



Beware False Prophets

(Matthew 7:15-20)

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJ)

I. NARROW GATE REVIEW

A. Two Ways: Those who profess to be Believers seek Yeshua in two very different ways.

13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many [it is popular] who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few [it is unpopular] who find it." (Mt. 7:13-14)

B. The Broad Way: Many argue for this way. It is popular because it has few restrictions, giving much room for compromise. There is room for various opinions about morality. Those on this road can follow their desires and not have to leave anything behind (lusts or pride, etc.). It is the road of tolerance and permissiveness. Many are proud of being very tolerant and broad-minded.

C. The Difficulty of the Narrow Way: Few choose this because it is difficult on our fleshly desires that must be denied (Mt. 16:24). It has clear boundaries defined by God. To walk on this road we must leave everything behind that is not in God's will—our lust, pride, covetousness, etc.

1. Put to death the deeds of the flesh

13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. Romans 8:13-14

5 Therefore, put to death what belongs to your worldly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, God's wrath comes on the disobedient, 7 and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. 8 But now you must also put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. Colossians 3:5-10

D. An Unpopular Position: Yeshua demands that His servants be faithful witnesses to this glorious message of life on the narrow way. It is unpopular so there will be opposition. Those who proclaim this will be called an extremist or fanatical. People want to live without restraint and without conviction of their sin.

E. Broad is the Way that Leads to Destruction: we are called to put to death the deeds of the flesh. This is not an easy, passive process.

16 I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance — as I told you before — that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit. Galatians 5:16-21, 24-25

9 Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, 10 or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. 11 Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

F. Easy Yoke: This statement in no way contradicts Mt. 7:13. Rest in this context is a spiritual rest for our soul or heart (not a physical rest for our flesh). Taking Jesus' yoke is not about receiving forgiveness, but embracing meekness. We are to be yoked to Jesus and His lifestyle—it is difficult on fleshly desires, but easy on our heart as it fills us with peace and contentment.

²⁹“Take My yoke upon you...I am lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For My yoke is easy...” (Mt. 11:29-30)

G. Both Difficult & Easy: What is *difficult* to our flesh is often an easy yoke to our heart (spiritually, emotionally). What is *easy* to our flesh is often difficult on our heart (spiritually, emotionally). Some believers seek in vain for an “easy” path for their flesh that is also “easy” for their heart.

H. Love Leads to Obedience: We don't go through the narrow gate to “earn our salvation,” but those who are in relationship with Yeshua will be unable to live a successful life of disobedience to His commands and ways. The Scriptures are clear that if we love Him we will obey His commands as a byproduct. For those in relationship with Him, it will hurt our hearts when we are doing things against His will as found in the Scriptures.

II. FALSE PROPHETS AND TEACHERS

A. Significant Deception: Jesus and Paul gave more warnings *about deception* in the end times than tribulation and persecution (Mt. 24:4-5, 11, 24; Mk. 13:5-6, 22; Lk. 21:8; 2 Thes. 2:3-10; 1 Tim. 4:1).

²³And in the latter time...when the transgressors [sinners] have reached their fullness, a king [the Antichrist] shall arise. (Dan. 8:23)

1. Many: Jesus emphasized the popularity of the broad way with its distorted message of grace (Mt. 7:13, 22; 24:5, 11, 12). It is alarming to know that so many professing believers live this way.

²²Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord...” (Mt. 7:22)

¹³Broad is the way that leads to destruction, and...many who go in by it. (Mt. 7:13)

⁵For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many... ¹⁰Then many will be offended, will betray one another...¹¹Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many...¹²The love of many will grow cold. (Mt. 24:5–12)

B. Winsome & Popular: False prophets/teachers will generally be charismatic, charming, and speak persuasively. They also may have supernatural gifts/power that flow through them (Matthew 7

1. Sheep-like on the outside: They will talk of Jesus and will claim to speak for God. They will use Bible passages. It will be important to note not only what they teach but what they neglect to teach.

2. Ravenous wolves on the inside: Jesus compared false teachers to wolves because their ideas are extremely dangerous. They are dangerous to people's spiritual life because they convince them that the narrow way is much broader than Jesus taught. They present the broad and easy way as the “narrow way.” They contradict the words of Jesus by presenting the broad road as the way of grace.

3. Many Unaware: Many false teachers are not aware they are false because they do not read and apply the Scriptures enough to understand their error. Do not be dazzled by their popularity, charm or stories.

C. By Their Fruits: We will know them by their fruits. We can only test or know a ministry or person by its fruit—words and deeds (Mt. 7:16, 20). We do not treat others based on what we discern is wrong (in place of what we observe) without evidence of fruit.

1. Only Observable Fruit: We can't move based on a sense, discernment, or a prophetic word from someone about another person in the congregation or another ministry: this protects the Body of Christ from a culture of slander and accusation.

D. Difference Between False and True Teachers: We maintain that there is a difference between teaching in error and being a false teacher. A false teacher is teaching false doctrine about Yeshua and leading people away from the true gospel doctrine. It is not merely someone who has made a mistake in his or her theology. If our standard is that we must be 100% right all the time in doctrine, then we all are false teachers to some degree—as we have all changed and/or tweaked our doctrinal understanding over the years. (Ron Cantor)

1. Deceivers: The New Covenant is clear that false teachers and false prophets are not those who merely made a mistake, but are deceivers.

2. *Similar Foundational Motivation*: Both teachers share of the benefits of Christ. False prophets don't include the narrow path/difficult responsibilities of denying the flesh for Believers.

III. FALSE TEACHINGS

- 17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. (NAS) Romans 16:17-18
- 6 They are the kind who work their way into people's homes and win the confidence of vulnerable women who are burdened with the guilt of sin and controlled by various desires. 7 (Such women are forever following new teachings, but they are never able to understand the truth.) 8 These teachers oppose the truth just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses. They have depraved minds and a counterfeit faith. 9 But they won't get away with this for long. Someday everyone will recognize what fools they are, just as with Jannes and Jambres. (NLT) 2 Timothy 3:6-9
- ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine [teaching], but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables. ⁵But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Timothy 4:3-5
- 1 But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. 3 In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed. (NLT) 2 Peter 2:1-3
- ¹⁰...walk...in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries [fallen angels], ¹¹whereas angels, who are greater in power...do not bring a reviling accusation against them...¹²But these, like natural brute beasts...¹³count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime...in their deceptions while they feast with you, ¹⁴having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices...¹⁵They have forsaken the right way...following the way of Balaam...¹⁷These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest...¹⁸For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure [seduce] through the lusts...through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption [in their private lives]... 2 Peter 2:10-19
- A. Prevalence in the Last Days:** The Scriptures clearly say that false teachers will be prevalent in the last days. These teachers will have teachings that "tickle our ears" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Also the fruit of their lifestyle and teachings will predominantly include the following three negative personal fruits according to the Bible: sexual immorality, greed/covetousness, and rebellion (2 Peter 2; Jude 3-13).

IV. AVOIDING DECEPTION

- A. Apply Yeshua's Teachings:** consistently and prayerfully apply Yeshua's teachings to our life
1. Yeshua's words will judge us
47 If anyone hears My words and doesn't keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects Me and doesn't accept My sayings has this as his judgment: The word I have spoken will judge him on the last day. John 12:47-48
 2. Weightier to Lighter: I would encourage us to start with focusing on the teachings as found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). These are the weightiest and most important of Yeshua's teachings.
 3. Obedience: If you love me... Obedience to Yeshua does not earn our salvation, but gives evidence that our faith is genuine (Jas. 2:14-17). We express our faith with works of obedience to Jesus. To exalt works as that which earns God's love greatly undermines the grace of God. However, to exclude good works as unnecessary is to deny the life empowering influence of grace (Ti. 2:11-13). Salvation by works and salvation *without* works both rob Jesus of His glory. (Bickle)

¹⁴“...if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can [that] faith save him?...” ¹⁷Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:14–17

a. We are not to trust our heart or feelings but align ourselves with the commandments of the Bible.

B. Awareness of the Most Prevalent Areas: be aware of the most prevalent areas:

20The rest of the people, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands to stop worshiping demons and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood, which are not able to see, hear, or walk. 21And they did not repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immorality, or their thefts.

Revelation 9:20-21

1. Sexual Immorality: the Bible describes sexual immorality as all sex acts outside of that within the context of a marital covenant between one man and one woman. Standing up for and teaching this message will put us in an unpopular place within our culture.

a. heart purity: Yeshua calls for sexual heart purity so that there would be no cultivating or stirring up of illicit desires and that there would be a purity of heart in this area or sexuality.

2. Greed/Covetousness:

7For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. 8But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. 1 Timothy 6:7-10

a. Paul states that with food and clothing we should be satisfied

b. The coming difficulty will expose weaknesses related to our idolatry at placing an inordinate amount of focus on materialism and secondary desires

3. Rebellion/Unforgiveness

C. Mindful of Yeshua’s Return

2Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is. 3And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

D. The Discipline and Correction of the Lord

1. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus identified compromise in five of the seven churches. We must take a stand against issues that Yeshua took a stand against.

2. God Disciplines Those He Loves

My son, do not take the Lord’s discipline lightly or faint when you are reprovved by Him, 6for the Lord disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He receives.

7Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? 8But if you are without discipline — which all receive — then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9Furthermore, we had natural fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn’t we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? 10For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but He does it for our benefit, so that we can share His holiness. 11No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the fruit of peace and righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:5-11

E. Other Practical Ways to avoid deception include regular, prayerful Bible reading; setting our hearts to obey the Lord; staying in close relationship with others; regular involvement with a body of believers that has leaders who uphold biblical doctrines and practices; and maintaining a teachable spirit—that receives instruction and correction from others.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bickle, Mike. *Being Wise & Great in God’s Eyes (Matthew 7:13-24)* [Sermon on the Mount teaching #20]. https://mikebickle.org/watch/mb_3419. With great appreciate to Mike for his encouragement to freely use his notes. I liberally did so in sections I & II above.