quotation pinpoints his foundation for success: “Excellence is achieved by the mastery of the fundamentals.”

A typical story from his coaching era at Green Bay explains this philosophy vividly. After a bitter loss to the Chicago Bears, the Packers’ archrival, Lombardi hustled his players from the locker room after the game onto the team buses. He took them from Chicago back to their practice field in Green Bay, still in their dirty, sweaty game uniforms. He gathered them around himself with a football in his hands.

He held the football in front of them and said to them, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” He then directed his team through a grueling practice session with particular emphasis upon the fundamentals of football. The team performed them poorly in their loss to Chicago, and he reviewed them with the team to remind the players of the importance of the fundamentals in successful football.

This story from the victorious career of Vince Lombardi holds significance for life as well. Life has a way of clouding our eyes to its fundamentals. We get distracted by the latest fads and excitements which lead to disastrous results.

Lombardi's lesson describes the desperate need facing the professing Church of Jesus Christ today. The Church and its leadership have lost sight of Biblical fundamentals and flounders in perilous times. Although exceptions exist, they prove the rule.

For too long, the Church followed the mantra, "Doctrine does not matter" and forsook the fundamentals. Then, to the bewilderment of many, a rudderless, spiritually weakened Church ensued. In vain attempts to "fix" the difficulties, it flits from one new idea to another, hoping to find the mysterious, evasive plan that will correct the decline.

Church leadership has failed. Whether from ignorance or by deliberate choice, the Church of Jesus Christ has succumbed to the siren call of false prophets and abandoned the old fundamentals from the Bible.

The Apostle Paul feared this pattern would befall the churches he labored so hard to develop. On his last trip to Jerusalem, where he knew trouble awaited him, he called together the church leaders from the Church at Ephesus.

He wanted to give his friends instruction about his future, though somewhat unknown. His message combined a warning and directions on how to face the coming problems. (Acts 20.28-31) He warned them that grievous wolves, false prophets, would come into their Church and draw many aside.



In his message, Paul compared these Church leaders to shepherds. God had entrusted them with the responsibilities as shepherds over His flock, the Church. They had a duty to feed the people of God, not with physical food, but with spiritual food.

God required these shepherds to protect their flocks from their enemies, who wanted to destroy them. God expected these spiritual leaders to give direction to their flock. Paul emphasized these obligations, because he knew that dangers lay ahead, and he made clear the responsibilities of these spiritual leaders as shepherds.

That which Paul feared would happen at Ephesus describes the condition of the Church today. Wolves in sheep's clothing, false prophets, have infiltrated the Church. They twist the Scriptures to their own benefit and, consequently, the Church has declined.

We live in perilous times. False leaders victimize the Church. Faulty leadership of our day evades, attacks, and undermines Biblical doctrines. They teach that doctrine is not essential to Christian life. Even more dangerous, they say that no one can really know the truth.

### **False Prophets Neglect Essential Orthodoxy**

Seven Biblical doctrines serve as the old fundamentals of the Church of Jesus Christ and of our faith in Christ. Church leaders, the shepherds of Christ's flock, must defend these truths against those who proclaim otherwise. False prophets ignore them which identifies them as false prophets,

the grievous wolves against which Paul warned.

**#1: False prophets neglect the fundamental doctrine of God, His person and works.**

God has existed from all eternity in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the only true and living God, He sovereignly created and controls all things according to His plan and purposes. Through His appointed Judge, Jesus Christ His Son, God will pronounce justice upon all who fail to trust and obey His word as revealed in the Bible.

This brief comment does not, of course, state the full doctrine(s). It does, however, identify a primary basic belief for God's people but lacking in today's Christian Church.

**#2: False prophets neglect the fundamental teaching of the nature of Jesus Christ.**

True shepherds of the Church must believe and defend the person and works of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Without eradicating His deity, He set aside His rightful claim to His form with God, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became incarnate in human flesh, born of the Virgin Mary.

He became the God-man, God in the flesh, in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. His works would fill volumes describing His supernatural miracles. His greatest work came when He gave His life on the cross as atonement to God for the sins of people like you and me.

Everyone who comes to God by faith upon what Jesus Christ accomplished on his/her behalf on the cross will experience forgiveness and peace with God. Justification by faith alone in Christ alone

provides salvation for all who believe. His resurrection on the third day after His death and His ascension into the Father's presence confirmed it.

**#3: False prophets neglect the teaching of the fundamental doctrine of the person and works of the Holy Spirit.**

An equal member of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit does not possess a physical form. Although a spirit, He possesses the attributes of a person. Even though He is deity, He inhabits the lives of believers and works in them.

Jesus taught in John 14-16 many of the works of the Holy Spirit, Who empowers believers with His supernatural authority and ability to serve God, to worship and glorify Christ, and to walk in holiness. He molds our lives into the image of Christ.

We do not hear very much about the Holy Spirit in our day. We have grieved Him, and in that process, we have quenched His work among us. The shepherds of Christ's Church must exhort Christ followers in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His works in believers.

**#4: False prophets neglect the fundamental teaching of the several doctrines of salvation.**

Today, the phrase "born again" carries little meaning. Some professing Christian teachers have taught this truth incorrectly to the confusion of many. Multitudes of people have done exactly what Paul said would occur. These wolves in sheep's clothing have come to destroy peoples' faith, and to guide them away from Jesus, the only Savior of sinners.

For this reason, I will discuss briefly several

important doctrines of salvation, which we must believe in order to follow the Scriptures faithfully.

**Depravity:** Every human being, beginning at conception, is birthed with a totally depraved nature which alienates and separates us from God. Each of us inherit the sinful nature that Adam and Eve received when they disobeyed God's command and ate of the forbidden fruit.

This sinful nature so thoroughly permeates our natures that it renders us completely helpless to satisfy God or to reconcile ourselves to Him. The Bible describes humanity as dead in trespasses and sins. Therefore, we have no desire to seek and know God, have any power to please God, or to reconcile us back to God. We are spiritually dead, helpless. (Romans 3.10-18; Ephesians 2.1-3) All sinners need a Savior Who can pay for our sin and reconcile us back to God.

**Regeneration:** You cannot make yourself born again spiritually any more than you can physically birth yourself. However, God made provision to reconcile sinners back to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ, whose death brought reconciliation between God and people like you and me.

You had nothing to do with your physical birth, and you have nothing to do with your spiritual birth. You can do nothing to deserve it, prepare the way for it, or produce it in your life. Religious actions though

earnestly and faithfully performed,  
contribute nothing to your spiritual new  
birth.

The Holy Spirit produces the new birth  
through an experience called regeneration. It  
is a sovereign, gracious gift of new life from  
above from God to sinners like you and me  
by the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's  
life.

**Holiness:** Once the Holy Spirit regenerates a  
person, He produces changes in those whom  
He regenerates, always. He causes the  
regenerated one(s) to repent from his/her  
sins. You turn from them and no longer  
follow your sinful lifestyle.

Furthermore, He gives you faith to trust  
Christ and Christ alone for your salvation.  
When you trust Christ, you become justified  
before a holy and just God. As the Holy  
Spirit works in your life, He produces a  
desire to follow Christ and obey Him.

The Holy Spirit then leads the child of God  
into a holy life. It does not occur all at once,  
but each one grows in holiness under the  
Spirit's direction.

These short statements identify the basic  
doctrines of salvation: helpless depravity of sinners  
without Christ, regeneration by the Holy Spirit,  
repentance from sin, and personal holiness. By no  
means do they describe the totality of these

doctrines.

Volumes of books describe them in detail. As a Christian grows in faith in Christ, the fullness of salvation will stagger the mind. The miracle of regeneration includes the nature of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, as well as what you become in Christ...literally a new creature.

**#5: False prophets neglect the fundamental doctrine of the Bible.**

The Holy Spirit moved upon human instruments to record faithfully God's inspired message to humanity. Because of its inspiration by God, it is inerrant, infallible, and authoritative for life and practice. It describes the nature of God and the responsibilities of humanity to Him.

When you believe and obey it, the Holy Spirit brings into your experience the reality of the Bible's message as it presents it. It reveals how you can know God and experience Him your daily life.

Down through history, the enemy of the souls of humanity has attempted to destroy the Bible. Governments continue to outlaw it, and religious leaders misuse it. Elitists mock it as something you cannot trust. While they admit that it contains good moral teaching, they contend that it contains errors and is nothing more than a good book, unworthy of trust for eternal salvation.

Despite these challenges, God's word endures. The Bible offers trustworthy evidence and revelation of God.

**#6: False prophets neglect the fundamental doctrine of holiness.**

Many people revolt at this doctrine because they

personally fall short of God's demands, and do not want to think about it. Christ followers must become increasingly holy. Our lives should show development from the day that we first trusted Christ.

As we have grown older physically and our lives have changed, so our spiritual lives should also show growth. As believers examine themselves today in contrast to when they first trusted Christ, they should see a difference in their lifestyles and their thinking.

They will find that they have lost former desires and interests, and they will experience a growth in holiness. All believers in Christ experience spiritual growth. Not all grow at the same rate or in the same fashion. However, they become increasingly like Christ.

Let me ask you a question. Can you honestly say that you have greater interest today in pursuing after God and obeying Him than when you first trusted Christ? You should see a difference as the Holy Spirit works in your life. You will not attain ultimate perfection, but you should grow and develop spiritually.

Complacent pastors today do not emphasize personal holiness. People in their congregations do not want to hear sermons which remind them of their sins. They do not want to review their spiritual failures. However, Paul reminded his friends from Ephesus of their responsibilities as teachers and as leaders to feed and tend their sheep. That work involves corrective ministry as much as any other aspect.

**#7: False prophets neglect the doctrine of the**

## **Church.**

The Bible describes how the Church should function. It tells how to identify spiritual leaders and explains how those shepherds should function. It reveals what we should do when we encounter leaders who lead people astray from Biblical teaching. It describes the Church as the body of Christ, a living organism.

However, the Church has developed into nothing more than a business organization, and it follows all the patterns of secular structures. The professing Church experiences very little of God's supernatural activity. One can explain it all in terms of management and business styles.

The Church is not an organization, nor should it function like one. We need to return to the Scriptures and examine them for the fundamentals vital to the Church and Christianity. They are living and vital. Moreover, as members of the body of Christ, Christ followers serve Jesus as their King. He is in charge of the Church. We need to counsel with the King to find out how He wants His body to function.

Most Churches do not do that today. They disregard the kingship of Christ in these matters. When you hear Christian teachers counsel the people of God away from the Lordship of Christ in issues of the Church, they identify themselves as false leaders.

As wolves in sheep's clothing, they pretend to follow Christ but in fact deny His authority as enemies of Christ.

## **Implications**



These seven doctrines comprise the foundational truths essential to true biblical Christianity:

- the doctrine of God;
- the nature of Jesus Christ;
- the person and works of the Holy Spirit;
- the doctrines of salvation: depravity, regeneration, holiness;
- the doctrine of the Bible: inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative;
- the doctrine of holiness; and
- the doctrine of the Church.

False pastors and Church leaders prevalent today neglect and attack these truths, as Paul warned. The Church reels under their evil influence. The failure to proclaim these basic beliefs produces spiritual decline.

We desperately need a spiritual revival in the body of Christ.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see the truth of these doctrines, their absence in today's Church, and their necessity in Christian congregations. May He lead you to pursue the truth and to conform your life to it.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will bring about a spiritual revival in your life and the life of the Church of Jesus Christ that we may once again experience God's glorious presence in our lives.

## References

1. Wikipedia, "Vince Lombardi"

2. Ibid.

## Questions For Reflection And Application

01. Who is God and how does He work?
02. Who is the Holy Spirit and how does He work?
03. Who is Jesus Christ and how does He work?
04. Describe how they differ.
05. What does “regeneration” mean?
06. What does “holiness” mean?
07. Which comes first, regeneration or holiness?
08. If you study this article with another person or in a group, perform a short play in which one person shows the plan of salvation to another person. If you do this quiz alone, write the major points you would share if you could lead another to Jesus Christ.
09. How did the Bible come to exist? What does “inerrant” mean? What does “infallible” mean? How does the Bible differ from any excellent history book?
10. How does the Bible show the organization of the Church as different from business or charitable organizations? How does the Church organization differ from democracy?

*Thank You, heavenly Father, for these wondrous truths that we have examined in a brief fashion. They outline the truth as presented in your Word about Yourself and the things You want us to believe and to defend. When we examine others about us who teach things contrary to these truths, may You open our eyes to see their errors, to turn aside from them, and to pursue the truth.*

*I ask You, Holy Spirit of God, to open our eyes to understand the truths that we have examined, to believe them, and to commit our lives to them. May the belief of these truths ultimately bring a change in the way we live and act as we conform our lives to the truth. We will give to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit honor, glory, and praise for all that You accomplish. I ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ.*

*Amen.*

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **False Prophets Avoid Christ Centered Preaching**

What if a friend asked you for help on how to find a good church to attend? How would you respond? What criteria would you recommend?

- location?
- size of congregation?
- type of music?
- children's programs?
- teen programs?
- women's ministry?
- men's ministry?
- evangelistic preaching?
- expository preaching?

Oh, my. The list of criteria could be a long list. This provides only a glimpse of the factors one could consider in choosing where to worship with other Christians. Add to this list the prevalence of false prophets and teachers. This sad reality affects the selection process, because they abound.

Any search for a new Christian congregation must consider the possibility of a false teacher at the helm of a prospective Church. How, then, does one identify a false leader and choose a Biblical leader?

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Church, he outlined the principle criteria for choosing a pastor/leader to follow. He emphasized the importance of the centrality of Christ in preaching.

*“For after that in the wisdom of God the*

*world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1.21-24)*

The conditions in Corinth resemble our world’s circumstances today. Corinth was a wicked city, filled with lusts for possessions, sexual promiscuity, and immorality. Our world very much mirrors the city of Corinth.

As Paul reminded his friends at Corinth of the importance and the centrality of Jesus Christ and the cross, so we in our day need to remember what we need for life and godliness, Christ and the cross. The message has not changed nor has the need changed.

The Jews wanted a sign from Christ as proof of His claims as Messiah. They wanted Jesus to perform some supernatural sign for them. Then they would believe His declarations. When Jesus refused to comply with their demands, the Jews rejected Him.

The Greeks pursued wisdom. They wanted the gospel presented in a wise and scholarly way. When Paul presented the cross of Christ, which seemed foolish to them, they rejected the gospel.

We find in our day much the same reactions to the cross and to the preaching of Jesus Christ. Many demand visible signs to convince them of the truth

of the gospel. To others, it appears foolish. Our society emulates Corinth.

As an antidote to this spiritual poverty, the Apostle Paul proclaimed a Christ-centered message. He outlined the essentials of Christ-centered preaching. What does it include? What emphasis does it provide?

In this message to his friends, Paul explained three marks of Christ-centered preaching, the most important requirement in church choice. We will examine them so that we can understand this all-important emphasis. Then, we can discern and reject those false prophets and leaders who fail to provide it and locate and learn from those who preach Christ.

## **Three Marks Of Christ-centered Preaching**

### **#1: Christ-centered preaching teaches the depravity of mankind.**

False prophets and pastors fail to present the sinfulness of man. They skirt the issue. In fact, many of them will say, “If you come to our church, if you read my materials, you won’t find anything in there about sin.” They avoid it openly and proudly.

I remember a time when I heard a preacher, who during his message completely avoided several sections of his text that gave some very definitive “do nots.” After the service, I spoke to him about his message. I said, “I have a question. How come in your message you didn’t talk about the parts where it said ‘don’t do this...avoid this and this?’”

Immediately he responded, “I only preach a

positive message. I don't talk about anything negative." He failed to preach on sin and its presence in the lives of his congregation.

Because Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, sin has entered the nature of humanity. Every one of us has a sinful nature from the moment of conception. Sin has entered the nature of man. That cute little child or grandchild that you hold in your arms possesses a sinful nature, which

*"... (is) estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." (Psalm 58.3)*

Every child has a heart of rebellion and disobedience. The Scriptures say it this way:

*"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child." (Proverbs 22.15)*

We do not like to view anyone this way, especially children. However, as soon as they have the opportunity, children will divert their will and attention away from God. We are sinners not because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

That is the bent of our hearts and desires. We willfully, deliberately pursue a life away from God, because of our sinful natures. A Christ centered ministry will present that truth and point out several truthful features about us as human beings.

Our sinful natures make us totally helpless in any pursuit after God. By nature, we do not like God nor love God. We are hopelessly dead in our trespasses and sins, as the Scriptures describe us. (Ephesians 2.1-3) We cannot meet the demands of a

holy God. We not only lack the ability to satisfy God, we also lack any desire to meet His commands.

A Christ centered ministry presents these truths. Paul talked about how in the wisdom of this world man did not desire after God. He pointed out and reminded his friends what he had taught them when he preached to them initially. He proclaimed to them their depravity before God.

Jesus preached this same truth in His conversation with Nicodemus. Christ said,

*“He that believeth on [Christ] is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already.”* (John 3.18)

In other words, as sinful men and women without Christ, we stand before God condemned, justly deserving the wrath of God upon us, because of our sinful natures. Further in that same conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said,

*“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”* (John 3.36)

That describes how you and I stand before God without Christ, condemned. Paul reminded his friends in Corinth of how he declared their sinfulness before God. Through Paul’s teaching on the sinfulness of mankind, many came to faith in God’s provision for them in Christ.

Christ-centered preaching presents the depravity of man and points out to men and women their



lostness before God. They stand before God condemned, incapable of any good, incapable of any kind of correction, incapable of any kind of righteous living that would satisfy God. They stand condemned before God.

In our day we need a return to true Christ-centered preaching that proclaims the depravity of man.

**#2: Christ-centered preaching teaches salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.**

A Christ-centered ministry preaches deliverance from sin through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Many preachers, whom I would call false prophets and false teachers, do not present Jesus in true fashion. Instead, they present salvation in a variety of ways.

For example, many say that every religion has its “Jesus.” They teach that those who have the Bible, have the Jesus Who is described in it. Those in other lands and cultures have someone like Jesus that they follow. Thus, many “Jesuses” exist. It does not matter which Jesus you follow if you follow and believe one of them. In error, they call it Christ-centered preaching.

Furthermore, these same teachers and preachers completely avoid the cross. They do not talk about it or even present it. Recently, I researched a very prominent young preacher who travels around the world, preaching to crowds. Multiplied thousands come to his meetings.

The world proclaims him as one of the young, dynamic preachers of our era. He does not preach on the cross. He avoids it, except for infrequent references to it.

No salvation exists for sinners like you and me without the cross. A salvation presented to you as one that will provide for you a passageway into eternal life with God that does not include the cross will not save you. You will ultimately discover, sadly to your harm, that you still stand before God condemned.

Paul mentioned to his friends and reminded them, “The preaching of the cross calls to men and women to believe and to faith in Christ.”

Some will ask, “Why the cross? Why do we need to hear about the cross and all that blood? Besides, Jesus did not die there on the cross. He just swooned, and his followers took him down from the cross. Then, they hid him away and later said he came back to life. We don’t believe any of that.” They just flat out reject the cross

We need a brief reminder of what Jesus fulfilled on the cross. On the cross, Christ presented Himself to God as a substitutionary sacrifice as payment in full of the penalty for sin on behalf of people like you and me. When He offered Himself on the cross, He gave His life there. Yes, He did die on the cross. He did not swoon on the cross. He died there.

When speaking of Christ, the Apostle Peter declared,

*“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1 Peter 2.24)*

When Christ died on the cross, shedding His blood and having His body broken by the cruelty of His tormentors, God the Father looked down on His

sacrifice and accepted it. Christ's death on the cross fulfilled a payment in satisfaction to God the Father on behalf of people like you and me. (See Colossians 2.13-14.)

That explains why God accepts only those who come to Him through Christ. (See John 14.6 and 1 Timothy 2.5.) When a sinner comes to God, (s)he must come through faith alone in the Substitute Whom God provided for sinners, Jesus Christ.

I remind you that I stated that a Christ-centered ministry preaches deliverance from sin through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. I cannot contribute anything to my salvation, because of my inherited sinful nature and the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ for sinners.

Therefore, sinners receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as their substitute, alone, with nothing else added to it. Christ-centered preaching presents Jesus Christ as the satisfaction for the sin of people like you and like me. Any other preaching by false teachers and leaders will not reconcile you to God.

When we have faith in Christ, we enjoy benefits that accrue to us:

- We experience freedom from guilt.
- We enjoy freedom from the foolishness of endless self-analysis.
- We possess freedom from endless preoccupation with ourselves.

A prominent mark of false teaching today stresses maximizing your full potential, having all of your emotions and your psychology all blended correctly and having a full emotional you. False

teachers do not even talk about Jesus, or God, or about what Jesus accomplished on the cross and what it will provide in our lives when we fully trust him.

Christ-centered preaching proclaims deliverance from our sinful human natures and all its hurts by faith alone in Christ alone. Paul said:

*“We preach Christ crucified.”* (1 Corinthians 1.23)

To those who believe it brings salvation.

### **#3: Christ-centered preaching teaches Christ-like living as a mark of faith in Christ.**

Christ-centered preaching presents the demands and the delights of the life of Christ living in our everyday lives. We tend to view salvation as a one-time experience which provides, some day in the future, eternal life.

We act as though our salvation in Christ has no bearing upon our lives today. We go on living the way we have always lived, pursuing our own dreams and desires. We wash our hands of anything between the time when we trusted Christ and the time when we would enter eternal life. That describes a commonly held fallacy.

Christ makes demands upon those of us who trust Him and have claimed His death on the cross as payment for our sins to the satisfaction of God the Father. He taught His disciples how He expected them to live and has made demands upon all who trust Him.

For example, He said,

*“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16.24)*

*“For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5.20)*

The Scriptures provide a multitude of Christ’s demands that describe the pattern of life of His followers.

Following Christ brings delights, too. Christians have barely scratched the surface to fully understand and grasp the effect that faith in Christ can have upon our lives.

Faith in Christ brings fullness of joy, freedom, peace, and security to our minds and hearts because of Jesus and what He accomplished and fulfilled on the cross.

To realize its fullness requires that we who trust Christ present ourselves daily to Jesus, asking Him to bring into our lives that which He provided for us in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father.

John wrote to his friends in his first epistle, telling them how they could have fullness of joy in Christ. (1 John 1.4) What Christ accomplished on the cross has a bearing upon every aspect of our lives:

- married or single;
- rich or poor;

- family life;
- work activities;
- friendships;
- time;
- talents; and
- treasures.

## Implications

The false prophets, teachers, and leaders of today reject all three of these aspects of Christ-centered ministry. They reject the depravity of man, deliverance through faith alone in Christ alone, and the demands and delights of Christ upon our lives. The declaration of these truths helps identify a Godly leader. False prophets and teachers avoid them.

For some of you, these truths we have just examined from the Scriptures have no meaning, because you do not trust Christ. Therefore, it has no effect in your life.

Jesus said,

*“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11.28)

*“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* (John 14.6)

*“Everyone who comes to me I will in no wise cast out.”* (John 6.37)

I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see your need of trusting Jesus and bring you to faith in Jesus, the only provision for sinners like you and like me. I call upon you to trust Christ now.

Those of us who have trusted in Christ need to realize what it means to have a Christ-centered ministry. False messengers and their false messages bombard us. If we follow them, they will lead us astray. Yes, we must reject their errors. We cannot play with them and somehow make them part of our lives.

We must turn from them and pursue the truth. We need to have some foundation upon which we can build and stand to help us discern between the true and the false. Christ-centered preaching provides it. We need to know the truth upon which we can rely and rest so that we can discern between the true and the false.

I pray that the Spirit of God will help you to have that foundation upon which you can rest. It will help you discern the true from the false, so that you might experience fullness of joy in Christ.

### **Questions For Reflection And Application**

01. Define the meaning of “the depravity of man.”
02. It would be hard to find an unbeliever who believes in the depravity of man. Why do you think a professing Christian would *not* believe in the depravity of man?
03. If a Christian visiting speaker, a Christian author, or a church pastor fails to present the truth of what Scripture says about the depravity of man, is it possible for him/her to direct an unbeliever to salvation?

04. How many paths to life everlasting in heaven are available to mankind?
05. Why do you think that the cross is central to faith in Jesus Christ? Why not the birth of Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, the ascension of Christ, or some other activity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
06. When we have faith in Christ, we experience freedom from guilt. We also know freedom from endless self-analysis, and preoccupation with our selves. Are these benefits offered through the teaching of Islam, Buddhism, Scientology, Agnosticism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, or any other religious teaching? If not, why not?
07. How is what Christ accomplished on the cross affecting:
  - a) Your marital status?
  - b) Your financial status?
  - c) Your family life?
  - d) Your work?
  - e) Your time?
  - f) Your friendships?
  - g) Your talents?
  - h) Your treasures?
08. Do you sit under the teaching of a Christ-Entered pastor or teacher?
  - a) Does (s)he teach the depravity of mankind?
  - b) Does (s)he teach salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone?
  - c) Does (s)he teach that Christ-like living is a mark of true faith in Christ?
  - d) If you answered "no" to one of these previous three questions, should you continue to sit under his/her teaching and



leadership?

09. If you are a Christian pastor or teacher who does not regularly include those three teachings, how do you justify your ministry?

*Thank you, heavenly Father, for your provision for us in Jesus Christ. Thank you for what He accomplished in His life, His death on the cross, His resurrection, and in His ascension to sit at Your right hand in the glory of heaven. Thank you for your grace and for your mercy.*

*Father, I ask that You send your Holy Spirit to bring into our daily lives faith in Christ to the saving of our souls.*

*Then, secondly, to bring into our lives the fruit, the benefits, the blessings, the delights of what Christ accomplished for us. May they permeate our daily experience and all of the affairs and activities of our lives that we might enjoy that which He has provided for us.*

*We will give to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit praise, honor, glory, and thanks for what You accomplish in our lives. I ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ Your Son.*

*Amen.*

## **Chapter Fourteen**

### **False Prophets Disregard The Holy Spirit**

I'll never forget Charles "Tremendous" Jones. Perhaps you have heard of him. He became a highly successful salesman and spent many years giving seminars on successful sales techniques.

I attended one of his seminars in Detroit, Michigan with my father. We laughed and cried at his humor and poignant stories that emphasized his remarks. Many of his points stick with me today.

My wife and I used one of them with our children. He told of how he paid his children to read books he thought they should read. We followed his advice with our daughters. (We did test them to make sure they had read them.)

Perhaps he acquired the idea from a quote by Claud Cockburn:

*"Never underestimate the effectiveness of a straight cash bribe."*

Bribery does work. Many businessmen use it to get ahead in their careers. Businesses bribe customers to entice them to purchase goods and services. Others corrupt legal authorities to ignore and to overturn legal requirements.

However, no one can bribe unbelievers to trust Christ. Nor can the assembly of the first-born use it to expand Christ's kingdom so His glory fills the earth. Further, it does not enable Christ followers to fulfill the impossibilities of the Christian life.

The believers at Corinth in Paul's day faced problems. Their world emphasized wealth,

wickedness, and wisdom. Especially, the citizens of Corinth prided themselves in their ability to discern truth. Paul feared that the Corinthian believers, in their desire to know God, would use the means that their fellow citizens followed to attain wisdom.

How did the Corinthians attain wisdom that Paul feared his friends would adapt?

### **The Corinthian Error**

The Corinthians had a thirst for communicating wisdom. To persuade audiences, speakers compiled a collection of volumes on how to sway people in any kind of audience of any truth, regardless of the opposition to it.

When any speaker wanted to convince a group of people of some truth that he held, he went to this set and researched how to present the truths that he wanted them to believe.

Then, when he came to the audience, he presented his speech in the way those volumes directed him as the best means and methods to communicate his truth to persuade his audience.

Two phrases describe the Corinthian culture's way of communicating truth and convincing people to believe it:

- excellency of speech: and
- enticing words.

Every speaker used these techniques as revealed in the volumes that taught persuasion.

### **Correlation**

### **Modern day adaptation of the Corinthian error**

Our world replicates the world of Corinth at the time of Paul. We have our culturally influenced means and methods of presenting the gospel in hopes of persuading people to believe the gospel. Modern day false leaders and pastors use a variety of false means in their gospel proclamations.

- **Authorities**

For example, they rely upon human authorities. This method comes in three forms:

- famous and spectacular people to give endorsements of Jesus;
- human interest polls to determine sermon topics, church program selection, types of meetings, and music;
- area demographics to dictate building location, income targets, and ethnic emphasis or exclusion.

- **Apologetics**

Still others depend upon apologetics, using skillful argumentation against famous religious leaders to defend the gospel. Although apologetics can prove the rationality of the Scriptures, it fails as an effective means of spiritual revival in the Church and the world. It cannot change the heart to believe upon Christ.

- **Archaeology**

Proponents of archaeology rest upon artifacts and geographical digs as a foundation for presenting

the claims of Christ. They believe that these evidences will prove the validity of the Bible and convince unbelievers to trust Christ. The Bible does not require archaeology to verify its message.

- **Appeals to the flesh**

Another way in which we adapt to our culture counts on appeals to the flesh. We specifically design church programs to please human nature, hoping to draw in the crowds. These occur in some churches as a regular pattern. Others follow it at popular holidays, like Easter, Christmas, or national celebrations.

The promotion of these events concentrates upon vivid descriptions of the program that caters to the flesh and the satisfaction of its desires.

- **Appeasement**

Worse yet, many present the “gospel” by appeasement. These false prophets and teachers proclaim a message designed not to offend anyone. So, they couch it in terms that make their audiences feel good about themselves, never mentioning the demands of Christ upon those who follow Him.

- **Alternatives to the Holy Spirit**

1. We confuse emotion and excitement for the Holy Spirit. Music groups and bands whip up excitement and audience enthusiasm and call it the moving of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit affects people’s emotions, but you cannot manufacture it. The mere presence of emotion and excitement does not equate to the presence of the Spirit.

2. In similar fashion, false prophets and pastors tend to confuse the spectacular with the supernatural. This especially plays a role in special presentations designed to appeal to the flesh. However, a spectacular presentation does not guarantee the supernatural power of God. The supernatural can be spectacular, but the spectacular is not necessarily supernatural.
3. Again, we mistake a lively sermon presentation for the unction of the Holy Spirit upon the preacher. Too often we mistake enthusiastic and bombastic presentations for the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Many in leadership of professing churches reject supernatural activity. They say, "It is not for our time. It no longer occurs in our day. Oh, yes, in times past supernatural activity took place. We can read about it in the Bible. It did occur. But that is not for us anymore. Don't expect anything supernatural to happen in your life, because that does not come from God." So, they disavow the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit and rely upon human means to achieve their goals.

These examples highlight a few of the methods that false pastors and leaders use from the culture to present the truth of Jesus Christ. However, their application rejects Biblical patterns. They contradict how Paul proclaimed Christ to Corinth and in every

place where Paul taught.

### **The Biblical means of spiritual effectiveness**

- **Paul's Method for Spiritual Effectiveness**

He did not follow the Corinthian format. In fact, he came to them in the opposite fashion. He contrasted between the way that the world presents wisdom and the way that God presents it.

In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul described how he came to them and spoke of Christ to them.

*“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2.1-5)*

He did not come in the fashion that the Corinthians desired, relying upon human means and methods. He certainly could have, because he studied under the greatest teachers of his day. A well-educated and highly trained man, he could have relied upon his brilliance in the Scriptures.

In contrast, Paul rejected their commonly accepted methods. He did not want the Corinthian believers' faith to rest upon human artifice. Instead, Paul wanted their faith to rest upon God. So, Paul

rejected the appeals, attractiveness, and winsomeness that the culture's system would produce. He preached to them in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Many of us have seen demonstrations at stores, malls, and county fairs. A person displays a product and shows its uses, hoping to convince you to purchase the product. That pictures the meaning of Paul's description of how he presented Christ to the Corinthians. He proclaimed Christ by the supernatural ability that the Holy Spirit gave to him.

By the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, the Corinthians believed Paul's message, and God changed their lives.

- **Biblical spiritual effectiveness in demonstration of the Spirit**

When we talk about the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, what do we mean? I suggest a few examples to evidence the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. For example, everyone's salvation results from a supernatural act. You cannot save yourself. Salvation comes from a work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life, supernaturally.
2. The Holy Spirit turns sinful, wicked men and women into saints, who do not have to rely upon the Greek original to prove their sainthood. Their lives demonstrate it. The demonstration of the Spirit and of power will produce true, Biblical saints.
3. Further, the demonstration of the Spirit and of power provides unction to a preacher. Unction, a Biblical term,



describes one totally absorbed by God. The preacher speaks with a fervency and urgency, which consumes the speaker. You can see it. The preacher is on “fire,” spiritually speaking.

4. Again, the demonstration of the Spirit and of power affects the atmosphere of the meeting. I do not refer to the air that you breathe. Rather I intend the sense of God’s presence. Awe pervades the place without anyone asking for silence. The quietness recognizes a holy condition that occurred supernaturally, without manipulation. A holy fear grips you, not a flippant carefree attitude. God has invaded the meeting and made Himself known to those present.
5. In addition, prayer depends upon the supernatural intervention of God on behalf of the matter requested from Him. I do not doubt that a direct correlation exists between the rejection of the Spirit’s supernatural work and the decline in prayer. Despite the thousands of promises in the Bible for answered prayer, believers simply do not believe that God answers prayer. Therefore, prayerlessness pervades the Church today. Prayer and faith in the supernatural work of God by His Spirit go hand in hand. False prophets and Church leaders explain away the obvious. The Church and believers in Christ must turn to God in prayer to plead for mercy from Him to intervene

again, supernaturally. Prayer can be and should be a vital relationship between you and God where you bring to Him your needs and you expect Him to answer. God still answers prayer.

6. Additionally, we can see supernatural activity by miracles. We see very few miracles in our day. I have often thought about why we do not see miracles in our day. Many people say that we do not see miracles today, because God does not do miracles anymore. Well, I suppose you could give that as an answer, except I am prime example number one that that is not true. God does do miracles today, because I can tell you several that God did in my body. Supernatural miracles. On one occasion, the doctor, absolutely dumbfounded, staggered out of the surgery room to my wife and said, "I can't explain it. It is not there. It was there on the operating table before surgery, but it is gone." That only describes one of them. God does miracles this day, in our day. Why doesn't He do more? I admit I do not know why He does not. However, I know one reason why He does not. It comes from the fact that we do not ask Him for the miraculous. We fail to ask Him to perform for us those things that only He can do, the supernatural, requests that require Him to do something that no one else can do. Miracles? Yes, the supernatural activity

God on behalf of His children.

## **Implications**

In many ways, the professing Church fits the description of Corinth: wealthy, wicked, and wise. We have the same interests and desires as our Corinthian counterparts. With few exceptions, everything about the present-day professing church can be explained in human terms.

The professing Church rejects Paul's counsel and concentrates upon the world's ABCs of Church growth, attendance, buildings, and cash. We expect preachers today to follow the pattern of the world in their appeals to us.

Thus, we have great misunderstandings of Biblical truth because we approach it as we approach every other kind of knowledge. We cannot understand God and His provision in Christ the same ways that we attempt to learn science, mathematics, business, or literature.

Because of the unique nature of God, it requires His Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds to understand spiritual truth. Paul made this evident in his reminder.

The examination of Paul's approach to the Corinthians helps us to distinguish between false and true ways in which to present the gospel. It also enables us to discern the false prophets and teachers who present the gospel incorrectly.

So, when Paul said, "When I came to you, I came to you in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," what did he mean? The things that we just examined and perhaps more. The Holy Spirit worked in him beyond human explanation. The

Corinthians saw it and believed Paul's messages.  
(See Romans 15.17-19.)

In similar fashion, today, we need to see once again the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit, not the explainable ways of the false prophets, pastors, teachers, and leaders so abundantly present.

Where has the Spirit of God identified in your heart and life your failure to apply these truths? Do you rely upon the ways, means, and methods of the world to try to understand God? Do you follow those that choose the world's ways instead of reliance upon the Holy Spirit?

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see the abundant supernatural works that He can and will provide to you and His children who ask Him. He waits for your call.

### **Questions For Reflection And Application**

01. How did the Corinthian society identify and understand truth?
02. How do modern false leaders and pastors use human authorities in their method of proclaiming the gospel?
03. Why are apologetics ineffective as a means of spiritual revival?
04. Why are special programs for Easter, Christmas, or holidays usually ineffective in developing spiritual growth and maturity?
05. Why do you think church leaders have a fear of offending someone through preaching a gospel that includes the demands of Christ upon His followers?
06. How can you correctly determine the presence of the Holy Spirit in a church meeting?

07. Have you ever experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in a church meeting? Describe where it was and what happened.
08. When have you enjoyed a demonstration of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?
09. What is the role of prayer in profound demonstration of Holy Spirit power?
10. Do you believe in the miraculous? Why or why not?

*Dear heavenly Father, thank You for this vivid example we have from your servant Paul. It shows us how You used him, and how he relied upon You by Your Holy Spirit to demonstrate to the Corinthians the truth and reality of Yourself.*

*Father, I pray that in Your grace and mercy by Your Holy Spirit You will demonstrate the truth and reality of what we have examined, especially concerning the Lord Jesus Your Son. Open our eyes to see and to understand the truth, so that we might commit our lives to it, trusting your Son Jesus exclusively as Lord and Savior, and that we might be reconciled to You through His blood.*

*We will give You thanks, Father, for what you accomplish.*

*I ask these things in Jesus name, Amen.*

## Chapter Fifteen

### Where Do We Go From Here?

I will never forget that night. Newly married, my parents visited Diane and me. I heard about a leadership seminar by Charlie “Tremendous” Jones. Maybe you have heard about him.

My dad and I attended one of them in Detroit, Michigan. I will not forget that meeting. We laughed so many times that my sides ached. In the midst of the laughter, I learned many significant lessons that stayed with me 50+ years.

For example, he said the following on how to make a decision:

*“Make it. Make it yours. Die by it, die by it, die by it.”*

Too often procrastination prevents a decision. Do not put it off; make that decision now. Make that decision a part of your life. Then, stick by it. Good advice for a young man just out of college and thinking about the future.

The preceding chapters in this book outline we examined how to discern false prophets by reviewing Scripture’s description of their characteristics.

We learned how to identify them, not only by the ways they behave, but also by the errors they teach, and the truths they fail to teach. This final study examines how the Scriptures instruct us to respond to false prophets and teachers.

Each chapter closes with the prompt to you to avoid false prophets. That requires a decision on

your part.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

Scripture provides clear direction from Jude, the second to last book in the Bible, on how to proceed.

*“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. 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.” (Jude 3-4)*

Jude told his friends of the presence of false prophets and teachings among them and how followers of Christ should respond to false leaders. These believers became aware of ungodly men who had crept in among them, teaching false doctrines, and leading many astray.

Jude felt compelled by the Spirit of God to say, “Stop! We must identify these misleading teachers and properly respond to them.”

### **Contend for the Faith**

What did he mean when he told them to “contend?” That word comes from the sport of gymnastics, an active event in Jude’s day.

It describes the contest among competitors who strive for a prize. Each of them wants to win the victory wreath and wear the crown. They contend with all their concentration and energy.



Jude exhorted his friends to contend for the faith in this manner. He urged the Church to fight and struggle with all their strength against false leaders.

He cried to them to ward off the adversary with fervency and zeal.

### **Conform to the Truth**

- **Counsel #1**

In verse 20 of his short letter Jude said,

*“But ye, beloved, build up yourselves on your holy faith. Pray in the Holy Ghost. Keep yourselves in the love of God looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” (Jude 20-21)*

Jude directed his fellow Christ followers to experience God themselves. Know Him and conform your life to Him. Live after that truth. Conform your life to the truth.

The advice of Jude parallels Paul’s advice to Timothy. Paul told him,

*“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee. (1 Timothy 4.13-15)*

- **Counsel #2**  
Conduct Yourselves with Compassion.

*“And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.”” (Jude 22-23)*

Jude spoke to the believers, “Have some compassion. In your withdrawal and deliverance from doubters, have some compassion. Deliver some so as by fire, dragging them out. Do not stay there with them but drag them out.”

Jude desired compassionate confrontation, not contentious confrontation. He wanted his friends to stand for the truth, but to speak the truth in love.

### **Correlation**

In these passages, the warning Jude gave to his friends in that first century fits our day, because we also face false prophets. They preach their false messages on television, on radio, and in their books, which assert faulty doctrines and false hopes.

We need Jude’s warnings and direction on how to react to them. Believers must recognize them for their own security and well-being as followers of Christ. They must separate from false leaders who would lead them astray from the truth.

These teachers mock the name of Christ and declare a false image of God and His truth.

Now that we have some discernment from Scripture regarding false prophets, where do we go from here?

Jude outlined in the letter to his friends two steps for followers of Christ to take in response to ungodly leaders.

### **Contend for the faith**

Contending for the faith includes overcoming faulty notions. We must know and understand the truth to identify error. It calls for examination of those whom we follow to discern between the false and the true. (1 John 4/1-3)

We do not follow them just because they come professing the name of Jesus. We must examine them and test them to see if they teach and obey the truth. That flies in the face of much of what the professing Church proposes today.

- **Fallacies against contending for the faith**

#### **Fallacy #1**

At this point, fallacies arise that prevent many from resisting error. Many call it unChristian to fight for the truth. Yet, Jesus gave us a clear example when He fought against the scribes and Pharisees of His day. He spoke against their false teachings with strong derision. (See Matthew 23 for example.) Jesus always pointed out error as He spoke the truth.

Many in our day fear what people will think, when they stand for the truth. They suspect they will be chastised for causing division and splits in the Church and will be seen unfavorably by their friends. We spend a lot of time contemplating what other people will think of us. We use it as an excuse for inactivity and failure to obey God.

We sacrifice the truth for the sake of false unity to avoid hurt feelings. That is compromise.

### **Fallacy #2**

Another fallacy rests upon a wrong interpretation of “judging.” Many misinterpret Jesus’ statement,

“*Judge not lest you be judged*” (Matthew 7.1)

as meaning that Christians should not judge anyone at all.

In fact, if you read the rest of the chapter, you will notice that Jesus did not tell His audience not to judge. He instructed them on *how* to judge. He warned that they would suffer judgment in the same fashion that they judged others. Therefore, judge with care. Make discerning, careful judgments based upon Scripture and the truth.

We dare not let error grow because of a misunderstanding about judging.

### **Fallacy #3**

Others deflect the counsel of Jude by thinking that it does not matter or is unimportant. The spiritual welfare of the Church matters. It reflects on the glorious name of Christ and His honor.

If it does not matter, why did Jesus pray the Father to send the Spirit of Truth to believers? Why, did He call Him the spirit of Truth? He prayed the Father to send the Holy Spirit for this very reason: the truth matters. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth.

Many believers think that the teachings of false prophets and teachers do not affect them. Untrustworthy doctrine does influence how we live.

It causes doubt and unbelief, which are enemies

to faith in Christ. It generates questions about God and His character. These weaken individuals and the Church.

#### **Fallacy #4**

The last fallacy is the toughest one of all, because it sounds so spiritual. This error causes many to say, “I’ll stay here, and I will stand for the truth.

Even though the leadership of the Church possesses the characteristics of false prophets, I will stay here and try to fix it.”

Seldom does anyone stay and fix error in the Church. Paul warned the Corinthian believers,

*“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”* (1 Corinthians 15.33)

When Paul spoke of evil communications, he described companionships, friendships, and relationships. He reminded his friends of the dire consequences of evil associations that corrupt their good habits, character, and moralities. Sin never improves upward.

With sorrow, I tell you that you seldom does anyone fix error in the Church. Scripture confirms this conclusion. Jesus, for example, never stayed where the people did not want Him.

In fact, when He sent out His disciples on a mission and gave them power over all kinds of evil things, He told them what to do if the people rejected their message. He told them that “If you go into a city or into a house and they reject you, leave. Shake the dust off your feet. Go to the next

town.” (See Matthew 10.1-15.)

Again, chapters two and three of Revelation contain seven letters dictated to John by the Lord Jesus, which John delivered to the appropriate churches during his lifetime.

If you read those two chapters, you will discover that error, sin, faithlessness, and demonic worship. These Churches followed false gods, even permitting false teachers to teach.

You will find that in every instance Jesus rebuked them. He does not smile at unbelief, which deeply offends Him.

Through John, the Lord Jesus rebuked these churches for their sin. He chastised them and called them to repentance.

He instructed the members of the churches to turn aside from the false teachers and follow Me. God rebukes unbelief every time at every turn, among those whom He loves.

Yet, in our turning from false prophets to pursue Godly leaders, we must do so with compassion.

One of the hardest things for people to do is to leave a church. You have friends there. You have happy memories associated with that church. You may know the pastor and his family very well, and you care about them. You have a level of comfort in this fellowship.

However, if the pastor and the church’s leadership exhibit the features of false prophets, you face a difficult decision. If you determine that they do not proclaim the truth nor follow scriptural directions, you must not stay there.

Paul warned his friends,

*“Come out from among them and be ye*

*separate.*” (2 Corinthians 6.17)

What God calls you to do is not easy, but it is the right thing to do. Jesus did not tell us it would be easy to be His disciple. In fact, He called it a cross. He said, “If you want to be my disciple, take up your cross and follow me.” That is what God calls us to do.

A dear friend of mine, Don Lonie, put it in a memorable statement. He said, “If you run with a skunk, you will smell like one.” Unfortunately, you will not fix the erring Church.

My friends, this is no time for games. We are to stand for the truth. Jude’s warning to his friends applies to us to contend for the faith, because of the false men that have come into the body of Christ.

The Bible records Paul’s confrontation with Peter, when Peter behaved incorrectly in the church. To Peter’s credit, He heeded Paul’s admonition. (See Galatians 2.11-16.)

Again, Paul warned his beloved Timothy of false prophets and told him not to follow or listen to them. (See 2 Timothy 2.16-18.)

Once we identify the false prophets and teachers, we must reject them. In both the Old and New Testament, the Scriptures give us that directive. God’s word commands us to avoid and withdraw from them. It warns us not to listen to them or their teachings, even if they perform miracles that appear from God. (1)

Contending for the truth requires that we seek God and find leaders who seek God. As when Samuel went to look for the man after God’s heart, we must avoid looking at the personality and appearance of someone.

Depend upon the Holy Spirit to help you see the heart. The heart expresses itself in outward behavior. A Godly man or woman will exhibit Godly character.

### **Conform to the truth**

Because of the seriousness of the problem confronting us, we must conform to the truth. Previous chapters outlined foundational truths at stake in our battle against false prophets and teachers. We must hold to these truths and conform our lives to them

Further, we must obey the Bible's commands on how to respond to false prophets and teachers.

## **Implications**

I pray that by now you perceive the severity of the problem. This is not merely a difference of opinion. This is a pervasive, severe problem. The professing Church today contains false prophets, pastors, teachers, and leaders who lead it into dangerous confusion and unbelief.

I trust that you see the attitude of God toward it in Jude's and Paul's comments. God is deeply displeased. He is righteous, and He will withhold His favor from a church that is casual about truth. There will be no blessing, and He will judge.

Scripture is consistent in its teaching that God does not tolerate sin. Repeatedly He judged His people when they turned away from Him and embraced sin. Beginning with His dealing with the Children of Israel described in the Old Testament, His believers depicted in the New Testament, and in the Church throughout history, God's judgment is



sure.

One of the first and most severe judgments is the withdrawal of His glorious presence. Because it happens subtly, we often do not realize it.

Gradually, we begin to replace the actual presence of God with man-made enthusiasm. We may clap and sing, "Praise God!" but He withholds His blessing.

God never blesses that which is false. He may permit it. But that is not His blessing. How does their failure, and it was a failure on Israel's part, relate to false prophets in the church? Read the evidence for the abundance of quail and its sad result in the lives of the Israelites. It does bear on false prophets in the church and your response to them.

The Children of Israel cried, "God, give us meat. You have given us this manna, and You have given us water, but can You provide meat?"

God said, "How much meat do you want?" So, he sent them quail.

How many quail did God send to the Israelites when they complained in the wilderness for more meat? Would you believe a circle with a 20-mile diameter and 3' deep? Yup.

Do you have any notion how much quail God sent to those Children of Israel? The quail that God sent covered a circle 32-40 miles across, 3 feet deep. My friends, that is a lot of quail! (Numbers 11.31-35)

They were so thrilled that thousands of them literally gorged themselves to death eating that quail. God's blessing with abundance? No, think again.

We read the writer of Psalms harking back to

that instance when he wrote,

*“He gave them their request...”*

But here is the part I want to impress upon you:

*“But he sent leanness to their souls.”*

(Psalm 106.15)

You call that a blessing? That is a judgment. The greatest judgment they suffered was not death by gorging themselves on the quail, which they did. They experienced leanness of their souls because God was not there.

The same condition describes the Church today. We cannot address the issues of false prophets and teachers that I have expressed in these studies on our own. We need the Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit of God first to teach us the truth so that we know the truth, and we need Him to give us discernment so that we can distinguish between the false and the true. Sometimes the line is close and hard to discern.

How will we do that? The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, will guide us into the truth. Remember. Jesus said,

*“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”* (John 14.16-17)

The Church needs a revival. I do not mean an artificially generated experience, where the preacher jumps around, and people fall on the floor as if swayed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. That cheap imitation does not come from God.

I am talking about a revival where the Spirit of God moves and convicts of sin so profoundly that men fall on their faces before a holy God and cry out to Him for mercy. We must see our true condition before God. We cry out to Him for mercy, because He demands holy lives from His children.

We need a revival that proclaims the truth that calls upon men and women to repent and turn from their sin, and to believe and trust Jesus

How will you respond? I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see the truth and to cause you to trust Him and to conform your life to the truth in faith.

## **References**

01. See Deuteronomy 13.1-4, Jeremiah 23.14-22, 1 Timothy 6.1-5, and 2 Timothy 3.1-5.

## **Questions For Reflection And Application**

01. How do you, as an individual, contend against faulty notions, grown deep within you from early childhood? How do you recognize errors in thinking that you have observed for many years?
02. Do you think of “contending for the faith” as an unChristian indulgence? How do you discern between a critical attitude and an effort to

- maintain truth? How far are you willing sacrifice for the sake of truth?
03. What did Jesus say about judgment? How is done correctly? What procedures can you incorporate to safeguard yourself against inaccurate judgement?
  04. How much does false teaching matter to you? List the issues that you consider to be very important. List issues that you consider to be of lesser importance. Asks the Lord to give you further wisdom about whether your priorities are in synch with God's Word.
  05. In what ways can false teachings hurt the church? In what ways, can they hurt you and your family?
  06. How do you decide whether you should leave a church that promotes false teaching? Have you ever done that? Have you considered at any time that you should do that? Even though it is very painful to leave a church for many reasons, how bad must it be before you would do it? Can you trust the leading of Jesus Christ in matters like this?
  07. Have you conformed your life to truth?
  08. In what ways can you demonstrate compassion when you realize that a brother or a church is following false teaching?
  09. Do you discern between blessing and "leanness" in your church, Bible Study, Sunday School Class, Christian seminar or retreat, Christian books, Christian radio and television broadcasts? If you discern leanness, what will you do?
  10. Will you join the host of believers in Jesus Christ who are praying for revival?

*Dear heavenly Father, You did not say it would be easy to follow You. However, You did tell us that You would never leave us or forsake us. You would be with us, You would help us, and You would give us strength.*

*When we encounter difficulty, frustration, temptation, and trial, You promised You would help us. You promised You would comfort us, encourage us, and enable us by Your Holy Spirit to do that which You call us to do.*

*Father, I pray for my friends that in Your grace and mercy that You will send forth Your Holy Spirit to them to open their eyes to see the truth and to bring them to faith and trust in You.*

*Bring about in them the spiritual revival that they need and that I need so we might be true followers of Christ, children of God who are different, who conform to the truth of Your Word, that Your name, Father, and the name of Jesus Your Son, would be honored, glorified, worshipped, adored, and feared.*

*We will give You honor, glory and praise, triune God for what You accomplish.*

*Amen.*

## Author's Profile

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The Church of Jesus Christ faces a crisis. False prophets invade the Church with messages that sound authentic but lack Biblical authority.

Packed with excellent Biblical examples, this book provides a scriptural description of these frauds and the response of Christ-followers to them:

- describes the conditions in the Church that cultivated this crisis;
- draws a picture of the characteristics of false prophets who captivate the minds of unprepared people;
- delineates canons of Scripture that are at stake; and
- declares the course of action that Christ-followers must take to stem the decline of the Church and to set their sails to catch the winds of revival.

#### **Other Books by Thomas Hill**

- *Secrets of Successful Living: Studies in the Life of Daniel*: ISBN 978-0-941251-01-3 (Paperback)
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