

believe the truth about the resurrection and judgment. To backup their heretical belief they misapplied Scripture (Luke 20: 28). Jesus reprimanded them "... you do err... because you know not the scriptures" (Mark 12:24). Just because a man is standing behind a pulpit or wearing a robe doesn't mean he is actually preaching the truth of God's word. It behooves each of us to be like the Berean Christians of Paul's day. As he preached, they searched the scriptures daily to see if Paul's teaching was truly from God (Acts 17:11).

The Cornerstone Booklet Ministry: Biblical Answers to Contemporary Issues

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The CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL ANSWERS TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

HOW TO IDENTIFY A FALSE RELIGIOUS LEADER



Cornerstone Booklets

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Why false prophets need to be identified?

The Bible warns repeatedly of a great falling away from the Christian faith that comes about through the ministry of false prophets (2Thess. 2:3; 2Tim. 3:1-5; Matt. 24:4-5; 2Tim. 4:1-3; 1Tim. 4:1-3; 2Pet. 2:1ff). Furthermore, in 1st John 4:1 we are admonished to "... believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." We are living in a day when these scriptures need to be applied. If there ever was a day to test the spirits of prophets, now is the day, lest any sincere Christian people be led astray into a pseudo religion. Listed below are some of the characteristics of false prophets. May God use these characteristics to help you discern between truth and error; so that you may not be deceived!

False prophets rise up among God's people

Perhaps one of the greatest dangers the Christian Church faces today is not the worldly influence outside the Church, but the false teaching and worldliness in the Church. Satan does his most devastating work as "... an angel of light" (2Cor. 11:14,15). Jesus admonished his disciples to be alert to the "ravening wolf" who comes among them in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). A false prophet doesn't announce his entrance into the Church and his intentions to destroy the Church. He comes in "secretly" (2Pet. 2:1). Having a "form of godliness" (2Tim. 3:5). He gains people's confidence as "one of them" only to bring "swift destruction" upon them (2Pet. 2:1). When Jesus informed his disciples that one of them was a false prophet, they were astonished and had no idea to whom He referred (Luke 22:23). Every Christian Church needs to heed Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29ff -- "... after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, seeking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch!"

False Prophets Are Known by Their Fruits

"beware false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7: 15,16).

The ultimate test of a true prophet is helping others to conform their lives to the character and lifestyle of Jesus Christ. Jesus ordained his followers and teachers to "... go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain..." (John 15: 16). That last word is very important! A false prophet can help a person temporarily cope with life's pressures but eventually there is defeat that comes that is more devastating than the original problem (Matt. 12:43-45). But a true prophet is able to guide his followers to Biblical principles that result in permanent lasting solutions to their problems and needs -- fruit that remains. Listen to the words of 2Peter in describing false prophets who are not able to truly free their followers: "these are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever... while they promised them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption;..." (2 Peter 2:17-22). It further describes their condition as a "dog turned to his own vomit." False religious teachers cannot bring their followers to freedom, because they don't have it in their own life. Jesus said first remove the beam in your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the beam in your brother's eye (Matt. 7:1-5).

A False Prophet Wrests the Scripture to His Own Advantage

"... they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

Who are the unlearned in this verse? They are the false prophets who have the Bible, who read and quote the Bible, but who are "... ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2Timothy 3:7). A false prophet quotes Scripture out of context to justify disobedience (Matt. 4:6). The Pharisees were unwilling to follow God's standards about divorce and remarriage, so when they were talking with Jesus they misquoted Moses to backup their erroneous views (Matt. 19:7ff). The Sadducees were unwilling to

1Peter 2:13ff. We are told there to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man." A false prophet wants to maintain domination and control over his followers by having them submit to him in a dictatorial rule. We are warned that spiritual leaders should not constrain their followers to obey them but by a godly example and godly teaching lead the way (1Peter 5:2, 3). Jesus explained that the greatest leader of all is not the one who demands to be served by his subjects, but the one who is servant of all (Mark 9:33-37; 10:42-45). Those religious teachers that are teaching their followers that they have no obligation to pay their taxes are an example of how false teachers encourage rebellion towards authority (Matt. 17:24-27; Romans 13:6; 1Peter 2:3).

A False Prophet May Be Able to Work Counterfeit Miracles
"and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast"
(Revelation 13:14).

One of the most deceptive means Satan uses to lead people away from God is through imitation miracles. God warns in 2Thess. 2:9: "... him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." Even in Moses' day the Egyptians had those who were able to do some of the same signs and wonders that Moses was doing (Exodus 7:8-13). Satan is not all-powerful as God is, but God has granted his miracle working ability (Revelation 16:13, 14; 2Cor. 4:4; Job 1:12). We are to test the workings of spirits to see if they are of God (1 John 4:1-4). Not every miracle done is the working of the Holy Spirit. God has given us a test of a genuine prophet and genuine miracles from God in Deuteronomy 13. In this passage we are told a false prophet uses a miracle to gain our attention and then to cause us to "... go after other gods..." (13: 2). A sure sign of evil spirits at work is when you are being encouraged to violate the Scriptural principles of God's word. Our faith is rooted in the absolute certainty of God's word not in spiritual experiences (Matt. 12:39; Luke 11:29-32).

False Prophets Deny Basic Doctrines about Christ
"denying the Lord that bought them" 2Pet. 2:1

Those who reject the virgin birth of Christ, the literal bodily second coming of Christ, the Deity of Christ, and the humanity of Christ are not true prophets. What a man confesses or denies about Christ reveals if he is truly a child of God (1John 4:2,3). Paul gave two tests to determine sound doctrine. First, that which is in harmony with the words of Christ, and second, that which leads to Christlike living (1Tim. 6:3). For example, Jesus affirmed His complete confidence in the Scriptures as God's Word without error (Matt. 19:4-6; 4:4; 5:17, 18). If a man denies the inerrant Word of God, he is denying Christ and is exposed as a false prophet. Those in a church that denies these doctrines should remove themselves from it and find a church that is true to Christ and His words (Acts 19:9). There is no such thing as missionary Church membership -- which is "I'll stay in this Liberal Church because I can help them see the light of God's word." God's word is clear! We are to have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11). "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers..." "wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2Cor. 6: 14,15).

A False Prophet Will Have a Large Following
"many shall follow their pernicious ways" 2Pet. 2: 2

A false prophet doesn't tell people what they need to hear -- the truth; he tells them what they want to hear. This explains the great following they are able to achieve. The Bible warns of this occurrence: "for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts, shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth" (2Tim. 4:3,4). A false prophet doesn't preach against sin; he doesn't preach that you need to be born again; he doesn't warn about hell and God's judgment; he doesn't make mention of the blood of Christ; his message is one of peace (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). He assures his followers if they will just think positively and live sincerely that everything between them and

God is okay. He assures them of peace when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11). A word of caution is in order here. A false prophet is known not so much by what he says, but by what he doesn't say. For instance, if I said to you, "I planted some grapes in my garden. The grapes are purple. The grapes taste deliciously sweet. The grapes are blooming right now. There are plenty of grapes for everyone." So far everything I have said could be true, and you might not be able to find any fault with my message. But, suppose I left out the one detail that the grapes in my garden are of a poisonous variety and if you eat of them they will make you deathly sick and possibly kill you. This information is vital to your wellbeing; and although everything else I told you was true, I didn't tell you what you needed to hear to spare your life from distraction and death. This is the subtle method of the false prophet. If he preaches the love of God all the time and never warns of man's sin and need of Christ's salvation through his blood: then he is deceptively leading souls to hell. Jesus warned of this in Matt. 23:15.

A False Prophet Is Motivated by Materialistic Gain

2Peter 2:3 "... through covetousness shall... with feigned words make merchandise of you."

A false prophet is not concerned about your soul or eternal welfare but only his pocketbook. He uses his followers for his own financial goals and ambitions. He boasts of his spiritual advancement based on his financial success. He is described in Scripture as one who "supposes that gain is godliness" (1Tim. 6:6). This same verse exhorts believers "from such a person withdraw yourself." This is not a true prophet. If spirituality is measured by financial prosperity, then Jesus was spiritually bankrupt. Matthew 8:20 records "... the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Furthermore, James 4:5 reveals that those who are richest in faith are the poor of this world, not the rich! The Bible describes those that use their spiritual gifts and talents for financial gain as going the "way of Balaam" (2Peter 2:15). Balaam was a typical hireling prophet, anxious to make a market for his gift (Num. 22:5).

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False Prophets Promote Rebellion Towards Authority

2Peter 2:10 "... Despise government... self willed... not afraid to speak evil of dignities."

God has instructed all believers to honor and respect those in authority, because their authority is established by God Himself (Rom. 13:1-7; 1Peter 2:13-20). He warns those who resist authorities "... that they resist the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves judgment" (Romans 13:2). A false prophet wants no other authority over him. He wants to be the final authority in his life (2Thess. 2:4). Furthermore, he turns children against their parents, citizens against their government, wives against their husbands, employees against their employer all in the name of religious duty. There are times when Christians must refuse to obey authorities who command something contrary to Scripture (Acts 5:28, 29). God's authority is always higher than man's authority. This is by far the exception to the normal rule of reverently submitting to them. Read