

False Prophets and Their Fruits	Coram Deo	Study
"Recognizing prophetic impostors is not always easy, but Jesus says the fruit of their teaching helps us evaluate our instructors."	"The study of church history, our church's confessions, and membership in a good, local church is necessary to help us weed out the good teachers from the bad."	Open It Explore It Get It

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits" (vv. 15–16a). Matthew 7:15–20

False Prophets and Their Fruits

Following His call for us to pursue the narrow way that leads to salvation (Matt. 7:13–14), Jesus warns us to beware of false prophets in today's passage (vv. 15–20). Just as there are two ways, one of salvation and another of damnation, so too are there only two kinds of teachers: true ones and false ones. Being able to distinguish these teachers from one another is vital if we want to promote our spiritual well-being. Otherwise, false prophets will lead us to destruction.

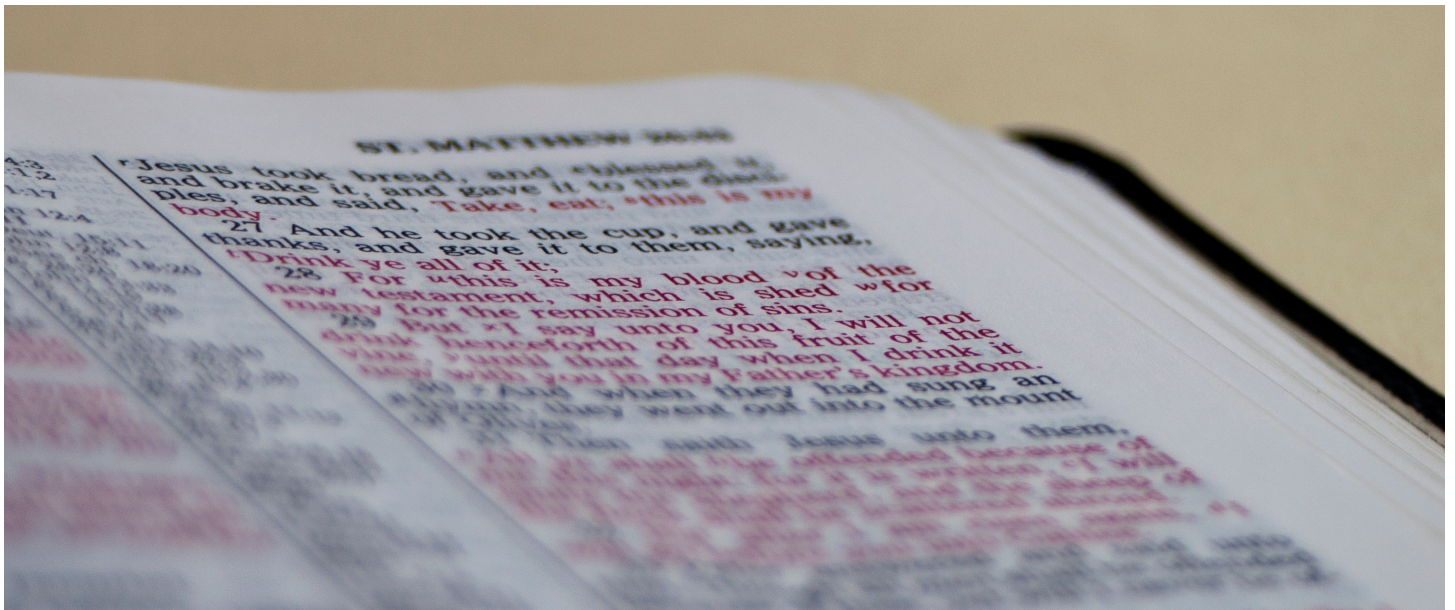
Recognizing prophetic impostors is not always easy, but Jesus says the fruit of their teaching helps us evaluate our instructors (vv. 15–

16a). Some buckthorn bushes in Palestine produce black berries that look like grapes from a distance, and certain thistles have flowers that appear to be figs. However, a close inspection of both these fruits reveals them for what they really are — things unfit for consumption. Likewise, we must examine the fruits our teachers' produce in order to determine the nature of the source from which they come (vv. 16b–18).

Since the church's foundation has been laid (Eph. 2:19–21), no one today exercises the gift of prophecy as the prophets and apostles of old did. Yet the prophetic responsibility to explain God's Word to the people remains, and teachers are obligated,

like the prophets, to preach true doctrine (Deut. 13:1–5; Titus 2:1). Therefore, teachers who exhort us to live out Jesus' rules for kingdom life bear good fruit. Sound teachers call us to repent (Matt. 5:3), live as salt and light (vv. 13–16), recognize our inability to keep God's law under our own power (v. 20), and follow Christ wholeheartedly (6:19–24). True teachers never knowingly reject Scripture's clear teaching (Gal. 1:8–9; 2 John 9). John Calvin comments, "All doctrines must be brought to the Word of God as the standard, and that, in judging of false prophets, the rule of faith holds the chief place."

Good fruit also includes purity of character and life. This does not mean



“The study of church history, our church’s confessions, and membership in a good, local church is necessary to help us weed out the good teachers from the bad.”

moral perfection, but general conformity to Christ. Those whom the Father calls to shepherd His flock must not live in debauchery (2 Peter 2). They must not preach and practice envy or divide over minor matters (1 Tim. 6:2b–5). By their holy conduct, they are to set a good example for God’s chosen people (4:12).

Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Though we are all responsible to evaluate our teachers by the fruit of their teaching and lives, it does not necessarily follow that this evaluation is solely an individual responsibility. In fact, we need other Christians who are grounded in the faith to help us do this. The study of church history, our church’s confessions, and membership in a good,

local church is necessary to help us weed out the good teachers from the bad. Are you involved in such things? ¹

Passages for Further Study

1 Kings 22:1–40
 Jeremiah 28
 Matthew 24:10–1
 Acts 20:28–35

Open It!

1. Describe a time when you saw an advertisement for a product that compelled you to purchase it only to find out when you got it that it fell short of what was promised.



2. Who was your favorite teacher in school? What made that teacher different from the others?

Read It | Matthew 7:15-20

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. For who are we to be on the lookout?
2. How are we to recognize them from true prophets?
3. What makes them hard to discover at first?

Get It

The Lord Jesus gives us a general warning against false teachers in the church. We are to "beware of false prophets." The connection between this passage and the preceding one is striking. Would we keep clear of this "broad way?" We must beware of false prophets. They will arise. They began in the days of the apostles. Even then the seeds of error were sown. They have appeared continually ever since. We must be prepared for them, and be on our guard.

false teachers in the church

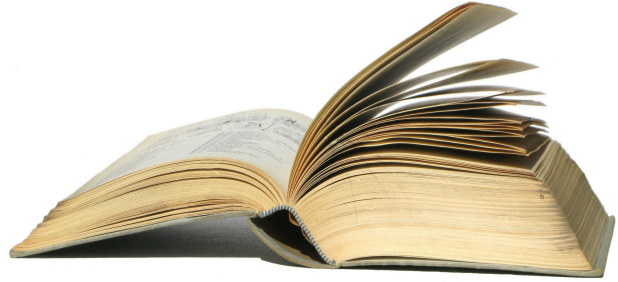
This is a warning which is much needed. There are thousands who seem ready to believe anything in religion if they hear it from an ordained minister. They forget that clergymen may err as much as laymen. They are not infallible. Their teaching must be weighed in the balance of Holy Scripture. They are to be followed and believed, so long as their doctrine agrees with the Bible, but not a minute longer. We are to try them "by their fruits." Sound doctrine and holy living are the marks of true prophets. Let us remember this. Our minister's mistakes will not excuse our own. "If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch."

What is the best safe-guard against false teaching? Beyond all doubt the regular study of the word of God, with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Bible was given to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. (Psalm. 119:105.) The man who reads it aright will never be allowed greatly to err. It is neglect of the Bible which makes so many a prey to the first false teacher whom they hear. May we all bear in mind our Lord's warning! The world, the devil, and the flesh, are not the only dangers in the way of the Christian. There remains another yet, and that is the "false prophet," the wolf in sheep's clothing. Happy is he who prays over his Bible and knows the difference between truth and error in religion! There is a difference, and we are meant to know it, and use our knowledge.

J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts

1. Tell about a time when you heard false teaching. What was taught and how did you respond?
2. Why is it significant that Jesus' warning about false prophets comes immediately after the discussion about the narrow and broad gates?
3. Jesus says that false prophets come to us in "sheep's clothing." What disguises might they wear today?
4. What are some popular false teachings being embraced by our culture today?

In Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus addresses the future false prophets He knows will come. He talks about their appearance and their teachings. Both their appearance and teaching reveal through testing that they are false. He speaks of them as ravenous wolves who come to devour their prey. Jesus makes it clear that we must be on our guard at all times knowing that a healthy understanding of scripture is our only antidote and protection from false teaching.



5. Why do you think Jesus chose these metaphors to describe false prophets? What do these images reveal about the seriousness of false teaching?
6. What is it about false teachers and their teaching that make them so dangerous?


If they are so dangerous, why are we tempted to follow false teachers?

7. How do you spot false teachers today? Do you think they are easier or harder to spot than in the New Testament time? Why?

False prophets plague the church because they can easily deceive with false claims and mighty works (Mt 7:22; 24:24; Re 19:20). To recognize false prophets, the ordinary Christian must examine the way they live and their message. Do their behavior and character conform to Christ and His teaching? Do they proclaim only what people want to hear that makes life easy and pleasurable while ignoring the demanding and difficult requirements of discipleship?²

8. What did Jesus mean by "fruit?" How would the fruit of false teachers identify them?

Fruit trees may be beautiful but they have as their primary purpose the bearing of fruit, and so they are judged not by looks but by fruit produced. Jesus is saying that in the same way a prophet or anyone who speaks for God is to be judged by his life and not just by his lips (words). Just as a genuine fruit tree cannot keep from being revealed by its fruit, the nature of the prophet cannot help being revealed. Jesus is making it quite clear that although false prophets will come, we do not have to be deceived by them but we can in fact accurately identify them if we look closely at their "fruit." On the other hand, the implication is that if genuine believers fail to look closely at the "fruit" of a prophet's life, they can be ensnared by them.³

- 
9. While this passage is about false teachers and their ways, what truths can we glean from this passage about true and false followers of Christ?

What does fruit look like in the life of the believer?

10. How good are you at spotting inaccurate teachings that subvert solid theology that pleases and honors God?

11. What is the difference between theological nit-picking and proper doctrinal examination?

12. What are the “non-negotiable” truths that we must believe? How do we determine what we fight against and the things that we “agree to disagree” about?

13. What do you think are some of the most tempting but dangerous false teachings about Jesus and Christianity today?

What is your responsibility as a Christian when you encounter such teaching?

What can you do to remain true to Scripture and avoid these false teachings?

¹ R.C. Sproul, False Prophets and their Fruits *From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org*

² Disciple's Study Bible

³ www.preceptaustin.org