

LESSON ESSENTIALS

INTRODUCTION TO EVANGELISM

LESSON 11: Beware the False Gospel

While it might be easy to recognize a false prophet if he contradicts God's Word openly, the real challenge lies in catching subtle inconsistencies. That's when it is important to look into God's Word and let His Spirit give you discernment. Read on to know more.

Jesus warned His followers about false prophets, but many are still misled by their eloquence, charisma or self-service. This lesson gives you some practical Bible-based tips to identify false prophets.

We need rely on God's Word, and specifically see if certain teachers' messages agree with the Gospel. False prophets tend to misinterpret the Bible or speak of false doctrines.

Everything we need to know is written in the Bible and Jesus Christ is the foundation of our faith. False prophets however digress from both the Bible and Jesus and often turn the focus to themselves, money, or power. They can even abuse the foundation of our faith by claiming that Jesus Christ is not God

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" warned Jesus in Matthew 7:15. Jesus knew how the Devil would work and warned His followers about false prophets and their deception. Sadly however, many do believe their eloquent sermons or feel-good teaching. Let's talk about how you can identify the true evangelists from those who seek to lead people astray.

The Bible teaches that we must 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world' (1 John 4:1). We need rely on God's Word, and specifically see if certain teachers' messages agree with the Gospel. False prophets tend to misinterpret the Bible or speak of false doctrines. These people might seem harmless, but their teaching is contrary to God's Word and can lead people away from the faith. Sometimes these teachers might also quote from books that are not in the Bible as if they were equal in authority.

You can know that they're not preaching the message of truth if they say that salvation can be obtained through what we do, or that people can be saved by certain rituals or certain acts of righteousness. The Bible, on the other hand, is clear that salvation is a gift of God given by His grace through faith, and not by our works. Sadly, the followers of these false prophets are always working to obtain or to hold onto their salvation through certain deeds.

Sometimes, these people will accept anyone to join them, regardless of their faith or lifestyle, rather than emphasizing a personal commitment to Christ. They can be aggressive, charismatic, and quite dangerous.

Very often, these teachers have their own agenda of promoting themselves through their teachings. They elevate themselves or other 'leaders' of these movements. They claim to have a unique and superior understanding of truth compared to other people. These leaders pretend to be given new and exclusive insights into truth that have never been available before.

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It's easy to identify a false prophet if he uses any of the above tactics. However, you also need to watch out for more subtle hints. Sometimes people begin teaching out of a love for God, but as they gain power and authority they can be attracted to teaching which promotes themselves or which does not agree with the Word of God. We need to be sure that whatever teaching or whatever pastor we are learning from is focused on Christ.

We also need to look out for our Christian brothers and sisters who may believe false teachings. We need to gently try to draw that person back to God's Word. The first thing to do, is to be pleasant and courteous to that person, and show them what the Bible says. Sometimes, we tend to go overboard in trying to win an argument. Don't forget that proving them wrong is not going to open their eyes. We'll have to show Christ-like love and patience during these discussions. We need to make sure they are discussions, not arguments. If you are not defensive and simply talk (rather than debate), the person you're reaching out to will also lower his defenses and search for the truth. You'll have to break things down little by little, using Scriptures to show what you want to explain to them.

It can be difficult to know when it is appropriate to confront someone and when it is not as important. Some beliefs are very important to hold onto: the Bible is the Word of God, God as creator, Jesus as the Son of God, Jesus' innocence, power, death, and resurrection, His coming victory in the last day, and so on. But when the topic at hand is not as critical, this is not the false teachings that God is warning us about, it may be just a difference of interpretation or personal. For instance, it is of utmost importance that we agree Christians should meet together for fellowship and worship. That is a command of God. However, different groups may meet more often than others, or conduct their worship in a different order. These differences are of secondary importance. If you are confused about a specific issue, perhaps ask some believing friends, pray about it, and you may discuss the matter with the person with an open mind, knowing that you may learn something new.

Confronting someone on the significant truths is difficult. As hard as this may seem, you have to remember that this is not a personal challenge, but a spiritual battle. You need to prepare for these discussions with prayer and to get your friends to pray too. You need to be rooted in the Word of God and be in constant fellowship with the Spirit, or you too might fall into that same trap

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IN REVIEW

- There are plenty of false doctrines and false prophets. WE need to be very aware and careful.
- They preach different gospels and tend to lead people astray. There are certain methods that we need to watch out for, such as their ideas that:
 - a. Contradict the Bible
 - b. Take the focus off of Jesus Christ
 - c. Teach that salvation can only be attained through works, or that salvation is only for some people.
 - d. Make the leaders or one leader more important, more knowledgeable or closer to God than their followers.
 - e. Elevate the status of certain people, of money, or other idols.
- We need to constantly pray and keep watch and bring misled people back to God.
- The task is not just an intellectual task of disproving their ideas, but a spiritual one, teaching them the Word of God.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- What does the Bible say about false prophets? How can you identify them and protect yourself from them?

- How can you effectively convince their followers about the truth?

- How can you strengthen yourself in God so as to not fall prey to the teachings of false prophets?

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