

## BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM

**Psalm 19:11** gives us two reasons we should be thankful for—and be students of—God’s Word. What are they? **Reason #1** is declared in the first half of the verse: “Moreover by **them** [God’s Words] is thy servant warned...” If you know anything at all about God, you’d agree that He **warns us because He loves us** and wants to **keep us** from that which will harm us!

**Reason #2** is in the second half of the verse: “...and in keeping of them [God’s Words] there is great reward.” There is **blessing in obedience**—and not just for the nation of Israel! We will be getting to some of those blessings in a couple of weeks, but for now we are going to focus on the **warnings** that God gives us.

Last week we looked at a warning directly from Jesus as found in Matthew 7:15. Let’s turn there again; please follow along as I read verses 15-20. In the first 4 words of Jesus’ declaration found in verse 15—“Beware of false prophets”—we see that false prophets are **real**...and are a real **threat**...and are a real threat **to us**! Jesus cries “wolf” because there **are wolves**. Who are wolves after? **You and I** as individuals—and **all of us** collectively as a church family!

We noted their **deceptive** nature—they pretend to be one of the sheep when in reality they are a wolf—as well as their **destructive** nature. Jesus here calls them **ravening** wolves, meaning their desire is to seize or snatch a sheep suddenly like a robber snatches whatever it is they are stealing. Jesus was not the only one who warned of false prophets, though.

Last week we also looked at Paul’s warning to the leaders of the church in Ephesus found in **Acts 20:29-30**. “For I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous** wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

**Grievous** wolves describes **how** they snatch the sheep—cruelly, savagely, and violently. The destructive nature of false prophets is also seen in their **treatment of the flock**. How do they treat the flock; God’s church? Paul says they “spare not the flock”—meaning they seek to **destroy** the church—but not just for the sake of wrecking the church! They **have a plan**—they want to **draw disciples** to themselves!

**How** do they do that? Paul says they do it by “speaking perverse things” regarding doctrine. They take the teachings of God’s Word and corrupt it... and distort it...and misinterpret it...and twist it into **saying something it doesn’t mean**, thereby making it **false**.

Description #1, then, of a false prophet—a false teacher—is that they **twist** Scripture. There are obviously some other descriptions of false teachers found in the Word of God and that is what we are going to be looking at this morning.

Look again at vs 15. Jesus tells us to beware of false prophets because they **pretend** to be one of us when **they aren’t one of us**. We won’t necessarily recognize them by their **outward appearance**, though, because they blend in quite well! So **how** are we to detect them? **How are we to know who they are** if we can’t tell by looking at them? Jesus tells us how—twice—in this passage. What does Jesus say? Vs 16 “Ye shall know them by **their fruits**,” vs 20 “Wherefore by **their fruits** ye shall know them.”

--Jesus says a **good tree** brings forth **good fruit**—and **can’t bring forth evil** (bad) fruit.

--On the flip side, a **corrupt tree** brings forth **evil fruit**—and **can’t bring forth good** fruit.

But what is **good** fruit—and what is **evil** (bad) fruit? Jesus doesn’t elaborate here, but that doesn’t mean we **don’t know** what good and bad fruit is! God used Paul, Peter, and Jude to give us descriptions of false teachers. We obviously can’t look at all 3, so we are going to focus on what Paul said to Timothy.

Please turn to I Timothy 6, beginning with vs 1. I’m going to read verses 1-5 for context.

First, let’s notice... **1. The doctrine of false teachers**

So **what is it** that false teachers teach? Paul gives us two descriptions of their doctrine here in vs 3.

**A. Advance a different doctrine**

We see that in the first phrase of vs 3 “If any man teach **otherwise**...” “Otherwise” of what? Sound doctrine!

How do we know that is what Paul means? Two reasons:

1) Because of how vs 2 ends: “These things teach and exhort.” What things?

The things that he has been teaching him throughout this letter!

2) We also know from the words themselves. The words “teach otherwise” comes from one Greek word: “hetero-didas-ka-leh’-o” which means “to teach other or different doctrine.” It is used only one other time in the Bible—in I Timothy 1:3: “...that thou mightest charge some that they **teach no other doctrine.**”

A false teacher, then, is someone who teaches doctrine that is **different** than what the Bible teaches. We saw that last week in Acts 20:30, and we see it again here. There are numerous others, we’ll look at one.

Look at II Timothy:3-4. Here we see that they won’t endure sound doctrine...and turn away from the truth...and shall be turned **unto fables**. If they are going to leave the truth—and turn to fables—someone obviously needs to be **teaching** the fables! What are fables? Things that are made up! Other translations have the word “**myth**” which means the same thing.

**MacArthur** puts it like this: “They don’t get their teaching out of the Word of God. They have something different than the Bible, some vision, some revelation, some psychological insight, some self-generated, self-spawned doctrine, some interpretation that is contrary to Scripture. Anything different than the sound true teaching of the Word of God revealed – marks a false teacher.”

Back to I Timothy 6:3. Not only do false teachers advance a **different** doctrine, they...

#### B. Agree not with sound doctrine

Stated another way, they don’t just make up their **own** doctrine—they **reject** sound doctrine! They consent not—they agree not—to wholesome (meaning “sound” —or “healthy”) words. What is sound doctrine? Paul gives two aspects of it here. **i. It is focused on Christ**

We see that in the phrase “even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ...” **False** doctrine is not focused on Christ and what He said or did, is it? Instead, the focus is **on a person** and what **they** said or did. Maybe it was a revelation they had...or some event they supposedly predicted... or some miraculous deed they supposedly performed.

Sound doctrine, on the other hand, focuses on **who Christ is**...and what Christ did! It stands firm on Christ being miraculously conceived...and coming to earth as God in the flesh...and living a perfect, sinless life...and dying a substitutionary death...and being supernaturally resurrected...and ascending into heaven... and being given a name that is above every name!

It is about Christ being seated right now at the right hand of the Father...and interceding for us...and preparing a place for us...and someday returning for us so that where He is, we will be also!

Not only is sound doctrine focused on Christ... **ii. It is focused on doctrine that leads to godliness**

Does false doctrine lead to **humility and godly** living? Not hardly! False teachers—especially cult leaders—often have **multiple wives**. They promote a **loose** lifestyle much more than a holy one. They desire extravagance and excess be lavished upon them—even if it means a **sacrificial** lifestyle for you!

Think of the “health and welfare” gospel I referred to last week where false teachers promise you perfect **health**—and lots of **wealth**—if you **financially support their ministry** and have enough faith! Listen carefully: If your priority is **your** health and **your** wealth—and God being your “genie in a bottle”—you have a “**happiness**” centered religion instead of one that leads to **holiness!**

God desires that we **be holy** (I Peter 1:15-16)—and that we be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). God wants us to have the attitude of John the Baptist as found in **John 3:30** “He must increase, but I must decrease.” God wants us to heed the words of Jesus as found in **Luke 9:23** “If any man will come after me, let him **deny himself**, and take up his **cross daily**, and follow me.”

What is the doctrine of false teachers? Paul gives us 2 descriptions; 2 marks. First, they advance a different doctrine—**their own**—instead of one based on the Bible. Second, they don’t just **add** to what God says—they **disagree** with what God says. They don’t consent to wholesome words that promote Christ and godliness.

Instead, they promote another person—or themselves—and focus on their happiness instead of holiness!

Next, let's consider... **2. The declaration regarding false teachers**

What does Paul say about someone who teaches a different doctrine—and disagrees with sound doctrine! Vs 4 “He is proud, knowing nothing...” Let's not forget, these are **God's Words** through Paul—not Paul's **opinion!** **God says** false teachers are “proud, knowing nothing!”

**They** don't see it that way, of course! They feel they know **everything**—or way more than you, anyway—because they have **spiritual insight** that is superior to yours! They are **above correction**—and don't want to learn—because they **have it right!** They also—in their minds—are **above deception**. That means—in the thinking of a false teacher—that anyone and everyone **can be deceived**—except them! Pride is so blinding, isn't it?

To again quote **MacArthur**: “All of his imagined intelligence, pretended scholarship, and supposed deeper insights amounts to mere foolishness to God ([Romans 1:22](#); [1 Corinthians 2:9–16](#)).”

### **3. The delight of false teachers**

What do false teachers enjoy? What do they specialize in?

In the middle of vs 4, we see two things: “but doting about questions and strifes of words...”

Let's break this down so we can understand it better. “Doting” means **what?** When we hear the word, we think of a “doting Dad”—a father who is affectionate, devoted, and loving. What was interesting to find out was that it **also means this**: “Exhibiting the mental and physical deterioration often accompanying old age.” That's quite a bit different than “being excessively affectionate,” isn't it?

What's even more interesting—at least to me—is what the word means in the Greek.

--Strong's defines it as “sick” or “unhealthy.”

--Vine's Expository Dictionary defines it like this: “to be ill, to be ailing...hence, to be taken with such a morbid interest in a thing as is tantamount to a disease.”

--BAGD defines it simply as a “morbid craving.”

What Paul is doing, then, is using a play on words! In vs 3, “wholesome” words in the Greek carries the idea of being healthy and well. “Doting” in the Greek carries the opposite idea—that of being “sick” or “unhealthy.” So Paul is saying, ‘Instead of agreeing to healthy teaching, you have a unhealthy craving for questions—and disputes about words!’

What's wrong with **asking questions?** Is that a bad thing? Not at all; I enjoy questions! But the word for “question” here has to do with **controversies and debates**. False teachers have a morbid craving for that which is **controversial**. Paul already warned Timothy about that in the first chapter where he uses the same word. **I Timothy 1:4** “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, **which minister questions**, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.”

The same word is used in **II Tim 2:23** “But foolish and **unlearned questions avoid**, knowing that they do gender strifes.” Same thing for **Titus 3:9** “But **avoid foolish questions**, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.”

So is Paul saying to **avoid** anything that is controversial? Not at all! The intent, I believe, is this: some things we don't know the answer to because the Bible doesn't tell us. False teachers like to dwell on the controversial...and debatable...and unsolvable. Paul warns both Timothy and Titus to avoid their trap!

There's a second thing Paul mentions that false teachers have an unhealthy craving for—“strifes of words.” Are words important? Of course! But false teachers like “word-battles.” They like to make doctrines from a single word.

It is important to understand what a word means—especially in the language it was originally written in! But a lot of Greek words are used a grand total of one time in the Bible—and sometimes it is difficult to know what that word means. When that is the case, we have to be careful not to be overly dogmatic on what it means—and we certainly can't build a major doctrine off of that one word! God is not the author of confusion and we need to make sure we are not promoting confusion!

Briefly, let's consider... **4. The damage caused by false teachers**

What kind of problems do false teachers cause? Paul gives us four in the end of verse 4 "...whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings..." and one in the beginning of vs 5 "perverse disputings..." Anything positive on this list?

**Envy** means to be jealous; **strife** means contentions, disagreements, or quarrellings;

Both envy and strife are listed as "works of the flesh"—as a contrast to the fruit of the Spirit—in Galatians 5.

**Railings** refer to abusive language, malicious talk, reviling, slander;

**Evil surmisings** are evil suspicions; and

**Perverse disputings** are constant friction or mutual irritation!

Again, I ask, is there anything positive on this list? The answer is an obvious, "No!" And I think you'd agree that we can sum up all the damage they do in one word—"divisiveness." "Divisiveness" is just a fancy way of saying **that which causes division** instead of bringing unity.

All these things—jealousy, quarrelling, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction—are all **symptoms of pride** and all bring about division instead of **oneness and unity**.

Lastly, let's consider... **5. Dealings with false teachers**

What are we supposed to do with false teachers? How are we supposed to "**handle them**," so to speak?

On the one hand, it is pretty easy to know what to do—at least **for you!**

A. Your responsibility

Notice the end of vs 5 "...from such **withdraw** thyself." You are to stay away from them, avoid them.

Paul says the same thing in **Romans 16:17** "Now I beseech you, brethren, **mark them** which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and **avoid them.**"

B. My responsibility

**One part** of my responsibility is pretty easy to understand—I need to warn you to "Beware of false prophets." Paul took this responsibility very seriously. **Acts 20:31** "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." This verse immediately follows his warning about grievous wolves entering in—and men from within the church trying to draw away disciples unto themselves.

There's a **second part** of my responsibility that—at least to me—is a little more difficult to understand.

**II Tim 2:24-26** "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, <sup>25</sup> **In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves**; if God peradventure **will give them repentance** to the acknowledging of the truth; <sup>26</sup> And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Unless I'm totally misunderstanding these verses, I have a responsibility to instruct those that have **strayed away** from the truth in order to **bring them back** to the truth! God uses His word to bring truth—and repentance—so that deceived people can be pulled back from the "snare of the devil."

Paul makes a similar statement to Titus about pastors. **Titus 1:9-11** "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able **by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.** <sup>10</sup> For there are **many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers**, specially they of the circumcision: <sup>11</sup> Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake."

I don't want to "write people off," so to speak, but I certainly don't want to disobey God and allow wolves in to destroy both you and our church. So beware of false prophets. We will know them by their fruit. Here's some questions to ask ourselves as we evaluate their fruit.

1. Do they teach different—strange—doctrine?
  2. Do they disagree with plain Bible teaching?
  3. Are they teachable—or proud?
  4. Do they promote Christ and holy living?
  5. Do they cause confusion—and division?
- If so, mark them—and avoid them!

So what does God want you to do with what you heard this morning?

The same things I mentioned when I closed the service last week!

1. First, make sure you are one of God's sheep! Make sure you are counting on Jesus—and Jesus alone—for salvation and forgiveness of sins!

There is a **false gospel**—a false way to get to heaven—that is preached in many churches. You know what God says about someone preaching a different gospel? Gal 1:8 “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”

2. Second, **beware** of false prophets! Don't think you can't be a target—and don't think our church can't be a target.

3. Be discerning! Don't assume that everyone who preaches or studies or teaches the Bible is a true teacher! **I John 4:1** says “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” Stated another way, inspect their fruit like we talked about this morning.

4. Be in the Word of God. The best defense against error is knowing the truth!