



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

## RECOGNISING FALSE PROPHETS BY THEIR FRUITS

### Matthew 7:16-18

**“Beware of false prophets. Ye shall know them by their fruits.”** To take heed and to avoid being destroyed and devoured by ravening wolves we must be able to discern and recognize the wolves even when they clothed in sheep’s clothing. If bottles of wholesome medicine and deadly poison are placed on the table without any label on the bottles or wrong labels on the bottles lives could be lost because of our inability to recognize the proper bottles. Imagine a convicted sinner standing before the gates (one wide, the other, strait and narrow) wondering which one to enter in hope of receiving salvation and eternal life. The false prophet, with a comforting, reassuring voice points him to the wide gate and the broad way. If the awakened, convicted sinner takes the false prophet for a truthful, faithful prophet he could seal his doom forever.

**“By their fruits ye shall know them”** (Matthew 7:20,16). Trees will be identified by their fruits. At a distance trees may look alike, but a close inspection of their fruits will enable us to distinguish between trees with good, wholesome fruits and trees with evil, corrupt fruits. Concerning the false prophets the fruits refer to their creed, their character, and their converts; their doctrine, their deeds and their disciples; their beliefs, their behaviour, and their brethren. The threefold fruit of life and labour, message and ministry, family, fellowship and followers will reveal much about who a teacher-preacher is - whether he is a faithful prophet or a false prophet.

### THE INWARD CORRUPTION OF FALSE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:15-17; 23:25-28; Luke 11:39; Psalm 5:9; Hosea 9:7-9; Matthew 12:33-35; 2 Peter 2:1,12-14; 2 Timothy 3:5-8; Titus 1:16; 2 Peter 2:17-19.

**“Inwardly they are ravening wolves. He knew what was in man. Your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Within they are full of extortion and excess. Ye indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of all uncleanness. Ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”**

These are statements from Christ concerning false prophets exposed by Him so that true seekers after God will take heed and beware of them. **“Man looketh on the outward appearance but the LORD looketh on the heart”** (1 Samuel 16:7). Men are always evaluating prophets or preachers by their outward projects, programs, performance and popularity. As long as we focus on the outward prosperity of false prophets and do not consider what they are inwardly, we shall never be able to recognize or refuse those false prophets. **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: WHO CAN KNOW IT? I the LORD search the heart”** (Jeremiah 17:9,10). The man of God from Judah could not recognize the old prophet in Bethel as a false prophet (1 Kings 13:11-24). Jehoshaphat could not recognize the inward corruption and deception of Ahab and his false prophets (1 Kings 22:4-8,17,18,29-37). Even the disciples of Christ could not recognize the inward corruption and secret plan of the false prophet in their midst (John 13:21-29). The kings and all the people on earth will not be able to recognize the future false prophet and the Antichrist and they will deceive the whole world (Revelation 16:13,14). Christ knows all things and all people. What we cannot know or discern by our natural intellect He reveals to us in the Scripture by His Spirit (Luke 24:45; John 16:13). **“Be not wise in thine own eyes”**. Listen to the good Shepherd. Trust your Lord and Saviour more than your feeble intellect; **“beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but INWARDLY they are revenging wolves”**.

### THE INSATIABLE COVETOUSNESS OF FALSE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:16-18; Isaiah 56:10,11; Micah 3:11; Jeremiah 6:13-15; Ezekiel 22:23-27; 1 Timothy 6:5-10; Titus 1:10,11; 2 Peter 2:3; Jude 10-13; 2 Peter 3:10-14.

**“Ye shall know them by their fruits.”** If we cannot always search into the inner or inward corruption of the false prophets, we can at least see their insatiable covetousness. How many preachers and christian ministers will remain in the ministry if it became necessary and compulsory for all christian preachers to be as poor as Christ and the Apostles in the early Church? How many of us will remain in full-time ministry if prosperity and popularity were not attached to the ministry? Covetousness is one of the identifying marks of false prophets. **“They are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his GAIN, from his quarter.”** **“Everyone is given to covetousness; from the prophet even unto the priest.”** **“The**

**priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for MONEY**. “Men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, supposing that GAIN is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. For the love of money is the root of all evil.” “There are many deceivers teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake” (‘for the purpose of getting disreputable gain’). “There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies. And through COVETOUSNESS shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”

The faithful prophet, like the shepherd, cares for the flock more than he cares for his life; the false prophet, like the ravening wolf, cares for nothing but to satisfy his own gluttony, and his own greed. The false prophet is in the business of religion for what profit he can get for himself. His basic motivation is self-interest; like an hireling, he labours and ministers for material gain. Instead of ministering and teaching for the purpose of opening blinded minds to saving and sanctifying truths of the gospel, he is in the ministry for the pay it offers.

## THE IGNOMINIOUS CHARACTER OF FALSE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:16-18; Ephesians 5:12; Jeremiah 2:8,26; 23:11-14; Ezekiel 13:22; Revelation 2:20-23; Romans 2:19-24; 2 Peter 2:2; 1 John 4:1,5,6; Matthew 7:21-23.

False prophets and their followers hate exposure. They often accuse those who remove their masks or their garb of deception, their sheep’s clothing, of being narrow-minded preachers who lack love for all. The minister of health who exposes quack doctors is not lacking in love; the father who warns his daughters of the ‘snake in the grass’ is not narrow-minded or devoid of love; the shepherd who unmasks wolves in sheep’s clothing so as to protect the flock of Christ cannot be accused of having no love. Love is faithful and truthful. It was love for sinners and saints, love for “**other sheep which are not of this fold**” and for the “**little flock**” already saved which moved Christ, the good Shepherd, to tear off the disguise of the false prophets. Love compels faithful shepherds to expose deadly enemies of the flock and reveal them in their real character. Christ did not hesitate to brand these subtle deceivers as “**ravening wolves**” because that is who they are.

“**Ravening wolves**”! The wolf, like the fox, is tricky and treacherous, subtle and sly. See an example of the subtlety of “**that fox**” (Luke 13:31,32; Matthew 2:7,8,12-16 - note: these are two different Herods, foxes, wolves, but they had the same nature - murderous subtlety). False prophets “**lie in wait to deceive**” and they employ “**cunning craftiness**” to entice souls into their trap. As wolves are cruel and merciless, so are these deceivers of souls. They profess much love but they are full of hatred toward those who expose them. They are greedy, avaricious and hungry for applause and the praise of men. “**Their prophets are light and treacherous**” (Zephaniah 3:4), frivolous, not sober. Their character matches their conviction and their choice. They recommend the wide gate instead of the strait gate; they walk in the broad way instead of the narrow way. As their creed does not accept the narrow gate and the narrow way, their character or conduct does not reflect self-denial, cross-bearing, crucifixion of the self-life and the mortification of “**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life**” (Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23; 14:25-27; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 2:15-17).

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