

How to Recognize False Teachers

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Matthew 7:16-20
Preached on: Sunday, March 18, 2018

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Her strength unequal to her task, rise up and make her great. The church finds her strength for the great task that God has called her to through his word and that's why we preach it week by week. Andrew and I were talking before the service began, we're happy to preach God's word for an hour each time we gather together not because we want to be seen and speak and to be seen doing that, but because this is the very word of God and it is in the word of God that the converting power of the Gospel is made known to sinners and it is in the word of God proclaimed that Christians find their strength and the church is built up. So it's crucial for us to be able to do that together and I am just so very grateful that God has gathered together at Truth Community Church a group of people like you that love God's word and are committed to this model of ministry. That's a great blessing for us to be able to share together and for us to share as a common purpose in life and a common purpose in ministry to do this together. We do this together and I'm thankful to God that we're able to do it at this point of time and in this point of history. God has raised us up for precisely this time. This is the life and this is the time and this is the point in history that God has given to us to minister together, to ministry his word together, and so we embrace that. We're not intimidated, we're not discouraged by the blackness and the darkness of the times around us. We realize that Jesus Christ will triumph over all the world, we realize that our faith is the victory that overcomes the world and, therefore, endued with the power of God, we gladly open his word today and look to see what he has to say to us as we continue our exposition of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. I invite you to turn there with me with a great sense of anticipation for what the Lord has for us on this particular day. This is the hour that he has appointed for us, today to gather together around this text today together and to see what the Lord would have for us.

Now last time we spent our time looking at Matthew 7:15 and let me just read that text to set by way of review as we come into our text for this morning. Matthew 7:15 Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Now as much as we love gathering together and proclaiming God's word, we realize that we do it in a hostile environment. We realize that there are many false prophets and many false teachers that have gone out into the world, and so there is a very real sense in which we are engaged in a spiritual battle as we do what we do together as a church, and Jesus says that that battle comes in the form of false prophets who outwardly appear to be one of the disciples of Christ but inwardly are known by the fact

that they are actually ravenous wolves. Rather than being a part of the flock, they are actually those who would attack the flock. As we've said multiple times, Jesus places this warning right here in his message having just said that the way to heaven is narrow, that that gate is narrow that leads to life and it is small and there are few who find it, and part of the reason that it is a small gate that enters into heaven, part of the reason that there are few who find it, is because there are so many false teachers teaching a false Gospel or teaching false things about spirituality that blind people to what the truth is and you can't get to heaven without the truth. You can't go to heaven unless you know what the true Gospel is and you respond to Christ by faith. Jesus says there are many false teachers who confuse the matter and so he warns us, he warns those who would want to know him, to be on the alert for false teachers as we seek to enter heaven through the narrow gate, as we seek to walk the narrow way of sanctification in the truth that is revealed in Scripture.

So he emphasizes the reality of false teachers. What we said last time is that these false teachers are real. They actually exist. They are deceptive. They are not easily discerned and we said that they are dangerous; that Scripture describes them as blind men leading other blind men into the pit. And when we are all born into this world dead in sin, born under the domination of Satan, we're all born and we have a spiritual blindness that is natural to our being, it should wake us up to the reality that we need to pay attention to what is being said here. That's why it is so important, beloved, it is so important for a church to teach the word of God as the central purpose of its ministry. Other people can run soup kitchens. Unsaved men can distribute clothes. The church must have clear in its mind that its primary purpose is to declare the eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ because it is only by that that men can find the truth and be saved. If a church does not do that, it has forfeited its reason for existence. Other people can provide a social club. Other people can provide social services. The church must have clear in its mind that if it is going to cause the people of God to rise up and be great in hostile times, that that will come through a clear proclamation of the word of God and through that alone.

So it's a matter of understanding what our primary purpose is. Well, false teachers come along and they blind unsuspecting people to the truth. They lead them into hell because their teaching hides the narrow way. Their teaching hides the exclusivity of Christ as the only way to know the Father. And the sad thing is that even Christians are susceptible to their influence. True Christians, true Christians, those who are truly born again, would not lose their salvation under the influence of a false teacher but they are certainly vulnerable to abuse under the influence of a false teacher. They are certainly vulnerable to stunted Christian growth under the influence of a deceptive man. They are certainly vulnerable to confusion. They are certainly vulnerable to a loss of their eternal reward for having walked in a manner that was not according to the truth that God has revealed in his word. So beloved, when we talk about this concept of false prophets and false teachers, here's all I want you to see for this morning, is that there is a lot at stake. There is a lot at stake and, look, there is a lot at stake simply because Jesus said this and we take our Lord seriously and we believe that when he spoke, his words had weight, they had eternal value, that they were important, and Jesus said, "Beware of these false prophets.

They are real. They are dangerous. They are deceptive." You would miss them if you weren't on guard.

Well, that leads us to a really important question, then: how is it that we are to recognize these impostors? How can we know when we are dealing with a false teacher? And beloved, I would say that we're in a particularly vulnerable time, the world at large being vulnerable to false teachers at a particular time, because with the rise of sophisticated media, sophisticated politicians, you know, we are used to judging people by outward appearance. Are they slick? Are they smooth? Are they photogenic? And that becomes the basis upon which we make important decisions for the leadership of the world, and those that we would follow and those that would be influential. You all know this to be true. Well, that plays right into the spirit of external appearances which make people so vulnerable to false teachers. So how do we recognize impostors? If the spirit of our age, my friends, if the spirit of our age was true, Jesus would go on to say look to the one who is well spoken. Look to the one who is well dressed. Look to the one who is suave and able to make you smile and chuckle to yourself. That's not what he says at all and that is not the teaching of the word of God. So what we want to see here today is we want to set aside what the world uses as the basis for that which makes men influential or makes women influential. It is not their ability to move you emotionally that is a mark of truth. Oprah Winfrey can move people emotionally. She has no concept of the truth of the Gospel. So we just have to be very careful and wake up to come to grips with what it is that Jesus says is the measure by which you recognize a false teacher, and we would run into the shelter of this fortress in order to protect our eternal souls from the destruction and the havoc that such men and women wreak upon their followers.

How do we recognize impostors? Jesus makes it clear for us in verses 16 through 20 which I want to read to you now. Look at verse 16 with me. He says,

16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Now, just by way of the structure of what Jesus says here, I want you to notice something very important. If you're a part of our church, if you follow our ministry, you find this characteristic, this key principle of interpretation brought out again and again because it appears so often in the Scriptures. Look at verse 16. Jesus had said, "Beware of the false prophets." You say, "Fine, I'm right on board with you, Lord. How can I recognize them? How can I know who they are?" Jesus says in verse 16, he says, "You will know them by their fruits." Okay, now then, go down to verse 20 and he says, "So then, you will know them by their fruits." So at the beginning and at the end of this key critical passage, Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruits," and that is the measure, that is the basis that we're going to unfold today, what are the fruits that would be the mark of a false teacher? How would you recognize them in that way? And what the critical point is for us to see at

the outset is that Jesus makes the standard, "You will recognize them by their fruit," but what it is that they produce in their lives, what is the outcome of their ministry. What is the outcome of the life, that's how you will know them.

So verse 16 and verse 20 function like bookends to this passage and everything is designed to help us recognize it is the presence of their fruits that give us the idea of how we are to recognize them. Those verses show us that we're dealing with a single theme as we go through these five verses together, and Jesus makes it on the basis, he premises all of his teaching on a very simple illustration. In one sense, we say that these men are deceptive and they are hard to recognize, and that's true when you only look at outward appearances, but what I want you to see is that the simplicity of Jesus' illustration lets us know that discernment can be done. That's really what we're talking about. How do we discern, how do we tell the true from the false? And even the fact that Jesus frames it this way, beloved, tells us something really important, doesn't it? It tells us that we have a responsibility to exercise discernment. I'm going to use a technical theological term here and you know every time I say that, I'm not going to use a technical theological term when I say it like that. Jesus here is telling us if I can phrase it in another way, he's telling you, "Do not be a gullible sucker. Don't be a sucker for false teachers." And he uses such a simple illustration that gives us the sense that this can be done.

Where do you find good fruit? You go to the right source. How do you know a good fruit tree? You know a good fruit tree by the good fruit that it produces. "That's a good juicy apple. Those are really nice peaches and they have a good flavor and there is good helpful nutrients to be gained when I follow that fruit." I can recognize, you can recognize a good fruit tree simply by the kind of fruit that it produces. If a tree produces dried up shriveled apples that are just the size of acorns, you say, "That's not a good tree. That's no good fruit tree." This is not difficult to understand what Jesus is saying and he takes that simple illustration which we can clearly recognize and understand and he says, "Just take that simple principle, transfer it from the physical realm into the spiritual realm, and you have the key clue that you need to know."

How can you recognize a false teacher? We're going to look at two basic principles from the word of God here today that make this evident. That make it evident. How do you recognize a false teacher? First of all, you consider their lives. You consider their lives. What is the fruit of their personal lives and what does that look like? The Bible gives us an enormous amount of help in this matter. Here in verses 16 through 20, Jesus gives us the principle of looking at the fruit of someone's life but he doesn't go into the detail of the kind of fruit that you look for, what is it that you try to examine. Well, elsewhere in Scripture that is given to us in great clarity, and if you would turn over to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, we're going to see that Scripture builds on this principle of what is the fruit that you look for to help identify and to distinguish a true from a false teacher.

1 Timothy 3 says in setting the standards for leadership within the church of Christ, it says,

1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An overseer [or an elder], then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Now there's a parallel passage over in Titus, a couple of books to your right in your Bible, Titus 1:5. We're going to draw broader principles out of these two passages to help us understand the fruit that you look for in distinguishing true from false teachers. Verse 5, the Apostle Paul who was appointed by Christ to be an apostle, one of the foundational men upon whom the church would be built, whose teaching is the teaching of Christ on this issue because he is Christ's apostle writing under the inspiration of Christ's Spirit, and so we have Christ himself speaking to us here. Your doctrine of Scripture is very important. Verse 5,

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

That's a lot of text to read without much comment. Beloved, here's the primary standard based on those passages that we saw in 1 Timothy 3 and here in Titus 1:6, the primary standard is that a teacher be above reproach and that means that there is no valid accusation of wrongdoing that can be brought against the man. He has to be above reproach. Scripture says this multiple times in establishing standards for church leadership. And here's the thing: a true teacher's life should display an unquestioned pattern of relational fidelity and sexual purity. There should be a pattern that is established in that way. So when it comes to evaluating a man in today's society and today's church, this standard alone gives you so much to be able to push aside so many self-proclaimed teachers. Can this professed teacher, can he fairly be said to be devoted to one woman? Can that be fairly said about him? Is he free from adultery? Is he free from a flirtatious spirit with other women? Is there a pattern of devotion to a single woman?

Now beloved, I don't even need to tell you how common it is in our weak and degraded age in the so-called evangelical church for men to commit adultery, to divorce their wives, to step back from ministry maybe for three months if they are serious about it, and then just present themselves repackaged as someone who can tell you now about grace because, "I've been there." And they use their adultery as a premise upon which that they can now teach about grace. It is the exact opposite of what Scripture says. Adultery is a disqualifying factor for a man to teach.

So beloved, when you are trying to sift through the various voices that are out there trying to proclaim the word of God to you and you come into a recognition that you find out that a man has been unfaithful to his wife, you realize that he is not above reproach, then he is disqualified from teaching God's word to you. You don't have to make decisions. You don't have to make judgments about whether this man is a true Christian or not. That's not the realm in which we're talking and the realm in which we're making judgments. The realm in which we are making judgment for you here today is, "Who can I safely follow?" And Scripture makes it plain that when a man is not above reproach, he is not a man who should be leading you spiritually. It is plain and, you see, this is one of the fruits of life that are displayed to help you to be able to distinguish clearly between one and another.

Now, look, part of the reason that men like that, part of the reason that adulterous men can find a following, is because it allows people who want to keep their sin to have a teacher that they are comfortable with and say, "Oh, I'm a lustful person, I'm an adulterous man, and here's one who tells me that I can still have the grace of God, and that I don't need to worry about that." It makes people comfortable in their sin to have a man whose life is marked by a pattern of sin, a history of sin, it allows them to be comfortable in their sin because, "Hey, after all, my teacher is right where I'm at." That's not the pattern, that's not the standard that God holds up before us. Above reproach, a one woman man. So you ask that question, "Can he fairly be said to be devoted to one woman?"

Now, Scripture goes on in those passages that we read and it invites you to scrutinize his family life. What does his family look like? You should be able to look at a teacher and say, "Do you know what? I see a man whose house is in order." That can be in various ways of financial order, but especially talking about relational order. Beloved, let me say it plainly, this would apply to men, these principles would apply to those women who would make themselves teachers of God's people as well. Listen, listen, listen, this is so very important: teachers, self-professed teachers who have a pattern of fractured relationships of those that are closest with them, are not in a position to lead anyone spiritually. The whole point of the Gospel and the point of transformed lives is that this produces a man or a woman of peace. Scripture says in Proverbs, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." Well, when you come to know, when you come to see that there is a teacher who has a pattern of fractured relationships, that they have broken relationships that have existed for years and they are not able to fix them, well beloved, this is the fruit of their lives. What do you think will be the outcome if you immerse yourself in the spirit of a teacher like that?

What's going to be the outcome? As you eat of the fruit of their teaching and the fruit of their lives, it's going to produce a similar result in you.

So you look at that and say, "This is not the standard. I can recognize you by your fruit. I won't judge whether you're a Christian or not. I don't need to do that. I just know that I don't need the influence of your teaching because I see from the fruit of your life that the fruit is bad. Something's wrong here. I don't have to figure it out. I don't have to justify it. I don't have to defend anything. I just have to say, 'Look, I'm sorry but this doesn't match up.'" And beloved, here's the thing, this is so very crucial. I'm trying to help and protect you in what we're doing here this morning. So beloved, it does not matter how fluent a man is. It does not matter how clever a writer someone is. The bad fruit in their personal life is a warning for you to stay away and to not be brought under their influence. There are plenty of godly men who can teach you, why would you follow after someone whose life is a personal disaster? Why would you follow after somebody, a man, a pastor, who has split multiple churches? A man who can't stay in one place for more than a year or two? Why would you do that? Their fruit is a sign of instability. Their fruit is a sign that something is wrong and that's all you need to know. You will know them by their fruits and, therefore, you beware you go someplace else.

So these matters, and you see, the glory of this, the wisdom of God in this is that these things are inescapable. A man might be able to talk himself out of a difficulty, a man might be able to talk himself out of scrutiny, and beloved, a man might have such cunning and persuasive ability that you don't even know how to refute him, and here's what I want you to see, is that Christ empowers you and helps you to realize that you don't have to win the argument, that you don't have to be able to sort everything out. You say, "Look, I see the bad fruit here. I'll go somewhere else, thank you." And that's how you protect yourself. You consider their lives, you look at their lives and when you see a divisive person in his family life and church life, you say, "I don't know what else I'm seeing but I know I'm not seeing the fruit of somebody good here." And you move on and you free yourself from the concern for that. You consider their lives and that helps you recognize a false teacher.

Well, secondly in these passages that we've read from Timothy and from Titus, you also consider their doctrine. You consider their doctrine and as you're writing down that heading for your notes, those of you that take notes, let me just say this. What we're talking about here, their lives and their doctrine, both elements are present. It's not that you have one and not the other. This is not an either/or. This is not a multiple-choice exam where you take one, "Well, his life is bad but his doctrine is good." It doesn't work that way. You take them together as unified whole. You don't rip the garment that Jesus says clothes a true teacher, you don't rip that garment and take one half of the cloth. It doesn't work that way. You consider their lives and, not or, and you consider their doctrine and what we find as we look at God's word here, is that the people of God should grow from a true teacher's instruction. What he teaches should be consistent with the teaching of the Bible, with apostolic doctrine.

Look at Titus 1:9 where it says that he should be able to "[hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." There is a positive dimension where he is positively instructing you in the teaching of God's word. There is a negative dimension where he is warning you against false teaching. And here's the point, here's the point, you can see this also over in 1 Timothy 3, it talks about the fact that a teacher has to be someone who is able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2, he is able to teach and he is not a new convert. So you consider his doctrine and you come to this: a true teacher is able to give positive instruction so that – oh, every word is important here – he has to give positive instruction from the Bible so that teachable people can grow under his ministry. He must refute those who contradict. Error cannot go unchallenged. So there is both a positive and a negative description.

So you're looking at his life, saying, "Is his life consistent with what Scripture points to?" It's not that the man is sinless. It's not that the man is without blemish in his life. We all stumble in many ways, Scripture says. That's not the point. The point is what is the pattern of the nature of his life? I'm going back to my first point again just because I think this is so very very important. Does this teacher's life leave in its wake a pattern of peace or conflict? Unity or division? You look at that pattern, you look at the wake, you look at what lies behind as the ship has gone by and you get an idea of what's going to lie ahead. So you consider these things.

Now as we consider the doctrine, false prophets, what do they do? Well, false teachers do not teach the narrow way of Jesus. This is where it can get so very confusing for you. False teachers may be happy to talk about God, about Christ, they may be happy to talk about his love for sinners even, "Oh, the love of God is so precious." Well, it is but we need to talk about the true love of God, not some sentimental notion that might tweak people's emotions that are not consistent with the nature of the love of God as it is truly revealed in Scripture.

Go back to Matthew 7 and I want you to see something very very helpful right here in the context that makes this so helpful and plain and evident to you. You know, probably the key principle of hermeneutics, which is the science of biblical interpretation, the most important principle is context, and you let context help you understand what the meaning of any particular individual verse is. So what is the context of this warning about false prophets and how is it that we can recognize them?

Jesus said in verse 14 of Matthew 7, "the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it," then he goes right into talking about false teachers and, "You'll recognize them by their fruit." Okay, get the connection here because this brings great clarity to it all. The way is narrow. Beware of false prophets. You'll recognize them by their fruit. Now as we're talking about their teaching, beloved, just add 1+1+1 and you come up with 3 and you see what the issue is. The true gate to heaven is small and the way is narrow, Jesus says. Well, when you start talking about false prophets, what can you expect to come out of their mouths? What will come out of their mouths is that which denies the fact that the way is narrow. What comes out of their

mouth is an absence of things which helps explain why it is narrow. So while false prophets, false teachers may talk about God and talk about Christ and talk about love, they are silent on what makes the gate narrow. And here's the thing, beloved: you cannot simply ask what does this teacher say, what does he positively say, the question you have to ask – this is so vital, this is so clarifying – what is it that he's not saying? What is he silent on? What does he not talk about? You see, it may be that the false teacher will not necessarily say anything that's just dead out wrong and obviously false. What they won't tell you is that all other religions besides biblical Christianity will lead a man to hell. What they won't do is call their audience to examine themselves because, "I'm concerned that you may not be a Christian. You test yourself to see if you're a Christian." What they won't do is confront a man in sin and say, "Brother, you need to examine yourself because your sinful lifestyle is not consistent with your claim to be a Christian." The one who says, "I've come to know him and does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him." Beloved, how do you explain your life of sin in light of the clear word of God? False teachers will ignore that salvation comes only through Christ.

I'm going to give you five questions here to ask to help you recognize false teachers by their doctrine. I'm going to go through these really quickly here, but as we do, as we go through these five questions to help recognize a false teacher by their doctrine or their absence of it, pay attention to the universal nature of the verses that I give to you in response to each of these questions.

Here's the first question. Now, let me preface it. Let me preface it, okay? It's the nature of Bible teaching that you cannot teach every single important doctrine in every single message that you preach, otherwise things just get confusing and overwhelming and we build it brick by brick, line by line, precept upon precept. So you can't evaluate a teacher fairly on the basis of necessarily just a single message. So we're talking about that which marks a teacher's ministry over the course of time with what we're looking at here.

So you ask a question like this, first of all, when does he teach on the holiness and the wrath of God? Those aren't popular subjects. When does he teach on the holiness and wrath of God? Romans 1:18 says, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." When does the teacher ever give you a sense of that? When does he give you a sense of that? That's a fair question because the wrath of God and the holiness of God is what we need to be saved from. If you don't know that there is wrath against all men everywhere under the sun, how are you ever going to know that you need to be saved if a man doesn't tell you that, if a teacher doesn't make that clear at some point?

Secondly, when does he teach on eternal judgment and hell? When does he teach on holiness, when does he teach on eternal judgment and hell? Revelation 20:15 says, "if anyone's name," anyone, universal, "was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." So when does he teach on judgment and hell?

Thirdly, when does he teach on sin and repentance? When does he teach on sin and repentance? Luke 24:47 says, "repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations."

So holiness and wrath, judgment and hell, sin and repentance. You see, these are not the things that tickle the ears of unregenerate men, and part of the centrality of judging the teaching of a man is when does he say the things that unsaved men don't want to hear. That's part of it.

Fourthly, when does he teach on justification by faith alone? When does he tell you that your works cannot save you? That Christ is received through faith and faith alone and that none of your works can save you and that only faith in Christ will bring a man into the kingdom of God? Romans 3:28, "For we maintain that a man," that is, any man, "we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." When does he tell you that?

And finally, when does he teach on the substitutionary atonement of Christ? When does he teach you about the work of Christ? Isaiah 53:6, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him."

When does he teach these things that are central to the Gospel? When does he teach these things, the absence of which leave a man in darkness? When does he say those things?

You know, I don't pay much attention to what's going on in other churches around us in our region, but once in a while I'll drop in to places, not to see their worship service but you just see what they're doing; the latest series that they are teaching on self-improvement, you know, make your mark on the world, calling themselves a church. But when do we talk about wrath and judgment and hell and Christ and his work and faith alone?

Beloved, I want you to know something for certain here. This is so important: if a teacher believes these doctrines that I just mentioned, if he believes them really and truly, he will teach on them. Don't assume – oh, beloved – do not assume that simply because a man talks in generalities about God and Christ, that he necessarily believes these doctrines which we've just enumerated to you because if a man truly believes them, he will speak on them. And I'll give you two undeniable reasons why that is true. If a man truly believes those doctrines, his heart convictions before God will compel him to teach on them and to tell men about them. He will understand that he has a vertical responsibility before God that he is going to one day give an account for, "Did you teach my people these things which are central to salvation?" And the true teacher trembles before God and says, "I must teach on these things because I have a stewardship, I have an obligation before a holy God and one day I'm going to give an account and I want that day to go well for me." If he's truly saved, he's going to understand that these things were at work in his own salvation and he'll have a heart compulsion vertically that says, "I must speak. I believe therefore I spoke." Jeremiah said, "These things burn in me like a fire and it

must be expressed." A true teacher will speak on these things at some point in his ministry, and over time repeatedly, because the nature of his heart convictions before God alone will compel him to do it. When he's in his study alone, he'll say, "I have to teach on these things."

I'll tell you another thing, beloved: horizontally if a teacher believes these doctrines, if he truly believes these doctrines, these five doctrines that I just enumerated for you, beloved, on a completely different level there is another reason that he will be absolutely compelled to speak on the: his love for men will compel him. His love for men will compel him. He'll look out on an audience and see not an audience that will perhaps buy his next book. He'll look out on his audience and see not a source of revenue for his struggling church. He won't look out on his audience and see what they can give to him and the benefit that they can provide to him. No, he'll look on them as eternal souls who need to be reconciled to a holy God. He'll look on them and see these are lost people who need to hear the truth that they might be saved, that God might be pleased to bless the preaching of his word for the salvation of souls. And he sees the value of men as created in the image of God. He sees the value of souls plunging into destruction and he says, "I have an opportunity to speak in a way that might profit them both now and especially in eternity, that they might be profited before they stand before a holy God and give an account of the lives." And a true teacher will be motivated by love for those who hear him and say, "I have to tell you these things. I realize you may not want to hear them but, beloved, these are things of eternal price, of eternal consequence. These are the things that are the water to your soul. You must drink of them." And even if his audience doesn't appreciate what is being said, he realizes the value of the truth and applies it like a faithful doctor applies the medicine that brings healing to the body, even if the patient balks at the taste of what's going down. His love will compel him. He will have no choice. And you mark it well, beloved, and man that can ignore things like this has no love for his audience or he would tell them. A man like this does not have the proper convictions before God or he would speak. You see, beloved, if he is silent on these fundamental points of the Gospel, what is he doing? He is leading people down the broad path that leads to destruction. He is going before them filling the potholes and paving the road to make it a smoother road for them, not realizing, and his audience doesn't realize, that this is a road that goes over a cliff and goes down to depths never to be retrieved.

So what do you do? You beware. You stay away when you see these things. If a man only trumpets grace, you need to beware. We preach a Gospel of grace absolutely, but the man of God, the true teacher, is someone who realizes, "I must teach the full counsel of God," and the full counsel of God includes holiness and wrath, and judgment and hell, and faith alone and Christ alone, justification. Beloved, false teachers love smooth talk and they love appearances but talk is cheap, and they have the ability to trick you into thinking they're the real thing but you need to know enough about truth to say, "Somewhere he needs to be touching on these themes. It's been a month. Okay, well, he was doing a series. I get it. That's okay. It's been six months. Really? Since he said anything about sin or hell or judgment or wrath, since he said anything about that? It's been a year, it's been two. Ah, that's all I need to know. I'll go somewhere else, thank you." This is how you beware, this is how you protect yourself.

They are deceptive. They can trick you into thinking they are the real thing but, beloved, I use the word even if it sounds a little harsh on our ears, beloved, speaking to each one of you individually, do not be a sucker for that stuff because their judgment is coming. Look at verse 19. Their judgment is coming. Verse 19, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." False teachers will be cut down by God and face eternal judgment. James 3 tells us that teachers will face a stricter judgment. Teachers with a broad audience will face an even stricter judgment. Oh, oh, oh, the consequences of this, the enormity of these things of which we speak are so vast. Isn't it precious to us to be able to read the words of our gracious Lord and to realize that he loves us and he cares for us and he has given to us in his word what we need to be able to tell what's true from what's false? Isn't that precious? Don't you see the great love of Christ expressed even as he warns us against the wolves of false teachers? They might fool us for a while but God will triumph in the end and he will vindicate and he will protect his truth even if these men flourish for a short period of time.

So what do you do with false teachers? I'm going to give you four final things to wrap up here. I gave you five things to identify them by doctrinal ways, here's how I would suggest to you that you can find a way to beware of them and to protect yourself from false teachers, whether they be of a national or international scope, or if they be someone closer to you perhaps even in your own life.

First of all, how do you protect yourself, first of all this: hold to principle over personality. Hold to principle over personality. Here's what I mean by that. It's the nature of the people of God that we have relationships going in a lot of different directions. It's the nature of relationships that people will try to tell you, "Trust me," or, "You know me," or they'll tell their story and thus cloud some of these issues. Beloved, we want to be gracious, we realize that we are men of clay ourselves and that we ourselves fall short, but once a teacher's life has been clearly identified as something that is out of order, that is divisive, that is destructive, once that's established, it's not just that they had a bad day or a bad week or a bad month, but there's a pattern here that's clear and established. Once that is established, once a man, once a teacher has had opportunity to teach again and again and again and there is never anything of what we've spoken about here today, once that's established, we hold to principle over personality. What I mean by that is this, this may be the most important thing of what I'm going to say: don't make excuses for them. Don't make excuses for them and say, "Well, they must believe it. They must believe it, I just need to give them the benefit of the doubt." Well, no, we've already covered that. If they believed they would speak. Vertically they would speak out of compulsion, out of heart compulsion, conviction that says, "This is true. I must speak." Love for men would make them speak these things. Don't make excuses for them, then, once these things are established. Beloved, don't make excuses, just turn away. Just turn away. You don't have to judge their spiritual condition. It's enough for you to say in your heart, "I'll follow someone else, thank you." Then you just go on and let that false influence not be a part of what's feeding your own spiritual life. Hold to principle over personality. Don't make excuses for them.

Secondly, remove yourself from their influence. Remove yourself from their influence. Don't listen to them. Don't read their stuff. And for those of you that are visiting or perhaps hearing this in other forms, if you come to that conclusion, remove yourself from their authority. It is more important for you to be true to Christ than for you to honor a long-standing human relationship when you realize, "I'm in the wrong place here." Remove yourself from their influence.

Thirdly, withdraw your support. Don't enable their ministry with your time and your resources. Isn't that obvious? This is part of the way that you beware of false prophets. I see this, I'm not going to pay them money. I'm not going to send them my check. I'm not going to donate to them no matter how much manipulative persuasion they bring upon me.

Fourthly and finally, I've been saying this one all along: leave final judgment to God. Leave final judgment to God. Multiple people have asked me and it's a very good question over the course of these past two or three or four weeks, people have said, "Now are these men, do these men know that they are deceiving? Or are they unaware of their deception?" I think Scripture answers those questions: yes, it can be both. Men are conscious deceivers and men can be deceived. Scripture talks about that false teachers are deceiving and being deceived. You don't have to sort all of that out in order to respond properly to what Jesus has said here in Matthew 7. People say, "Well, is he even a Christian, then?" That's an interesting question but it doesn't matter to what we're talking about here. Just avoid his influence. Get out from under his influence and leave him to God. You protect your own soul. Men, you protect your own family and let God take care of that. Your responsibility is not to make final judgments that are reserved for the throne of God. No, your responsibility is simply to avoid the danger once it has been identified. Jesus said, "You'll know them by their fruits."

Now, beloved, these are weighty issues, I get that, but they are weighty because eternity is weighty. The value of eternal souls is weighty. The value of God's truth is weighty. The value of the Gospel is weighty. It's magnificent. It's the pearl of great price. Our Christ is great and lofty. He's the one who came from heaven in order to seek and save sinners just like you and me. These are matters of great worth and, therefore, we deal with them earnestly and we remember what we've been saying so often through this series as Jesus teaches here: Jesus is teaching for keeps. He's not bluffing when he says that false teachers will be cut down and cast into the fire. He's not just casually discussing matters when he says, "Beware of false prophets." He's earnestly warning and teaching you that your soul might be well in the end. And what has he done? What has our gracious Lord done in his word for us in this teaching that we see from Matthew 7? He's given us what we need for discernment and he has done that out of love for his sheep, out of love for his people, so that we might walk safely on the narrow way that leads to eternal life. That matters and, therefore, we watch what we take in.

Let's bow together in prayer.

O God, do grant us the discernment we need to see these things clearly, to love you and your truth more than we love any man, any family member, anyone that has been close to us. Father, for some this will bring up issues to recognize to look back, "I was once under the influence of a false church. I was under the influence of a false teacher." Father, when that conviction becomes clear, be swift to meet them with the grace that would renew faith in Christ and say, "Ah, but I've been brought into the truth of your word. I've been brought into the truth of Christ and, Lord, now I am safe. Thank you for delivering me from that."

Father, would you raise up from within this room, even, men who love your truth enough to feel the compulsion that, "I must speak on behalf of God on these matters of truth"? And beloved Lord, we pray that it would not simply be the intellectual stimulation that men love but that there would be a heart love and devotion to Christ that says, "I'm going to serve Christ with these things," and married jointly to that, "I must love the souls around me enough to speak." Lord, over time won't you raise up men that would be shepherds after your own heart to do exactly that, raise them up in our midst? We need these men, Lord. We need these men to rise up and to embrace these things as their own and to make it the preeminent priority of their life. Not prosperity. Not sports. Not entertainment. Not video games. But the high and lofty call of God to declare his truth and shepherd his people. Won't you do that, Lord? It's part of what you do in building your church. We're trying to be a true church here. Won't you do that for us?

And grant us, Father, we pray, the discernment and the grace to handle these things well and to handle them rightly, mindful that sometimes this will come in the form, these issues will come in the form of people we know and faces we had trusted in the past, and Father, it is so difficult to see that manifested. When it does, Lord, help us to hold to principle over personality, to yield a human relationship before we would yield on your truth. So Lord, we need so much grace to live these things out. We ask you to provide it for us in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.