

Trinity 8

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

Beware! - This makes us constantly vigilant. We can never take it for granted that they are not here.

Where God's true word is preached, the devil is sure to follow.

Paul says to the Pastors at Ephesus, *"I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."*

This is a terrifying warning for us. For he says plainly that the false teachers will be familiar to us and come from among us.

So how can we tell them apart? How will I know if one is true or not?

Jesus gives the first clue when he says, *"who come to you."*

As God says, *"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran."*

They come of their own accord and not by the sending of the Lord.

Therefore your first line of defense is to ask, "has this person been sent by God?"

Is he here because of a public call and ordination?

Or does he merely claim that God sent him?

If not, then you must beware no matter how meekly he is clothed.

Some would skip over this first test and say, "But this person MUST be sent from God! After all, he seems so godly!"

For this reason, Jesus reminds you of the second test of a false prophet.

Namely, he will be wearing *"sheep's clothing."*

The devil constantly parades himself as an angel of light.

Therefore, when he sends wolves among God's sheep, you can bet that they will look, for all the world, like sheep and not like wolves.

Maybe they will be NICE and soft-spoken—never confronting anyone.

They might be ZEALOUS and on fire for missions.

Maybe they will be SUCCESSFUL and have a large following.

Are these traits bad in Christians? Of course not!

Would to God that there was more NICENESS, SUCCESS and ZEAL among us!

It is just that they are general traits which can be as true of sheep as of wolves.

Unbelievers can be NICE, SUCCESSFUL and ZEALOUS too!

Just look at the ZEAL of Mormon missionaries or the SUCCESS of Joel Osteen.

Look at the NICENESS of the Dali Lama.

Unless these traits produce good fruits, they are merely *"sheep's clothing."*

Therefore Jesus gives us the third test of a false prophet: *"his fruits."*

It is true that a false prophet will come in sheep's clothing.

Do not be impressed by this but rather test his fruits the 10 commands.

Is he zealous to teach the TRUTH of God's word or does He teach error too?

Is he nice because he seeks to fulfill the 10 commands toward you or because he is too timid to confront evil on the basis of God's Word.

Is he successful in God's eyes because, "what is required of stewards is that they be faithful?"

Or is he successful in the world's eyes because of a large following, a beautiful building or a generous budget?

You see, when you ask such questions based on the Word of God, you will easily identify the wolves in sheep's clothing.

Only when you rely on your own feelings and perceptions will you be deceived.

Therefore, when you have discovered that a person teaches contrary to even one point of doctrine as found in the commandments, creed or prayer, mark that one and avoid him. He is a false prophet.

So, for instance, if you encounter a preacher or church that denies the 6th command and condones adultery or homosexuality. You must flee from him and no longer listen at peril of your soul.

If you know that a preacher denies the true body and blood in the Lord's Supper, flee from him and believe God that the rest of his doctrine is tainted as well.

If one teaches against the fourth commandment and incites rebellion and insurrection, you must not hear him.

For it is the command of God to beware of false prophets.

Do not think that you are smarter than Jesus and that you can glean the good and filter out the bad. Jesus says it cannot be done.

"Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless...they try to make My people forget My name for Baal."

"Can you pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?"

It is the height of arrogance to consider yourself a good enough Christian that you can listen to false prophets without harm.

If you test God in this way, God will permit his Word to leave you.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

So, God warns you beforehand: "Don't be lax and take My Word for granted. But contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to all the saints."

And with this command he gives many great and precious promises.

The first promise is that He will answer the prayers of his faithful people and send us true prophets.

On the strength of this we pray, "rule and govern Thy Church with all its pastors and ministers, that we may be preserved in the pure doctrine of Thy saving Word...Send laborers into Thy harvest and sustain those whom You sent."

In answer to this prayer, God has graciously sent you his true Word.

By this true Word you have been baptized and by this Word you have been fed and sustained to this day.

In this way God, today, preserves his sheep from hearing the things which their itching ears desire to hear according to the flesh.

When we take heed to Christ's teaching in this matter of false prophets, we are assured that He Himself will keep them from us.

In this way, He Himself is doing the preaching and He is building the church and He is saving you from the gates of hell. For Jesus said to Peter:

"I Myself will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."