

12. Unethical and Immoral Nature of False Prophets and Teachers

Nothing is more at odds with the ethical and moral standards of Jesus than the acts of false prophets and false teachers. Peter, in 2 Peter 2:1, places false prophets and false teachers in the same category, "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you." False prophets and false teachers lack the moral and ethical nature of the true follower described in the beatitudes. They are not poor in spirit, meek, or pure in heart. Rather, Peter describes them in a manner consistent with their evil minds and behaviors in 2 Peter 2:10-12:

Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; 11 yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord. 12 But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

At the end of the Bible in Revelation, God revealed His mystery. There, all unrighteousness dwells in the triad of evil: the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. Their fate in the fiery lake forecasts the end of all false prophets and teachers. In Rev 16:13, John witnessed this triad: "Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet." In Rev 19:20, the beast and his cohort, the false prophet, received eternal punishment:

But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Nothing represents evil more than those who prophesy or teach falsely. They are by nature morally and ethically depraved.

False Prophets Look and Sound Morally and Ethically Upright

Matt 7:15-20

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

The world is full of false prophets and teachers who appear to be morally and ethically upright. This is the secret of their deceit. The Lord's analogy says it all: they appear as innocent sheep, but they are ferocious wolves. "Watch out!" he warns. He tells us that by their fruit we shall know them. We must look beyond the false prophet or teacher to their fruit. What are they teaching? Is it from the word of Christ? Is it in the New Testament? The ethics and morality of false prophets and teachers allow them to teach their own destructive doctrines according to 2 Peter 2:1-3

They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these

teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

John joined the Lord in warning us in 1 John 4:1: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

The stakes are high since the work of the false prophets is the work of demons no matter how good and righteous these prophets appear. Paul warned in 1 Tim 4:1-2, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron."

False Prophets Appear to Do the Right Things

Matt 7:21-23: 21

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

The ethical and moral deceit of the false prophet and false teacher comes from the apparent good that they do and say. They say:

- Lord, Lord.
- Did we not prophesy in your name?
- Did we not drive out demons in your name?
- Did we not perform many miracles?

The litmus test applied to the false prophets and teachers is the one given here by the Lord. Are they doing the will of the Father who is in heaven? God does not allow even small changes in the matter of teaching and doing His will. Such changes and alteration constitute a perversion of the gospel, and with that perversion comes a curse. Paul explains in Gal 1:6-9:

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

False Prophets Appear to Be Servants of Righteousness

The moral and ethical deceit of false apostles, prophets, and teachers is in their masquerade. They pretend to be something that they are not. Paul relates this great masquerade to the masquerade of the devil himself. In 2 Cor 11:13-15, Paul taught:

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their

Conclusion

In the grand scheme, the work of false prophets and teachers is the work of Satan. Its purpose is to deceive the righteous and advance wickedness. By nature, it can never be morally and ethically upright. Paul wrote a fitting summary describing the deceit of Satan's work in 2 Thess 2:7-12:

7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. 2 Peter 2:1: Where does one find false prophets and teachers?
2. 2 Peter 2:10-12: What are bold and arrogant men not afraid to do? How do the scriptures describe false teachers?
3. Rev 16:13: How does John describe the three beings of evil?
4. Rev 19:20: What will be the fate of the beast and the false prophet?
5. Matt 7:15-20: For whom are we to watch out? How will they be dressed? How will we recognize them?
6. 2 Peter 2:1-3: How do false prophets introduce their doctrines (heresies)? What is their attitude toward the Lord? What do they do to the truth? What kind of stories do they tell?
7. 1 John 4:1: How are we to treat every spirit?
8. 1 Tim 4:1-2: What did the Spirit clearly say would happen? From where do these teachings come?
9. Matt 7:21-23: What four things do false teachers say? What will the Lord say?
10. Gal 1:6-9: What will happen to a man or angel who perverts the gospel?
12. 2 Cor 11:13-15: How does Satan present himself? How do his servants present themselves?
13. 2 Thess 2:7-12: What will happen to the lawless one? Who is behind the coming of the lawless one? Who will perish? What will happen to those who delight in wickedness?