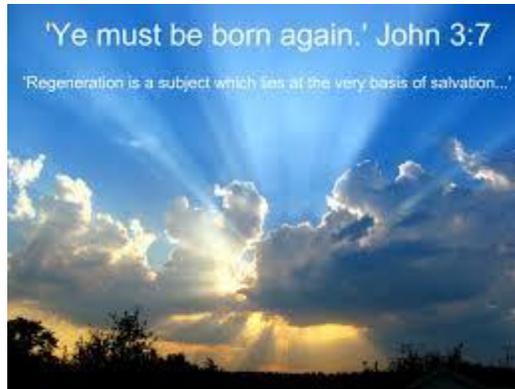


**How to recognize False Teachers**  
*Compiled by Dr. Harold Bollinger*

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## **Forward**

One of the problems facing the church today is false teachers. The early church had similar problems helping us understand how to deal with present day happenings.

A spirit of curiosity and a desire to gain power and prestige motivated the false teachers.

By contrast, genuine Christian teachers are motivated by sincere faith and a desire to do what is right. It may be exciting to impress people with our great knowledge, but high status based on falsehood is ultimately empty. 1 Tim. 1:5;

The people they teach should pay teachers, but these false teachers were attempting to make more money by distorting the truth and saying what people wanted to hear. They were more interested in making money than in teaching truth.

Peter and Paul both condemned greedy, lying teachers (see 1 Tim. 6:5). Before you send money to any cause, evaluate it carefully. Is the teacher or preacher clearly serving God or promoting his/her own interests?

Allow the work of the Holy Spirit in your life to give you a discerning spirit to understand the truth of Jesus Christ.

In this study you will learn ways of recognizing false teachers and false teaching.

## Chapter 1



### **How to recognize false teachers.**

God does not always send physically attractive leaders.

Moses warned the Israelites against false prophets who encouraged worship of other gods. New ideas from inspiring people may sound good, but we must judge them by whether or not they are consistent with God's Word.

When people claim to speak for God today, check them in these areas: Are they telling the truth?

### **Is their focus on God?**

**Are their words consistent with what you already know to be true?**

Some people speak the truth while directing you toward God, but others speak persuasively while directing you toward themselves.

It is even possible to say the right words but still lead people in the wrong direction.

God is not against new ideas, but he is for discernment. When you hear a new, attractive idea, examine it carefully before getting too excited.

**False prophets are still around today. The wise person will carefully test ideas against the truth of God's Word.**

The Israelites were warned not to listen to false prophets or to anyone else who tried to get them to worship other gods—even if this person was a close friend or family member.

The temptation to abandon God's commands often sneaks up on us. It may come not with a loud shout but in a whispering doubt. And whispers can be very persuasive, especially if they come from loved ones.

But love for relatives should not take precedence over devotion to God.

We can overcome whispered temptations by pouring out our hearts to God in prayer and by diligently studying his Word.

See Deut. 13:1-3;

How did the nation become so corrupt? A major factor was false prophecy. The false prophets had a large, enthusiastic audience and were very popular because they made the people believe that all was well.

By contrast, Jeremiah's message from God was unpopular because it showed the people how bad they were.

There are four warning signs of false prophets—characteristics we need to watch for even today.

- (1) They may appear to speak God's message, but they do not live according to his principles.
- (2) They water down God's message in order to make it more palatable.
- (3) They encourage their listeners, often subtly, to disobey God.
- (4) They tend to be arrogant and self-serving, appealing to the desires of their audience instead of being true to God's Word.  
See Jeremiah 23:9-14;

Sodom and Gomorrah were sinful cities destroyed by God (Genesis 19:23-24).

In the Bible they typify the ultimate in degrading, sinful behavior and rebellion against God.

The gate that leads to eternal life (John 10:7-9) is called "narrow." This does not mean that it is difficult to become a Christian, but that there is only *one* way to live eternally with God and only a few that decide to walk that road.

Believing in Jesus is the only way to heaven, because he alone died for our sins and made us right before God. Living his way may not be popular, but it is true and right. Thank God there is one way!

False prophets were common in Old Testament times. They prophesied only what the king and the people wanted to hear, claiming it was God's message.

## False teachers are just as common today.

Jesus says to beware of those whose words sound religious but who are motivated by money, fame, or power. You can tell who they are because in their teaching they minimize Christ and glorify themselves.

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False teachers are just as common today. Jesus says to beware of those whose words sound religious but who are motivated by money, fame, or power. You can tell who they are because in their teaching they minimize Christ and glorify themselves. Matthew 7:15;

Is it possible for Christians to be deceived? Yes. So convincing will be the arguments and proofs from deceivers in the end times that it will be difficult *not* to fall away from Christ.

If we are prepared, Jesus says, we can remain faithful. But if we are not prepared, we will turn away.

### To penetrate the disguises of false teachers we can ask:

- (1) Have their predictions come true, or do they have to revise them to fit what's already happened?
- (2) Does any teaching utilize a small section of the Bible to the neglect of the whole?
- (3) Does the teaching contradict what the Bible says about God?

- (4) Are the practices meant to glorify the teacher or Christ?
- (5) Do the teachings promote hostility toward other Christians. Mark 13:22-23

### **Elijah confronts false prophets at Mount Carmel.**

Ahab brought 850 pagan prophets to Mount Carmel to match wits and power with Elijah. Evil kings hated God's prophets because they spoke against sin and idolatry and undermined their control over the people.

With the wicked kings' backing, many pagan prophets sprang up to counter the words of God's prophets. But Elijah showed the people that speaking a prophecy wasn't enough. One needed the power of a living God to fulfill it. 1 Kings 18:19

### **Why did Jezebel like false prophets?**

Jezebel was enraged about the death of her prophets because they had told her everything *she* wanted to hear, prophesying her future power and glory. Their job was to deify the king and queen and help perpetuate their kingdom. Jezebel was also angry because her supporters had been eliminated and her pride and authority damaged. The money she had invested in these prophets was now lost.

Elijah, who caused the prophets' deaths, was a constant thorn in Jezebel's side because he was always predicting gloom and doom. Because she could not control his actions, she vowed to kill him. As long as God's prophet was around, she could not carry out all the evil she wanted. 1 Kings 19:2

## Why kings hired false prophets?

Evil kings did not like God's prophets bringing messages of doom (2 Chron. 18:17; Jeremiah 5:13).

Many, therefore, hired prophets who told them only what they wanted to hear (Isaiah 30:10-11; Jeremiah 14:13-16; Jeremiah 23:16, 21, 30-36).

These men were false prophets because they extolled the greatness of the king and predicted victory regardless of the real situation.

Wicked Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to join forces with him in battle (2 Chron. 18:2-3).

Before making that commitment, Jehoshaphat rightly sought God's advice.

However, when God gave his answer through the prophet Micaiah (2 Chron. 18:16), Jehoshaphat ignored it (2 Chron. 18:28).

**It does us no good to seek God's advice if we ignore it when it is given.**

Real love for God is shown not by merely asking for direction, but by following that direction once it is given. 2 Chron. 18: 5-6

When you want to please or impress someone, it is tempting to lie to make yourself look good.

Ahab's 400 prophets did just that, telling Ahab only what he wanted to hear. They were then rewarded for making Ahab happy.

Micaiah, however, told the truth and got arrested (2 Chron. 18:25-26).

**Obeying God doesn't always protect us from evil consequences.**

Obedience may, in fact, provoke them. But it is better to suffer from man's displeasure than from God's wrath (Matthew 10:28).

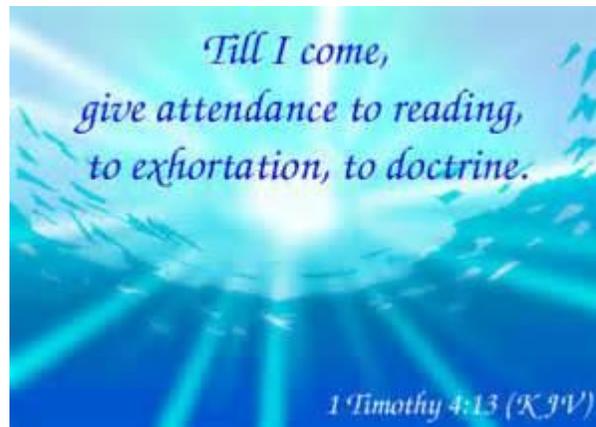
If you are ridiculed for being honest, remember that this can be a sign that you are indeed doing what is right in God's eyes (Matthew 5:10-12; Romans 8:17, 35-39).

**What caused the people to listen to false prophets?**

What made the people listen to and support the false prophets? These "prophets" said what the people wanted to hear. False teachers earn fame and money by telling people what they want to

hear, but they lead people away from God. If we encourage false teachers, we are as guilty as they are. Jeremiah 14:14

## Chapter 2



### **False prophets lulled people into a sense of false security.**

This warning was directed against false prophets whose messages were not from God, but were lies intended to win popularity by saying whatever made the people happy. False prophets did not care about the truth as Ezekiel did. They lulled people into a false sense of security, making Ezekiel's job even more difficult. Beware of people who bend the truth in their quest for popularity and power. Ezekiel 13:1

### **False prophets are common today.**

Jesus tells us to examine our own motives and conduct instead of judging others. The traits that bother us in others are often the habits we dislike in ourselves. Our untamed bad habits and behavior patterns are the very ones that we most want to change in others.

Do you find it easy to magnify others' faults while excusing your own? If you are ready to criticize someone, check to see if you

deserve the same criticism. Judge yourself first, and then lovingly forgive and help your neighbor.

Jesus' statement, "Do not judge," is against the kind of hypocritical, judgmental attitude that tears others down in order to build oneself up.

It is not a blanket statement against all critical thinking, but a call to be *discerning* rather than negative.

Jesus said to expose false teachers (Matthew 7:15-23), and Paul taught that we should exercise church discipline (1 Cor. 5:1-2) and trust God to be the final Judge (1 Cor. 4:3-5) Matthew 7:15

### **What motivates false prophets?**

**Those who "take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart" are the false preachers (see 2 Cor. 2:17) who were concerned only about getting ahead in this world.**

They were preaching the gospel for money and popularity, while Paul and his companions were preaching out of concern for eternity.

**You can identify false preachers by finding out what really motivates them. If they are more concerned about themselves than about Christ, avoid them and their message. 2 Cor. 5:12;**

A spirit of curiosity and a desire to gain power and prestige motivated the false teachers.

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people with our great knowledge, but high status based on falsehood is ultimately empty. 1 Tim. 1:5;

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Peter and Paul both condemned greedy, lying teachers (see 1 Tim. 6:5). Before you send money to any cause, evaluate it carefully. Is the teacher or preacher clearly serving God or promoting his/her own interests?

Will the money be used to promote valid ministry, or will it merely finance further promotions? 2 Peter 2:3;

We cannot reach up to God by following rules of self-denial, by observing rituals, or by practicing religion. Paul isn't saying all rules are bad (see the note on +Galatians 2:15-16).

But no keeping of laws or rules will earn salvation. The Good News is that God reaches down to human beings, and he asks for our response.

**Man-made religions focus on human effort; Christianity focuses on Christ's work.**

Believers must put aside sinful desires, but doing so is the by-product of our new life in Christ, not the reason for our new life. Our salvation does not depend on our own discipline and rule-keeping, but on the power of Christ's death and resurrection.

**We can guard against man-made religions by asking these questions about any religious group:**

- (1) Does it stress man-made rules and taboos rather than God's grace?
- (2) Does it foster a critical spirit toward others, or does it exercise discipline discreetly and lovingly?
- (3) Does it stress formulas, secret knowledge, or special visions more than the Word of God?
- (4) Does it elevate self-righteousness, honoring those who keep the rules, rather than elevating Christ?
- (5) Does it neglect Christ's universal church, claiming to be an elite group?
- (6) Does it teach humiliation of the body as a means to spiritual growth rather than focusing on the growth of the whole person?
- (7) Does it disregard the family rather than holding it in high regard as the Bible does?

To the Colossians, the discipline demanded by the false teachers seemed good, and legalism still attracts many people today. Following a long list of religious rules requires strong self-discipline and can make a person appear moral, but religious rules cannot change a person's heart. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. Col. 2:22-23;

The circumcision group" were the *Judaizers*, Jews who taught that the Gentiles had to obey all the Jewish laws before they could become Christians.

This regulation confused new Christians and caused problems in many churches where Paul had preached the Good News. Paul wrote letters to several churches to help them understand that Gentile believers did not have to become Jews first in order to be Christians—God accepts anyone who comes to him in faith (see Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:2-7).

Although the Jerusalem council had dealt with this issue (see Acts 15), devout Jews who refused to believe in Jesus still tried to cause problems in the Christian churches. Church leaders must be alert and take action on anything that divides Christians.

Paul warned Titus to be on the lookout for people who teach wrong doctrines and lead others into error. Some false teachers are simply confused—they speak their misguided opinions without checking them against the Bible.

Others have evil motives—they pretend to be Christians only because they can get more money (“dishonest gain”), additional business, or a feeling of power from being a leader in the church.

**Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warned against false teachers (see Mark 13:22; Acts 20:29; 2 Thes. 2:3-12; 2 Peter 3:3-7) because their teachings attack the foundations of truth and integrity upon which the Christian faith is built.**

You can recognize false teachers because they will (1) focus more attention on themselves than on Christ; (2) ask you to do something that will compromise or dilute your faith; (3) de-emphasize the divine nature of Christ or the inspiration of the Bible; or (4) urge believers to make decisions based more on human judgment than on prayer and Biblical guidelines.

Titus 1:10-14

### **What false prophets do**

The Old Testament frequently mentions false prophets (see 2 Kings 3:13; Isaiah 44:25; Jeremiah 23:16; Ezekiel 13:2-3; Micah 3:5; Zech. 13:2).

False prophets claimed to receive messages from God, but they preached a “health and wealth” message. They said what the people wanted to hear, even when the nation was not following God as it should. There were false prophets in Jesus’ day, and we have them today.

They are the popular leaders who tell people what they want to hear—such as “God wants you to be rich,” “Do whatever your desires tell you,” or “There is no such thing as sin or hell.” Jesus said false teachers would come, and he warned his disciples, as he warns us, not to listen to their dangerous words.

**With false teaching and loose morals comes a particularly destructive disease—the loss of true love for God and others.**

Sin cools your love for God and others by turning your focus on yourself. You cannot truly love if you think only of yourself. Matthew 24:11-12.

Jesus had told the disciples that false teachers would come (Matthew 24:11; Mark 13:22-23).

Peter had heard these words, and at this time he was seeing them come true. Just as false prophets had contradicted the true prophets in Old Testament times (see, for example, Jeremiah 23:16-40; Jeremiah 28:1-17), telling people only what they wanted to hear, so false teachers were twisting Christ’s teachings and the words of his apostles.

These teachers were belittling the significance of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Some claimed that Jesus couldn’t be God; others claimed that he couldn’t have been a real man.

These teachers allowed and even encouraged all kinds of wrong and immoral acts, especially sexual sin. We must be careful to avoid false teachers today.

Any book, tape series, or TV message must be evaluated according to God's Word. Beware of special meanings or interpretations that belittle Christ or his work. 2 Peter 2:1

### **What false teaching leads to?**

False prophets claimed to receive messages from God, but they preached a "health and wealth" message.

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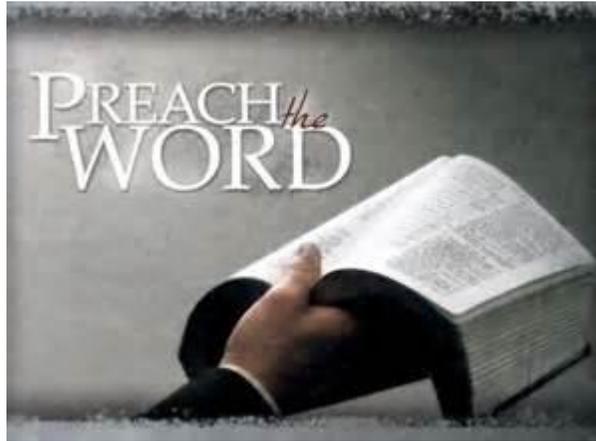
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**You cannot truly love if you think only of yourself.  
Matthew 24:12**

## Chapter 3



### **False Prophets teaching are not consistent with the Bible.**

Jesus' warnings about false teachers still hold true. Upon close examination it becomes clear that many nice-sounding messages don't agree with God's message in the Bible. Only a solid foundation in God's Word can equip us to perceive the errors and distortions in false teaching.

In times of persecution even strong believers will find it difficult to be loyal. To keep from being deceived by false messiahs, we must understand that Jesus' return will be unmistakable (Mark 13:26); no one will doubt that it is he.

If you have to be told that the Messiah has come, then he hasn't (Matthew 24:27). Christ's coming will be obvious to everyone. Matthew 24:23-24;

The Corinthians may have thought that preachers could be judged by how much money they demand. A good speaker would charge a large sum, a fair speaker would be a little cheaper, and a poor speaker would speak for free.

The false teachers may have argued that because Paul asked no fee for his preaching, he must have been an amateur, with little authority or competence.

**Believers today must be careful not to assume that every speaker who is well known and demands a large honorarium is superior at explaining and applying God's Word.**

Paul could have asked the Corinthian church for financial support. Jesus himself taught that those who the people to whom should support minister for God they minister (Matthew 10:10).

But Paul thought that asking for support in Corinth might be misunderstood. There were many false teachers who hoped to make a good profit from preaching (2 Cor. 2:17), and Paul might look like one of them.

Paul separated himself completely from those false teachers in order to silence those who only claimed to do God's work. 2 Cor. 11:4

**False prophets sought popularity over truth.**

There were many false prophets in Old Testament times. They were praised by kings and crowds because their predictions—prosperity and victory in war—were exactly what the people wanted to hear.

But popularity is no guarantee of truth, and human flattery does not bring God's approval. Sadness lies ahead for those who chase after the crowd's praise rather than God's truth.

Luke 6:26

## **False prophets compare themselves to others rather than God.**

Paul criticized the false teachers who were trying to prove their goodness by comparing themselves with others rather than with God's standards.

When we compare ourselves with others, we may feel pride because we think we're better.

**But when we measure ourselves against God's standards, it becomes obvious that we have no basis for pride.**

Don't worry about other people's accomplishments. Instead, continually ask: How does my life measure up to what God wants? How does my life compare to Jesus Christ? 2 Cor. 10:12-13

## **Many false prophets seem to make sense at first.**

The Corinthians' sincere and pure devotion to Christ was being threatened by false teaching. Paul did not want the believers to lose their single-minded love for Christ.

Keeping Christ first in our lives can be very difficult when we have so many distractions threatening to sidetrack our faith. Just as Eve lost her focus by listening to the serpent, we too can lose our focus by letting our lives become overcrowded and confused. Is there anything that weakens your commitment to keep Christ first in your life?

How can you minimize the distractions that threaten your devotion to him?

The Corinthian believers fell for smooth talk and messages that sounded good and seemed to make sense. Today there are many false teachings that seem to make sense.

Don't believe someone simply because he or she sounds like an authority or says words you like to hear.

The Bible should be your authoritative guide. Don't listen to any "authoritative preacher" who contradicts God's Word.

The false teachers distorted the truth about Jesus and ended up preaching a different Jesus, a different spirit than the Holy Spirit, and a different gospel than God's way of salvation.

Because the Bible is God's infallible Word, those who teach anything different from what it says are both mistaken and misleading. 2 Cor. 11:3-4;

Those people" refers to false teachers who claimed to be religious authorities and experts in Judaism and Christianity.

Appealing to the believers' desire to do what was right, they drew quite a following.

Paul said, however, that they were wrong and that their motives were selfish. False teachers are often respectable and persuasive. That is why all teachings should be checked against the Bible. Galatians 4:17

**False prophets not willing to give their lives for the gospel.**

Paul presented his credentials to counteract the charges that the false teachers were making against him. He felt foolish boasting like this, but his list of credentials would silence any doubts about his authority.

Paul wanted to keep the Corinthians from slipping under the spell of the false teachers and turning away from the gospel. Paul also gave a list of his credentials in his letter to the Philippians (see Phil. 3:4-8).

Paul was angry that the false teachers had impressed and deceived the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Therefore, he had to reestablish his credibility and authority by listing the trials he had endured in his service for Christ.

Some of these trials are recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 14:19; Acts 16:22-24). Because Paul wrote this letter during his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:17), his trials weren't over.

He would experience yet further difficulties and humiliations for the cause of Christ (see Acts 21:30-33; Acts 22:24-30).

Paul was sacrificing his life for the gospel, something the false teachers would never do. The trials and hurts we experience for Christ's sake build our character, demonstrate our faith, and prepare us for further service to the Lord.

Sea travel was not as safe as it is today. Paul had been shipwrecked three times, and he would face another accident on his voyage to Rome (see Acts 27). By this time, Paul had probably made at least eight or nine voyages.

Not only did Paul face beatings and dangers, he also carried the daily concern for the young churches, worrying that they were

staying true to the gospel and free from false teachings and inner strife.

Paul was concerned for individuals in the churches he served. If God has placed you in a position of leadership and authority, treat people with Paul's kind of empathy and concern  
2 Cor. 11:23-29

### **False prophets not connected to Christ.**

The fundamental problem with the false teachers was that they were not connected to Christ, the Head of the body of believers.

If they had been joined to him, they could not have taught false doctrine or lived immorally. Anyone who teaches about God without being connected to him by faith should not be trusted.  
Col. 2:19

### **False prophets embroil church in irrelevant disputes.**

Paul first visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21). Later, on his third missionary journey, he stayed there for almost three years (Acts 19-20).

Ephesus, along with Rome, Corinth, Antioch, and Alexandria, was one of the major cities in the Roman Empire. It was a center for the commerce, politics, and religions of Asia Minor, and the location of the temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis (Diana). The church at Ephesus may have been plagued by the same heresy that was threatening the church at Colosse—the teaching that to be

acceptable to God, a person had to discover certain hidden knowledge and had to worship angels (Col. 2:8, 18).

Thinking that it would aid in their salvation, some Ephesians constructed mythical stories based on Old Testament history or genealogies.

**The false teachers were motivated by their own interests rather than Christ's. They embroiled the church in endless and irrelevant questions and controversies, taking precious time away from the study of the truth.**

Today we could also enter into worthless and irrelevant discussions, but such disputes quickly crowd out the life-changing message of Christ.

Stay away from religious speculation and pointless theological arguments. Such exercises may seem harmless at first, but they have a way of sidetracking us from the central message of the gospel—the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And they expend time we should use to share the gospel with others. You should avoid anything that keeps you from doing God's work. 1 Tim. 1:3-4

**False prophets dilute the Christian faith.**

The “later times” began with Christ's resurrection and will continue until his return when he will set up his kingdom and judge all humanity.

False teachers were and still are a threat to the church. Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warned against them (see, for example, Mark 13:21-23; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Thes. 2:1-12; 2 Peter 3:3-7).

The danger that Timothy faced in Ephesus seems to have come from certain people in the church who were following some Greek philosophers who taught that the body was evil and that only the soul mattered.

The false teachers refused to believe that the God of creation was good, because his very contact with the physical world would have soiled him.

Though these Greek-influenced church members honored Jesus, they could not believe he was truly human. Paul knew that their teachings, if left unchecked, would greatly distort Christian truth.

It is not enough that a teacher appears to know what he is talking about, is disciplined and moral, or says that he is speaking for God. If his words contradict the Bible, his teaching is false.

Like Timothy, we must guard against any teaching that causes believers to dilute or reject any aspect of their faith. Such false teaching can be very direct or extremely subtle. 1 Tim. 4:1-2

### **Why Paul said false prophets were devil-inspired.**

Paul said the false teachers were hypocritical liars who encouraged people to follow “deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” Satan deceives people by offering a clever imitation of the real thing. The false teachers gave stringent rules (such as forbidding people to marry or to eat certain foods).

This made them appear self-disciplined and righteous. Their strict disciplines for the body, however, could not remove sin (see Col. 2:20-23).

We must not be unduly impressed by a teacher's style or credentials; we must look to his teaching about Jesus Christ. His conclusions about Christ show the source of his message.

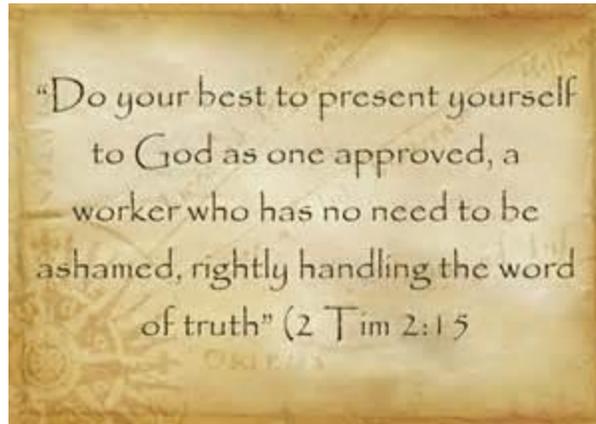
In opposition to the false teachers, Paul affirmed that everything God created is good (see Genesis 1).

We should ask for God's blessing on his created gifts that give us pleasure and thank him for them. This doesn't mean that we should abuse what God has made (for example, gluttony abuses God's gift of good food, lust abuses God's gift of love, and murder abuses God's gift of life).

**Instead of abusing, we should enjoy these gifts by using them to serve and honor God.**

Have you thanked God for the good gifts he has given? Are you using the gifts in ways pleasing to you *and* to God? 1 Tim. 4:4-5

## Chapter 4



### **False prophets teachings are based on false view of Christ.**

False teachers were a problem in Ephesus (see Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 1:3-11).

At the heart of false teaching is an incorrect view of Christ. In Timothy's day many asserted that Christ was divine but not human—God but not man.

These days we often hear that Jesus was human but not divine—man but not God.

Either view destroys the good news that Jesus Christ has taken our sins on himself and has reconciled us to God. In this verse, Paul firmly states that Jesus is fully man ("descended from David") and fully God ("raised from the dead").

This is an important doctrine for all Christians. 2 Tim. 2:8

### **False prophets denied resurrection of the body.**

Paul had handed Hymenaeus over to Satan because his false teaching concerning the resurrection was destroying some people's faith.

The false teachers were denying the resurrection of the body. They believed that when a person became a Christian, he or she was spiritually reborn, and that was the only resurrection there would ever be.

To them, resurrection was symbolic and spiritual, not physical.

Paul clearly taught, however, that believers will be resurrected after they die, and that their bodies as well as their souls will live eternally with Christ (1 Cor. 15:35ff; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; 1 Thes. 4:15-18).

**We cannot shape the doctrines of Scripture to match our opinions. If we do, we are putting ourselves above God. Instead, our beliefs should be consistent with God's Word. 2 Tim. 2:18**

### **Hypocritical actions at Lord's Supper.**

The feast may have been part of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The feast was a full meal that ended with Communion.

The false teachers, although they were sinning openly, took part in these meals with everyone else in the church.

In one of the greatest of hypocritical acts, they attended a sacred feast designed to promote love and unity among believers, while at the same time they gossiped and slandered those who disagreed with their opinions.

As Paul told the Corinthians, “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27).

These men were guilty of more than false teaching and promoting evil pleasures; they were guilty of leading others away from God’s Son, Jesus. 2 Peter 2:13-14

### **Views about the body**

Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable.  
Darkness represents what is sinful and evil.

The statement “God is light” means that God is perfectly holy and true and that he alone can guide us out of the darkness of sin.

Light is also related to truth in that light exposes whatever exists, whether it is good or bad. In the dark, good and evil look alike; in the light, they can be clearly distinguished.

**Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God.**

If we want to have a relationship with God, we must put aside our sinful ways of living. To claim that we belong to him but then to go out and live for ourselves is hypocrisy. Christ will expose and judge such deceit.

Here John was confronting the first of three claims of the false teachers: that we can have fellowship with God and still walk in darkness.

False teachers who thought that the physical body was evil or worthless taught one of two approaches to behavior: either they insisted on denying bodily desires through rigid discipline, or they approved of gratifying every physical lust because the body was going to be destroyed anyway.

Obviously the second approach was more popular! Here John is saying that no one can claim to be a Christian and still live in evil and immorality. We can't love God and court sin at the same time.  
1 John 1:6

### **False teachers refuse to take sin seriously.**

Here John was attacking the second claim of the false teachers: that people had no natural tendency toward sin, that they were "without sin," and that they were then incapable of sinning. This idea is at best self-deception and at worst a bald-faced lie. The false teachers refused to take sin seriously. They wanted to be considered Christians, but they saw no need to confess and repent. The death of Christ did not mean much to them because they didn't think they needed it. Instead of repenting and being purified by Christ's blood, they were encouraging sin among believers. In this life we are always capable of sinning, so we should never let down our guard. 1 John 1:8

## Many claimed they had no sin.

The false teachers not only denied that sin breaks our fellowship with God (1 John 1:6) and that they had a sinful nature (1 John 1:8), but they also denied that their conduct involved any sin at all (1 John 1:10).

That was a lie that ignored one basic truth: all people are sinners by nature and by practice. At conversion all our sins are forgiven—past, present, and future. Yet even after we become Christians, we still sin and still need to confess.

This kind of confession is not offered to gain God's acceptance, but to remove the barrier to fellowship that our sin has put between us and him.

It is difficult, however, for many people to admit their faults and shortcomings, even to God. It takes humility and honesty to recognize our weaknesses, and most of us would rather pretend that we are strong.

But we need not fear revealing our sins to God—he knows them already. He will not push us away, no matter what we've done. Instead he will draw us to himself.

Confession is supposed to free us to enjoy fellowship with Christ. It should ease our consciences and lighten our cares.

But some Christians do not understand how it works. They feel so guilty that they confess the same sins over and over; then they wonder if they might have forgotten something.

Other Christians believe that God forgives them when they confess, but if they died with unconfessed sins, they would be forever lost.

These Christians do not understand that God *wants* to forgive us. He allowed his beloved Son to die just so he could offer us pardon. When we come to Christ, he forgives all the sins we have committed or will ever commit.

**We don't need to confess the sins of the past all over again, and we don't need to fear that God will reject us if we don't keep our slate perfectly clean.**

Of course we should continue to confess our sins, but not because failure to do so will make us lose our salvation. Our relationship with Christ is secure. Instead, we should confess so that we can enjoy maximum fellowship and joy with him.

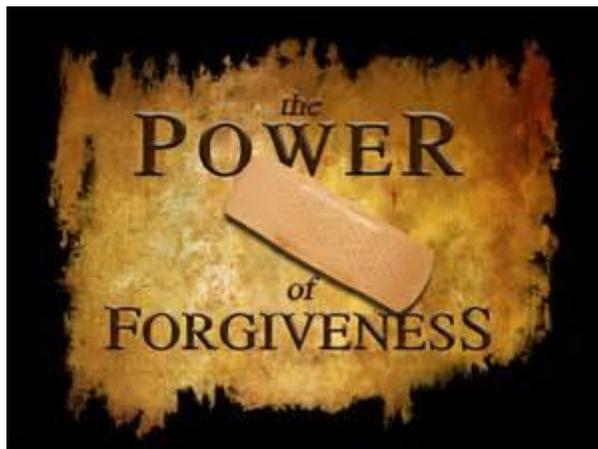
True confession also involves a commitment not to continue in sin. We wouldn't be genuinely confessing our sins to God if we planned to commit them again and just wanted temporary forgiveness.

We should also pray for strength to defeat temptation the next time we face it.

If God has forgiven us for our sins because of Christ's death, why must we confess our sins? In admitting our sins and receiving Christ's cleansing, we are:

- (1) agreeing with God that our sin truly is sin and that we are willing to turn from it,
- (2) ensuring that we don't conceal our sins from him and consequently from ourselves, and

## Chapter 5



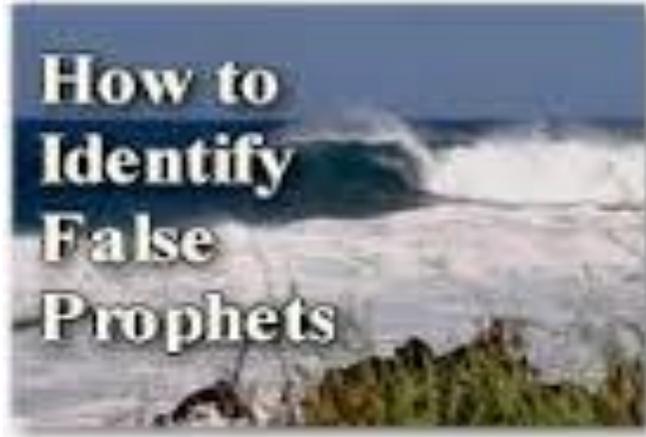
### **False prophets claimed a secret knowledge.**

False teachers claimed that they possessed secret knowledge that gave them authority. Their “knowledge” of God was esoteric—mystical and beyond human understanding.

The nature of God *is* beyond our understanding, but God, in his grace, has chosen to reveal himself to us—in his Word, and supremely in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we must seek to know all we can about what he has revealed, even though we cannot fully comprehend God with our finite human minds.

**Beware of those who claim to have all the answers and who belittle what they do not understand. Jude 1:10**



**True prophets and false prophets contrasted.**

**CHART: PROPHETS—FALSE AND TRUE**

*False Prophets*

Worked for political purposes to benefit themselves

Held positions of great wealth

Gave false messages

Spoke only what the people wanted to hear

*True Prophets*

Worked for spiritual purposes to serve God and the people

Owned little or nothing

Spoke only true messages

Spoke only what God told them to say—no matter how unpopular

The false prophets were an obstacle to bringing God's word to the people. They would bring messages that contradicted the words of the true prophets.

They gave "messages" that appealed to the people's sinful natures and comforted their fears. False prophets told people what they wanted to hear. True prophets told God's truth.

## **JOHN COUNTERS FALSE TEACHINGS**

John counters two major threads in the false teachings of the heretics in this letter:

### 1 John 1:6-8

So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness. We are not living in the truth.

[7] But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.

[8] If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth.

### 1 John 2:22

And who is the great liar? The one who says that Jesus is not the Christ. Such people are antichrists, for they have denied the Father and the Son.

**You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**

**References:**

**Holy Bible: King James Translation**

**Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.**

**Additional comments and charts are taken from:**

***Life Application Study Bible.* Illinois: Tyndale House 2007.**