



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



The Church's Most Wanted

Tim Badal | May 4, 2014 | Matthew 7:15-20

The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 28

Opening video: [John Piper speaking about prosperity gospel](#)

Open your Bibles to [Matthew 7:15-20](#) where we're going to explore the subject matter of false teachers. We're in a series on the Sermon on the Mount entitled "Upside-down Kingdom."

As we come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount we find Jesus very quickly addressing a couple of different issues through some mini sermons, which are all pointing to one very important thing. Jesus has been addressing the great contrast between the broad way that leads to destruction and the narrow way that leads to life everlasting and fellowship with God in heaven. That way is found through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

We learned last time that one of these roads is traveled by many and the other is traveled by few. There are teachers who point people down each of those directions. There are false teachers who proclaim the narrow way but in fact lead people down the broad way. Then of course there are true teachers who teach people to go the hard way—the way of the gospel, obedience and following Jesus Christ.

Jesus reminds us in our passage that—just as was true in His day—our world, our lives and our churches are filled with all kinds of false teaching. We need to be on guard against those false teachers and understand the sad dilemma that results from false teaching: many wrongly think they're on the narrow way that leads to eternity with Jesus. They adhere to their teachers who proclaim the narrow way all while saying it's okay to be on the broad way. And one day they will stand before Jesus and He will say, "*I never knew you*" ([Matthew 7:23](#)).

We need to be on guard against false teachers. Jesus reminds us in our passage how to discern the good teachers from the bad ones. While on the surface they may all seem the same, Jesus' words tell us that a deeper examination will help us see how destructive these false teachers can be to the body of Christ.

So let's listen to Jesus' words and find the truth of what Jesus is articulating. We're going to learn how we can recognize false teachers and how they've infiltrated our world and our churches today. We're going to

be examining these things under the heading, "The Church's Most Wanted." Here's what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says in [Matthew 7:15-20](#):

⁵"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."

Father God, we ask for Your blessing on our time in the Word and as I do what I believe You've called me to do. I have been given charge by the elders and the people of this church to expose false teachers for what they are. And yet I recognize that I too am a sinner and can be deceived. I pray for Your grace in my words that they would be right and true. I pray they would not come from any human thinking or understanding but from the core of Your Word. I pray that what I teach and proclaim would not be achievements for me as an individual. I pray that Your words would remind us all that we are sinners in need of grace, of the work You've done on the cross and that we have much to do as followers of Jesus Christ. Because there's a day when we'll stand before You and give an account for what we have listened to, how we've lived our lives and the doctrine we have said is true when in fact it's a lie. So I pray for discernment for these people. I pray for discernment for us as a church, that we will be known for generations as followers of Your Word and Your Word alone. We stand upon that truth and we give You the glory for it. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

As we address the "Church's Most Wanted," I'll tell you right away I'm going to be addressing some false teachers by name. Some of you are going to be offended by that because you are following some of those teachers unknowingly as a result of not being good stewards of godly doctrine and the Scriptures. After we're all said and done I invite you to challenge my words by going home and spending some time digging into the doctrines and beliefs of those teachers that we call out. If you can come back and show me that they are good and solid biblical teachers, then I'll come back next week and tell you I was wrong about them. I want to be humble in that. But I want you to know that I—along with our elders—have studied the teachings of these men and women and found them to be wanting because of the false teachings they proclaim.

When we talk about the "Church's Most Wanted" and name some of these names, many will think the "Most Wanted" list is a positive thing because some of these false teachers have some of the largest churches, the most glamorous buildings and some of the most incredible ministries. Their names are Christian through and through. The things they claim to desire seem totally godly and right but Jesus tells us that their ways lead to destruction and will devour many in their wake.

During the time of Operation Iraqi Freedom our military came up with a strategic way to address the regime of Saddam Hussein. There were dozens upon dozens of criminals who had helped serve Saddam in harassing and murdering many citizens during his dictatorship. As the Iraqi government began to crumble during our invasion, our military had to figure out a way to find those criminals and bring them to justice. They ended up making a deck of playing cards with the 52 "most wanted" Iraqi criminals for war crimes

and crimes against humanity. Of those 52 cards the aces identified the most valuable targets. The aces were the brother and two sons of Saddam Hussein, who was himself the ace of spades.

After Operation Iraqi Freedom ended, we know—through the news and through many within field command—there were many things about the operation that did not go how we wanted. There were many questions about why our military did what they did. But one of the things that got the highest marks was that strategic use of playing cards to highlight the “most wanted.” Those cards allowed the U.S. Army to apprehend all of the “most wanted” within a short amount of time because those playing cards became so commonplace that every individual on the cards was seen over and over again.

I think that the church would do well to have a set of playing cards with the most wanted of the false teachers. We think we know who the false teachers are and yet Jesus tells us in our passage that it’s not as easy as we think. We need help discerning these issues. I want this sermon to help you know how to understand if a teacher—including me, your own pastor—is teaching and preaching the things of God and not what the Bible calls “the doctrines of demons.”

Jesus begins by reminding us of the absolute urgency for us to examine our teachers. Notice He begins in verse 15 with the word “beware.” The word “beware” (*prosechō*) is a word that should stop us in our tracks. I’m not very educated about the biblical languages—I don’t have a lot of schooling—but I do know that when Jesus says, “Beware,” you should stop in your tracks. Jesus—the Lord of the Universe—is telling us to be on our guard, pay attention and be on the lookout. Any follower of Jesus Christ who hears that word should stop and listen to what He is saying.

Now Jesus isn’t just saying, “Alright, let’s beware.” The tone Jesus uses here is one that I use with my children when I see them running into disaster or danger. I have a loud voice and then I have an emergency voice that should stop my kids in their tracks, “Watch out!” That is the voice Jesus uses here. Jesus is articulating with great urgency that we need to be on guard.

As parents we use that kind of volume and urgency when we see our kids running for the street with cars coming from both directions. We do that when we see our kids hurling themselves towards an open fire or touching the area around the stove. We use it when we know there’s great peril before them.

Jesus knows us better than we do. He knows what’s being taught out there and wants us to stop in our tracks and recognize that there are false teachers everywhere, just as there were in the first century. There were false teachers before Christ, during the ministry of Christ, throughout church history and they are here today, alive and well. We need to be on the lookout.

The idea of “beware” (*prosechō*) is the idea of one who is walking the narrow road but is now being moved to look toward the broad way. Remember that Jesus has said there are two ways: one that’s narrow, hard and leads to eternity and one that is broad, easy and leads to destruction. Jesus is saying, “Be careful that you don’t think you’re on the narrow road while you’re really on the broad road. Be careful that you don’t put yourself under teachers who say you can live like the broad road and still be on the narrow road.” Inherent within this command “beware” is a calling to remain on the right course.

It's important to remember that false teaching is subtle. Yes, we have cults that any good orthodox Christian denies right away based on their teachings. But some of the false teaching out there is far more subtle. Some of it is happening in Christian ministry, being sold in Christian bookstores, aired on Christian radio, defined as Christian movies and shown on Christian TV. These are not Christian at all but rather lead to destruction. We need to identify them. We need to know what to look for so that we can be aware of these false teachings.

Now notice for whom Jesus says we need to be looking. He says, "*Beware,*" but of what? Verse 15 says, "*Beware of false prophets.*" The word "false prophets" (*pseudoprophētēs*) is one that we might not know very well. We don't have prophets today. We don't use that terminology.

So let me help you define what "prophet" means. It has a two-fold meaning:

1. A prophet is one who **foretells** or **predicts** things. We see that throughout Scripture. The prophets of old talked about the coming of Jesus Christ, His birth and the things that would happen during His time. The prophet Isaiah foretold things that took place at Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (Isaiah 53).
2. A prophet is also one who **forth-tells** or **preaches**. What I'm doing right now is forth-telling. I'm not preaching the future but rather proclaiming what has been articulated in the past. In essence I am saying, "Thus sayeth the Lord. Here's what the Lord has said and here is what I believe—through careful study—that the Lord has to say to you."

Jesus isn't talking about the first definition per se; I believe He's looking at the latter definition. It seems that Jesus is talking about false prophets as those who take the written Word and then use it for their own gain instead of the glory of God.

We need to be very careful. What are these false teachers and prophets doing? According to our context they are teaching that the believer can live life on the broad way all while expecting the benefits and blessings of the narrow way. They're saying, "You can live however you want and pursue the things of this world. In the end you will receive the benefit of the narrow way and the blessings that come from it."

We need to be careful because this type of teaching is out there in books, songs and movies. They're also found of course in the cults: Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses and many others. We find this teaching on Christian TV and radio. It is everywhere.

So if false teachers are that prevalent, then how do we determine who is right and who is wrong? Jesus helps us with that. He reminds us of three things concerning these imposters:

The Fraud They Execute

The Fruit They Exhibit

The Fate They Can Expect

1. The Fraud They Execute

They're hucksters and charlatans. They are perpetrating a fraud with the people. So how do they do it? What's their mode of operation? Jesus tells us in verse 15, *"Beware of false prophets [Okay, but what do they do?], who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."*

Let's just stop there for a second. Jesus is going to use a couple of different metaphors in our passage. He talks about wolves in sheep's clothing and trees that bear diseased fruits. We need to understand that one sermon or one sound bite isn't going to be enough to help us know who these false teachers are. When we examine a tree we have to see a whole season of that tree's life to determine the fruit that it produces or doesn't produce. Some heretics will be obvious right away in their teachings and we can say, "Yeah, that's out of bounds. That's unorthodox. That's a heresy." But Jesus is talking here about the ones who are a little more subtle. They're deceiving people.

Their Cunning Words

How are they deceiving people? Jesus says they do it through their cunning words. He says they are wolves hiding in sheep's clothing. They're living life amongst the sheep as if they're one of them.

We have preachers and teachers today who are false teachers that you would not expect. Why is that? Because they love to talk about God. They love to speak with great eloquence and style about the things of God, the cross of Jesus and the words of Scripture. They announce to the masses that they stand alone on the Word of God. Because of this many believers—people like us—see nothing wrong with them.

These preachers and teachers seem so wise and godly. People flock to them. Why is that? Because they are so likable. They're pleasant to be around and the things they share are uplifting. They seem to lift people out of the depths of hell with their words and bring happiness to unbeliever and believer alike. They seem to bring joy and contentment to a crowd no matter how big it is. They speak words that warm people's hearts. They speak about the capacity of the human spirit and the potential for us all to be champions.

However, their sermons are filled with Bible verses that are taken out of context. They're replete with stories and anecdotes of the human spirit. They tell you how following Jesus will win you health, wealth and happiness. What they share is of no offense to the natural man. They don't speak any words of conviction. Isaiah 30:10 says that false teachers will *"speak to us smooth things."* In Jeremiah 6:14 they are *"saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace."* Second Timothy 4:3 reminds us that they will tickle the ears of the listening individual by sharing things that they want to hear.

False teachers tell their followers that their words and actions are powerful. They preach that with the right perspective and positive thinking you'll be able to move mountains. You hear these things and are warmed to the heart but Jesus says, "Instead of being warmed to the heart you should beware." No matter how good they sound, how big their churches are, how many books they've written, how nice their words seem or how big their smiles are they carry death and destruction in their wake.

The Costumes They Wear

How do they do this without anybody noticing? It is because of the costumes they wear. Jesus says these false teachers are wolves in sheep's clothing. That may seem a bit odd to us. We use that term in our vernacular but what does it really mean?

Maybe we hear that and think back to the nursery story about Little Red Riding Hood. Do you remember little Red? She took a walk through the woods to her granny's house. She finally made it there and then what happened? She said, "Oh Granny, what big ears you have! Oh Granny, what big teeth you have!" I don't know how the wolf did it; Red must have had an eye problem. I mean, how did she not see that it was the wolf in her granny's clothes? Anyway, before she knew what had happened she was devoured. She was deceived. It's a weird nursery story.

When we picture that story in our minds it does not help us fully understand what Jesus is saying. We need to look at the context of Jesus' culture. When Jesus says, "They are dressed in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" the people would have readily understood what He meant.

These people were part of an agrarian society, so they understood the reference. In Jesus' day shepherds would take the dead sheep from their flock and use them. Instead of burying them or just letting their carcasses lie, the shepherds would take and use whatever parts of the animal they could. Then they would take the hides to use as clothing. They used the hides as clothing to protect themselves from the elements: the wind, rain and all of that. An animal skin was incredibly profitable for a shepherd in that respect.

There was another reason why shepherds did that. They also used the hide to attract the sheep of their flock to them. The smell of a flock was something very natural to the sheep. So after one of the sheep of his flock died, the shepherd would start wearing its hide so that the sheep would hear his voice, see him and respond to him as one of the flock. They would say, "That's one of ours. He's with us." Then they would come near to the shepherd, smell him and say, "He smells like us. He looks like us. We can follow him. We can know that he's going to lead us to the way of everlasting."

Let me help you understand this. Jesus shows us this as the Good Shepherd. Do you know what Jesus did? Jesus showed us that we can trust Him as the Good Shepherd because He put on flesh and made His dwelling among us. If He had come just as an angel or spirit we wouldn't have known Him or understood Him. But Jesus came, put on flesh, looked like us and smelled like us. He did things that we do. Then we could say, "He's our Shepherd. He has the words to eternal life so we will follow Him."

Jesus isn't just the Lamb that went to the cross and was slaughtered for us. He is the Shepherd Who wears the skin of the animal so that we may know He is ours and we are His.

Concealing Their True Ways

Here's the problem: the false teachers recognize this. They know this principle. They're not the Good Shepherd—they are ravenous wolves underneath wearing costumes instead of showing themselves for who they really are. So they do what the Shepherd does and put on the sheepskin. Because of that the sheep think they're okay. The false teachers do this to conceal their ways. They come in and they look the

part, smell the part and act the part. So the sheep get cozy with them and get closer to them. The whole time they're thinking, "Wow, this shepherd is great. This shepherd has wonderful things. This shepherd is leading us to good places." The whole reason why that shepherd is wearing those sheepskins is to cover who he really is—a ravenous wolf.

The word "ravenous" (*harpax*) speaks first of an absolute hunger. This wolf is so hungry that he is ready to find whatever he can and rip it from limb to limb. He is ready to devour the carcass of any sheep that comes his way. So that wolf dresses himself up to be beautiful and look the part. Then when the little sheep comes up close, what happens? Before the sheep knows it, the wolf's teeth are deep inside its flesh, tearing it apart, feasting on it for his own gain and glory.

Why do these false teachers do this? They do it to mimic the way of their father the devil. The devil doesn't come out as the boogiemer. Who would follow the ways of the boogiemer? He doesn't show himself to be the terrible creature that he is. No, the Bible says he masquerades himself as an angel of light so that when we see the devil and his demons we are attracted to them. This is what the false teachers do also. They find ways to masquerade themselves, concealing their ways so that they are ready for when the sheep least recognize them.

Now Jesus isn't necessarily talking about cults here. I'm going to assume that many of us are aware of the false teachings that are blatantly obvious as they come from the cults. But to help you understand how to classify false teachers we are going to define some things.

Heretics

First, false teachers can come in the way of heretics. What are heretics? Heretics are those who openly reject the Word of God and teach that which is contrary to divine truth. We see heretics in the kingdom of cults: Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists to name a few. There is a vast majority of Christendom filled with all kinds of rank heresy.

Let's look at the issue of Mormonism. Mormonism has almost become mainstream. Our last republican contender for presidential office was an elder within the Mormon Church. He did exactly what I do on a Sunday morning. That was his job. And we have come to recognize Mormons as mainstream. Why is that? Because they believe in a lot of the same things we do: the importance of morality, family, church attendance and fellowship.

Here's the problem: Mormonism is full of false doctrine. It begins with a doctrine that in a planet far, far away from here god is a human being who is making spirit babies with his many, many wives. We are the byproduct of that. The Mormons believe that god was a man who became god and is now sharing his posterity with mother earth and we are his spirit children.

The great thing about the Mormon faith is that men can do the same thing as our god in this planet does—we can become gods. Our job is to become gods ourselves. Ladies, you're not left out. You get to be the wives of gods and give birth to spirit children yourselves.

So how do you become a god? You work your way into salvation to become a god. I get that the Mormons want to be about family and pursue a life of morality, but the doctrine of the Mormon Church comes from the pit of hell and you need to recognize that. It's all smoke and mirrors.

My brother Abraham once gave me a definition of Mormonism. I love this definition and use it all the time. He recognizes Mormonism from Jordan and says, "Mormonism is the American equivalent to Islam." If you look at it you can see exactly what he means. They are both works-based salvation with a god who is not the God of Scripture. He's not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Brothers and sisters, you need to understand that and do your research because their church is right down the street. You don't have to look very far to find Mormons. If you drive by on Bliss Road you will see their parking lot filled with the cars of people who believe they're on the narrow road but are in fact on the way that leads to destruction. They're heretics.

Apostates

Then there are apostates. The Bible uses the term apostates to describe teachers who once followed the true faith but have now turned away from it. They've rejected it and are trying to lead others away from it as well.

Let's stop here for a moment. I saw a YouTube video that gives a good example of an apostate. It was a segment from the Colbert Report that took place on the Thursday before Easter. The Colbert Report is a news program that does a lot of satire and comedy. In this segment Stephen Colbert had a guest on who refuted the teachings of Jesus Christ. You would think that the individual doing that would have a pitchfork and horns. But when they brought out the man, it was Bart Ehrman.

Let me tell you about Bart Ehrman's pedigree. He is a graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College. You don't get much better than those two institutions. Bart Ehrman went to the schools that we love. But what does he do now? He teaches theology at the University of North Carolina on Chapel Hill and writes books telling people that the Jesus of the Bible is not Jesus at all. He says, "Hey, I used to believe this way but I don't believe this way anymore. I want to show you the error of your ways." I was very encouraged in the YouTube clip because Stephen Colbert—who is a practicing Catholic—did a phenomenal job of refuting this man. Bart Ehrman is an apostate.

Let me give you another example of an apostate. Not too many years ago one of the biggest names in Christendom for some time was beginning to rise up the ranks in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His name was Rob Bell. He attended Wheaton College around the same time as Pastor Keith. He was—and still is—a very articulate preacher and proclaimer of spiritual things.

As we watched Bell's teachings, they started out very good but then started to go off the rails. Only a couple of years ago he wrote a book called *Love Wins* in which he says that hell is only a temporal place of rejuvenation and change and that after a little time of reform in this place called hell love wins and everybody makes it to heaven.

We call that universalism. That is an apostate teaching. The Bible makes it clear that there are two roads: one that leads to heaven and one that leads to hell. Those two places are eternal in nature.

We need to call him out on these teachings because this man who used to be orthodox is now telling everybody, "In the end everybody makes it to heaven" and that comes from the pit of hell. It smells like smoke.

Deceivers

Then there are the deceivers. The deceivers are different. At least the other two—the heretics and apostates—speak their garbage with some sense of honesty. They tell you right away, "We don't claim to believe what orthodox biblical Christianity affirms." I'll give them that; at least they're honest with you.

The deceivers are totally different. They give the appearance of orthodoxy. They frequently give great declarations and fanfares about not being liberals or cultish. They claim to be ones who speak favorably of Jesus Christ, the cross, the Bible and the Holy Spirit. So true believers start to associate with them because they appear to be orthodox and evangelical. Their books, vocabulary, looks and associations give considerable evidence of genuine and true belief. But they're not genuine; they're fake. They're deceivers and the world is full of them.

2. The Fruit They Exhibit

So how do we recognize the deceivers? It is by the fruit they exhibit. Jesus says in verse 16, "*You will recognize them by their fruits.*" He says it again in verse 20, "*Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*" So how do you see the deceivers? You recognize them by their fruits.

What are their fruits? We need to understand first that all teachers display fruit. Every teacher you have—including me—is producing fruit. So you need to look at every one of your teachers as a tree and ask, "What kind of fruit are they producing?"

Creed

What is the fruit of anyone's particular ministry? It's their creed or their beliefs. While heretics and apostates are quick to articulate where they disagree with orthodox Christianity, the deceivers are far more subtle.

Deceivers will fail to do a number of things that are key to true Bible preaching and teaching:

1. They will preach only God's love. Look at your teachers and preachers and ask, "Do they fail to preach about the holiness, righteousness and justice of God? Do they only teach about the love of God?"

Now you might ask, "Isn't God love?" Yes, but we need to understand that God does not declare Himself as only love with the absence of all other attributes. God is the God of love but the Bible makes it clear that as much as God is loving He is also wrathful. It is clear that as much as God is compassionate He is also just. As much as God is merciful He is also totally righteous. You have to hold these things in balance as the Bible does.

There are times when God shows immense mercy to a group of people. He shows us that there is mercy, love and grace in this God of the Universe Whom we worship and serve. But in other passages of Scripture we also see God's divine wrath and indignation against a group of people. God is telling us, "Hold these things in tension."

This is where deceivers fail: they will only preach that God is love. They talk about this God with Whom you would absolutely fall in love because He's a soft teddy bear you can run to when you need Him. You don't have to change anything about who you are. Just run and embrace this God and everything will be fine.

2. They will avoid preaching about God's final judgment in hell. Be careful of this false teaching. This is Rob Bell's great failure. He has erased hell's eternity and made it a temporal place of reform where God's love wins.

Here's the problem: if there is no hell then there is no good news. Do you understand that? If all of us make it to heaven then why are we wasting our time? If there's no hell and no consequence for sin then there's no reason for us to be here. We're all going to get there anyway and that teaching is a travesty. Be careful. Make sure your teachers talk about how we are people who will be accountable for our actions and our attitudes.

3. They will deemphasize the depravity of man. Instead of teaching people that they're dead in their trespasses and sin they will teach people—and I quote—"to find the champion in you." This turns Jesus into a motivational leader not our Savior and Lord.

4. They will deemphasize the cross and its atonement. They deemphasize that Jesus went to the cross for the reasons the Bible says He did: to take upon Himself our sin and the wrath of God. If they even talk about Jesus going to the cross, they will say it was so He might be a great moral example of how we ought to serve and sacrifice to one another.

This is seen in a great debate that's going on over the hymn "In Christ Alone" and using an alternate version in new hymnals. Without permission from the authors Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, the Celebrating Grace Hymnal published in 2010 changed the words from, "Till on that cross when Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied," to "On that cross where Jesus died, the love of God was magnified." The new Glory to God hymnal dropped the hymn completely because they did not receive permission to use the alternate version of the hymn.

Why would anyone want to change the words of this song? They would say, "People don't need to hear words like 'wrath' and 'judgment.' They need to hear from God and their preachers something that is more palatable and love being magnified is the way to go."

Brothers and sisters this is happening close to home. Let me give you an example of what happens when we preach the truth. Not too long ago we had some visitors who were the neighbor friends of one of our members. They attended our church for a while. But then I hadn't seen them for a while so I asked their friends, "Hey, why aren't they attending anymore? Has something happened?"

The friend didn't want to tell me but eventually admitted, "They said they didn't like your preaching."

Well, they're certainly not the first ones nor will they be the last. I went to the default reason and said, "What didn't they like? Is it too long?"

The friend replied, "Oh no, they said they like the long sermons."

So I asked, "Then what did they say?"

The friend told me, "They said, 'Tim's preaching depresses me and I don't come to church to be depressed.'"

I said, "Well, what did they mean by that?"

The friend said, "They want positive messages and positive things. They said, 'When Tim speaks it's always about how bad we are.'"

Let me tell you something: if you came here looking for a positive message about who you are then you need to find another church. Here's what I know: God says nothing positive about us. When He speaks about us—sinners—He says we're dirty rotten scoundrels. We're dirty rotten scoundrels in the way we use our money, the way we relate with our husbands and wives, the way we relate to our children, through the things we watch on TV and through the way we do all sorts of things.

I pray that for the next hundred generations we proclaim this truth from the pulpit: our problem isn't a money problem, a relationship problem or a knowledge problem. Our problem is a sin problem and the only answer to that sin problem is the gospel of Jesus Christ. While you are here you are going to hear repeatedly, "You are very, very, very, very, very—times infinity—bad, and so am I. God is very, very, very, very, very good and glorious." We worship God and not self because we're bad and God is glorious. To Him be the glory, honor and praise. That message will depress people who desire to hear good things about themselves. Every time you elevate man and devalue God you are gutting the gospel.

Character

Then we have to view their character. We must look at the teaching of these people and ask, "What's their character? What's their personality like? What are their attitudes, motives and thinking like?" You can't know the heart of another individual so you have to look at his or her creed and character.

So ask yourself, "How do they act? How do they respond to their Lord?" Jesus gives us a great job description or examination tool for teachers and preachers of the Word at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. What are your teachers to look like? Your teachers should be those who are poor in spirit, who mourn over their sin, who are meek and humble, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers and who are willing to be persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Is that what you see in the teachers you are following? Hopefully, is that what you see in me? If not then I need to be challenged in that. I need to be brought to bear the accountability that every good teacher would desire. Do your teachers see themselves as sinners in need of grace?

Conduct

The last fruit is their conduct. How do they live? How do they relate with others? Here are a couple of questions I want you to ask about your teachers:

1. Do they have a God complex? Do they see themselves as God's answer to Christianity? I was leafing through a book written by one of the greatest false teachers of our day and in the forward it said, "This is the greatest teaching that has taken place in the church's history for 2,000 years." When you heap that kind of praise on a person, something is out of whack. Do the teacher's followers speak about the critical place they hold in their lives? For example some might say, "I would be lost without them. You don't understand the absolute critical nature that preacher has had in my life. Do you understand the peace that preacher has given me?"

I love it when you guys encourage me but if you start talking about how I'm central to the reason why you have salvation then I'm going to slap you. That's the Holy Spirit's role. As preachers and proclaimers of God's Word we are simply His mouthpieces. We too are sinners in need of grace. Be careful when people talk about the visions God has given them. Be careful of people who say, "This is a new take on an old Scripture." Be careful.

2. Do they seem greedy? Far too many pastors are using ministry so that they might live in luxury. Now I'm a strong proponent that churches should pay their pastors an honorable wage. I don't think pastors should be left in poverty while the rest of the congregation lives a different way. But some of the major pastors in our churches today are making hundreds of thousands of dollars, even millions.

I was in a meeting once and learned that one of the pastors there had a housing allowance for tax purposes of \$275,000. How do you get a housing allowance like that? His home is somewhere between 12-16,000 square feet. That's just a little bigger than our church building. His family is driving Bentleys and Mercedes. Now are cars bad? No. Are houses bad? No. But if this is why a preacher is doing what he does—to pursue these things—then you have to be careful.

The Didache—which is an early writing called "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"—said that you can know if someone is a false teacher or true teacher by whether or not at the end of their time they ask you for money. They will say, "I will freely receive and I will freely give." None of the apostles had all this stuff. We have to ask ourselves, "What are they in this for?"

3. How do they govern people? Do they rule people with an iron fist? Do they discard people who don't agree with them? Are they quick to pontificate, bloviate and walk around like a king? Be careful. Be careful when your pastor walks around with a posse of individuals keeping everybody away from him. Do you think that hasn't happened? I've gone to conferences where people that we hear on Moody radio have posses of people around them with earpieces and everything. It looks like he's the president of the United States. We have to be careful with this stuff.

Be careful of preachers who sound really strong but are hurtful in their wake. I know of a pastor from a very evangelical church who in a meeting told another staff member, "You kiss the pastor's ring, so kiss it." Many of you would be acquainted with this man's ministry.

This kind of behavior is a problem. Be careful of these things. We need to be on guard against them. We have to observe the creed, character and conduct of our preachers and teachers or we'll fall prey to their false teachings.

3. The Fate They Can Expect

What's the fate these false teachers can expect? What's going to happen to people who do such things?

Cut Down and Cast Out

Jesus makes it abundantly clear. They will be cut down and cast out. Verse 19 says, *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."* James 3:1 says, *"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."* That verse makes me fearful because I know what's happening today. I know that you're examining me—and I want to do a good job for you—but here's the thing I'm more worried about: God is examining me too. He's examining my heart and my words. I'm going to be under stricter judgment. Some of you are going to be in the fast lane of judgment and then He's going to say, "Alright Badal, pull over. We have some things to talk about. You preached a lot of sermons. We have some things to work though." I would rather be in your lane!

Based on the idea that teachers are held to a stricter judgment and these false teachers will be thrown into the fire, it is clear that some of our teachers will experience a hotter fire in hell because of their doctrines and their deception of others. So Jesus is saying that we need to be on guard and recognize these people who lead others to destruction.

How to Be on Guard

So what are some practical takeaways? I have three for you:

1. Be discerning. The word "Christian" doesn't always mean Christ-approved. My wife will say I'm getting on a soapbox here. Here's my soapbox: we listen to radio stations that brag about being family-friendly, positive and encouraging. Brothers and sisters, there's a reason they use that terminology. It's not always God exalting. As Christians we tend to think, "Oh this is good. It's better than the secular stuff." Let me tell you something: I would far rather listen to some truth about sin than untruths about my Savior. I would rather listen to songs talking about love relationships from a secular point of view than songs by people claiming to be Christians yet defaming the name of Jesus with bad doctrine. We listen to it because it's "Christian radio." We think, "Oh, then it's all fine and dandy." Listen to some of those songs. I am appalled by some of the things I hear on those radio stations. I tell my kids, "That's not the Jesus that we know from Scripture."

Regarding movies, we are inflamed with anger that an unbeliever would say untrue things about the story of Noah and we discard it as trash. But at the same time we'll go to a movie talking about Heaven as a real place with a Christian label on it and—regardless of the garbage in that movie—we say, "Oh, what a great Christian movie." That movie is not for us. Supposedly it is Heaven from the perspective of a little kid. I don't know what he saw but the Bible says that no one sees Heaven except the One Who descends from heaven.

So be careful. Be careful of the TV channels you're watching that talk about Christianity yet preach a pack of lies. Be careful of the books you read. I've seen some of the books you read when I go to your houses. If you're lucky enough I've told you about them.

2. Be a Berean. Study the Word to determine if your teachers pass the test. In Acts 17:10-11, the Bereans listened to Paul and said, "Paul, this is great. Let us go check the Scriptures." Do you not believe what I'm saying? Then go check your Bibles and see if I'm a good teacher or not. I applaud that kind of studious work. Do what we're teaching our kids in Awana to do in 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*" Let me add something to that verse: study to show yourself and your teachers as approved unto God. I think you can do that. I don't think God's going to be upset if you're studying for yourself and your teachers to see if you and they are approved.
3. Submit to and depend on your elders. This is crucial. You're probably saying, "Wait a minute. I have to listen to you guys?" Yes, you do. You need to listen because you have seen in our lives that we preach and teach the good things of God. As members of the church you have affirmed upon us the role of elder. We didn't put ourselves in this position; you did. What is the job of an elder? Hebrews 13:17 says, "*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls.*" An elder shouldn't ask you about counting calories, he should ask, "What doctrines are you listening to?"

In the midst of the qualifications for an elder, Paul says, "*He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it*" (Titus 1:9). The job of an elder is to protect you—the sheep—from bad doctrine.

So ask your elders questions. Say, "Hey, I got this book. I saw this video. I'm listening to this song and it doesn't seem to make much sense. Help me with it. Is it a good song? Is it a good book?" That's what the elders' job is: to seek those things out. Take heed of Jesus' words today. Be on the lookout. Beware.

I pray that you'd adhere to this teaching and you would seek out to make sure any teaching you hear is right. When Jesus says "beware" we need to beware. I'm going to pray and I'm going to show one more video (linked at end of this transcript). We don't show a lot of videos but today I thought the videos I found were really helpful for us. But I'm going to pray and I'm going to challenge some of you because some of you, especially the older generations, are not fans of rap. We're going to close out the service with a rap song. I'm going to help you because the words are going to be on the screen but they're going to call out some things that will be good for us and once the song is done you're dismissed.

Let's pray.

Father God, I ask for Your protection. We know there are many charlatans and hucksters. We know there are many people who desire to fleece the flock of God for their own selfish desires. We know in the latter days many teachers will come. People will turn their attention to these destructive heresies and doctrines taught by demons so that they may gain something out of it. I pray that will never be the case for this church. Let us never be too proud to think it could not happen to us. I pray that we as a people would be more diligent and that we would use our minds. You tell us to love You with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength. I pray that we would use our minds to ascertain if what we're reading, listening to and

watching is good. I pray that these false teachers would repent. But You know their hearts and minds so I pray that You would cut down these false ministries because they are destroying many and leading many to the way of destruction.

Thank You Lord for a church that preaches and teaches the truth of God, not only through my lips but through the multiple classes that preach and teach Your Word: to our youngest kids, to our student ministries and to our adults. Let us stand by Your Word because it is the only truth we have. In Christ's name. Amen.

Closing video: [False Teachers](#) by Shai Linne

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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