

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Matthew 7:15

I have a heart for Christ's Church and one of my greatest concerns is that so many in the church today are being led astray by "**false prophets**." One of the most painful things that I have learned in ministry is the resistance that so many have to being confronted with the truth of "**false prophets**" especially if it is one of their favorite "**false prophets**." Many Christians sincerely believe that if a pastor, teacher, evangelist, or author is a "Christian" then they could not possibly be a "**false prophet**."

Herein lies the danger of "false prophets." The danger lies in the fact that they are deceptive. When you can see a threat for what it is, then you are on alert and can be prepared to defend yourself. But when a threat or an enemy poses as a friend, our defenses are naturally down. In verse 6 of chapter 7 in Matthew it refers to "**dogs**" and "**swine**" and they are much more easily recognizable because of their open sinfulness and rejection of God.

In the Old Testament prophets were often recognizable by what they wore. For example, Elijah often wore rough, coarse, hairy, uncomfortable clothing as did other prophets. This kind of clothing was a symbol of their foregoing the normal comforts of life in the service of God. John the Baptist, who was the last prophet of the Old Covenant, wore a camel hair covering and ate locusts and honey. Prophets could generally be recognized by what they wore; by their plain, coarse clothing. Because of this reason, a person who wanted to impersonate a prophet would sometimes wear similar clothing. In Zechariah 13:4 it says of these that they "**put on a hair robe in order to deceive.**"

In the same way, shepherds, wore clothing made of wool from the sheep which they tended. This is the "**sheep's clothing**" that Jesus speaks of here in verse 15. "**False prophets**" do not deceive the flock by impersonating sheep but by impersonating the shepherd, who wears "**sheep's clothing**" in the form of wool garments; just as the false prophets in the Old Testament often wore the clothing of the true prophets. So it is with false shepherds today who often disguise themselves as true shepherds. Satan's man (or woman in some cases) goes under the guise of God's man, claiming to teach the truth with the purpose of deceiving, misleading, and if possible, to destroy God's people.

The Bible illuminates three basic kinds of false teachers: heretics, apostates, and deceivers.

Heretics are those who openly reject the word of God and teach that which is contrary to divine truth. Apostate teachers are those who once followed the true faith but have turned away from it, rejected it, and are trying to lead others away. Those two kinds of false teachers at a minimum have the virtue of a certain level of honesty. They don't claim to represent Biblical Christianity in the first place.

The most dangerous kind though is the deceiver, the false shepherd if you will. The false shepherd gives the appearance of orthodoxy, frequently with great words, declarations, and with a lot of fanfare. He is not a liberal or a cult leader but instead he is one who speaks warmly of Christ, the cross, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and so on and they associate with true believers. The false shepherd may go out of his way to appear orthodox, fundamental, and evangelical. From the way he looks, his vocabulary, and his associations he gives much evidence of genuine belief. But he is not genuine; he is a deceiver, he is playing a part. He has the speech of evangelical Christianity but he is living a lie. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 says,

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."

In other words, these "**false prophets**" are especially dangerous because they masquerade as true teachers of truth and they are therefore able to creep into Christian circles unnoticed. Do not accept as Biblical truth what someone teaches just because they label themselves as "Christian." As I have said so very many times, there is precious little on the shelves of Christian bookstores that is worth our time.

Tomorrow we will continue to look at the deceptions of false teachers.