

1 John
Recognizing False Teachers (Part 1)
1 John 4:1-6
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Well, I encourage you now to take your Bibles and turn with me to 1 John. And this time we're making real progress; don't turn to 1 John 3, turn to 1 John 4. See, we're moving because we begin our study of this new chapter today.

As you're turning there, let me just remind you that one of the greatest American theologians ever was a man named Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards played a major role in "The Great Awakening," a series of revivals that began in 1734 and spread throughout the colonies. But as controversy arose about "The Great Awakening," and it arose on two ends. On one end, there were clear abuses by those who sort of got captured in the flow of the emotion and all that was going on; that needed to be addressed on the one end. On the other end, there were those who were sort of, in their cold orthodoxy, skeptical that such a thing could be happening.

Edwards, in response really to both of those problems, wrote *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of The Spirit of God*, and the biblical framework for those 'marks' came from 1 John 4, verses 1 to 6. Edwards said, and I'm going to paraphrase Edwards here, he gave five marks, two of them were about the Scripture, so I'm going to sort of bring those into one, but this is my own sort of summarizing of Edwards. He said, "As you examine a teacher or a movement, anything that purports to be a work of the Spirit, you should ask yourself these questions in light of 1 John 4." First of all, "Does it exalt the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel?" That is, does his teaching center on the biblical Jesus? Does he talk about sin and depravity and judgment in his presentation of the gospel? Does he talk about repentance and submission to the Lordship of

Christ? Does he teach the eternal destruction in hell of those who refuse to believe and who don't repent of their sins?

Secondly, “Does it promote true holiness?” Does his teaching focus on worldly things, things that even unbelievers want, or does it encourage true holiness, true likeness to Jesus Christ?

Number three, “Does it exalt the Word of God?” Does the teacher spend most of his time spinning his own ideas, what he wants to say, and just sort of tagging a verse or two here or there to make it look biblical? Or does he read the text, explain the text in its context, and apply the text? Does it exalt the Word of God?

And number four, “Does it promote love for God and for others?” Does the teaching promote self-love, self-fulfillment, self-satisfaction, or does it truly encourage people towards selfless love for God and selfless love for others? It's that amazing passage that unfolded those distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God that we come to in our continuing journey through John's first letter this morning.

Now, for those of you who are new, some of you could get up and recite this, but stick with me because it's important. We're beginning a new section and some who have not been here need to know this. The theme of the letter of 1 John is, “The Tests of Eternal Life.” He gives us three tests; and by the way, it's clear that this is the theme because it's stated very clearly in chapter 5, verse 13, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Christ designed this book, the Holy Spirit inspired it, and John the Apostle, under the inspiration of the Spirit, wrote it to help you, Christian, gain a personal assurance of your salvation.

Now, to do that, John gives three tests of eternal life, and he repeats those same three tests in three cycles or movements in this letter. After the prologue in the first four verses, he immediately gets into the first cycle of these tests beginning in chapter 1, verse 5, running through chapter 2, verse 27. We looked at them, “Obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word, Love for God and His People,” and “Faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel.”

Then comes the second cycle, beginning of chapter 2, verse 28, and he starts in the same way, runs through the same three tests in the same order. By the way, he'll change that for the third movement. But here we are again, the same order. He starts out in chapter 2, verse 28, through chapter 3, verse 10, asking, “Are you obedient to Jesus Christ and His Word?” The second test in chapter 3, verses 11 to 24, we just finished is, “Do You Love God and Love His People?” He focused in that section on loving His people, but in the other two movements, he has focused on loving God as well.

And then you have in chapter 4, verses 1 through 6, do you believe, “Do You Have Faith in The Biblical Jesus and The Biblical Gospel?” Today, we begin to study that third test in this second cycle or movement in his letter; it is a doctrinal test. We've looked at the moral test, are you obedient? We've looked at the social test, do you love? This is the doctrinal test, “Do You Believe in The Biblical Jesus and The Biblical Gospel?” Let's read it together, 1 John, chapter 4, verses 1 through 6.

Beloved, 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. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the

antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

In those amazing six verses, John the Apostle demands that we, as believers, diligently apply several biblical tests to every spiritual idea, every message that we hear, in order to distinguish genuine teachers who teach God's truth, from false teachers who, in fact, teach damning error.

Now, in these two verses, the focus is really on false teachers and recognizing them, identifying them. And so, as this unfolds, we're going to see two crucial details about false teachers. In verse 1, we'll see "The Continual Danger of False Teachers," and in verses 2 through 6, we will consider "The Chief Tests for False Teachers." So, this morning, we begin with "The Continual Danger of False Teachers."

Most Christians, frankly, live in either complete ignorance or indifference to this reality, that we are surrounded by false teachers. Now, this constant danger is true because of a spiritual reality, again, that most Christians are completely unaware of, that you need to be aware of. And John here wants us to know, and he wants us to "Understand the Competing Versions of the Christian Faith," understand the competing versions of the Christian faith.

Now, even as I say that, perhaps you're tempted to think, "What does that mean?" That's a problem because you need to know that there are competing versions of the Christian faith out there. And that's what this passage is going to help us understand. So, let's look at it together.

He begins in verse 1 with his typical, “Beloved.” Again, as he changes sections, John uses this term of endearment to remind them and us of several realities to remind them of his love for them. He's writing to people he knew and had served and ministered to in Asia Minor, and he says, “You are my beloved.” But he also uses that term of God's love for them, “You are loved by God.” And because of how often he equates the love of God and being God's children, being adopted by God in this letter, he also means you are beloved not only by me, but you're beloved by God, you're his children.

“Beloved, 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.” Now this verse introduces us to the fact that in this world we live in, there are, in fact, competing versions of the Christian faith; there is the true Christian faith and there is at the same time, mixed in alongside of it under the banner of Christendom, a counterfeit satanic christianity.

This passage tells us that behind every human teacher who claims to speak for God, there are spirit beings. Many of those spirits are not the Holy Spirit, but they are demonic. Some of the human teachers who stand up and you listen to, you turn on the radio or the television or you listen to on YouTube, you're exposed to a teacher in some way, some of those purported Christian teachers are from God; others of them, in fact, are not.

As this passage unfolds, we're going to learn so much more than that. In fact, in these six verses, and I want to sort of step back at the very beginning here and sort of look at all six verses as a group, and then we'll come back and drill down. But in these six verses, we discover there are two conflicting versions of the Christian faith. One is genuine, Biblical Christianity, and the other is counterfeit demonic christianity. In other words, we're really talking about the

conflict between two opposing spiritual kingdoms, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan, and between God and Satan.

Now let's see how these two competing versions of the faith provide really a framework for everything that John is going to say in this paragraph. So, let's look at it. First of all, these competing versions of the Christian faith “Originate from Different Sources.” The “Genuine,” verse 1 says, is from God. The “Counterfeit,” verse 4, comes from “he who is in the world.” As we'll see when we get there, that's a reference to Satan. So, there is a version of Christianity that's from God; there is a version of christianity that's from Satan. Every spiritual idea, every concept taught in connection to the Christian faith can be traced ultimately, back to God, or it's a lie and can be traced to Satan. Jesus said this, go back to John, chapter 8, this is a seminal passage to really understand the conflict between truth and lies. John, chapter 8, and look at verse 40, Jesus said to the Jewish people he was talking to:

“As it is, you are seeking to kill Me, (Now notice this.) a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God,” (We worship the true God.) Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me.”

By the way, stop there for a moment, I just would say, that is a huge statement, “If God were your Father, you would love Me.” It always bothers me in my soul when someone says, “Yes, I know God,” but they can never find it in their mind or mouth to talk about Jesus Christ. If you know and love God, you love His Son Jesus Christ, and you're not ashamed to speak of Him. If you always find yourself talking about God in general terms and you always talk about things

like 'the man upstairs,' or other terms, just know you don't love God. He says, "The one who loves God loves Me." Now, let's move on.

He says, "...for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me." Now, he comes back to this issue of truth in verse 43, "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot (And He uses a Greek word meaning 'you don't have the power; you don't have the capacity to.') hear My Word." Why? "Because your father is the devil," and oh, by the way, the end of verse 44, "he is a liar and the father of lies." (Paraphrase.) You're all in to lies because he's your father. Verse 45, "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me? Which one have you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?" And now watch verse 47, "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God." You don't have an appetite for God's Word; you don't have any interest in understanding it; you don't have any interest in obeying it; you don't know God. That's what Jesus says.

So understand, then, that this is crucial to get every idea, every concept, every thought that claims to be Christian is part of the war between Satan and God. There are no neutral ideas spiritually, there are no neutral spiritual thoughts. You've got to be on your guard; don't let any thought go unchallenged or untested. What does God say? What does the Bible say? Because ultimately, those spiritual thoughts, spiritual ideas that you're exposed to come from either God or from Satan.

Secondly, in terms of these competing versions of the Christian faith, they "Teach Different Messages," different messages. "The Genuine," notice verse 6, teaches "Truth," meaning the

truth of God. “The Counterfeit,” verse 6 teaches error or error mixed with truth which is more common.

Thirdly, they “Are empowered by different spirits.” “The Genuine” is empowered, verse 2, by “The Spirit of God.” But “The Counterfeit,” notice verse 3, “...every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.” What is John talking about here? He is referring to the spirit beings who are behind and empower human teachers. In the case of true teachers of the real Christian faith, it's the Holy Spirit; but false teachers are energized by demons. That's what he's saying. This is what Paul says. I mean, turn over to 1 Timothy, chapter 4, this is just one example, but he says, 1 Timothy 4:1, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith (So these are people connected to the Christian faith.), paying attention to deceitful spirits (And notice this.) doctrines of demons.”

Do you realize that when you look out across the Christian world, everything that comes under the label ‘Christian,’ there are teachings that originate with demons? How do they get into the mainstream? Notice verse 2, “by means of the hypocrisy of liars (Here are your human teachers.) seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.” So, you have to beware, you have to understand that these two versions of the Christian faith are empowered by an entirely different spirits, the real, by the Holy Spirit, the false by demons.

Number four, they “Rely on different sources of revelation.” “The Genuine,” notice verse 1, comes “from God.” Specifically, in context of verse 1, “prophets from God.” And in verse 6, John says, “We (meaning the Apostles) are from God; he who knows God listens to us.” So, the source of revelation that we rely on in genuine Christianity is the Scripture, the prophets God sent, the Apostles He Sent.

This is what Paul says in Ephesians, chapter 2, go back there for a moment, Ephesians 2, verse 20. By the way, I wish I had time to really develop this; when I taught through Ephesians I did, you can go back and listen if you want to fill this out. But let me just give you a thumbnail sketch. In Ephesians 2, verse 20, Paul writes this, the church has “...been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*.” Paul says the church has been built on a foundation already, that foundation has already been laid. And what is the foundation? By the way, the foundation had been laid in the first century. What is it? It's the teaching of the apostles and the prophets about Jesus Christ and His gospel. The Apostles were the Twelve minus Judas plus Matthias and Paul, and the prophets here have to be New Testament prophets, for several reasons. First of all, just the word order; ‘apostles’ comes before prophets. If you were talking about Old Testament prophets, you would expect it had been the other way around. In addition, the foundation of this new building called the ‘church’ equally inhabited by Jews and Gentiles, points to New Testament revelation, not Old Testament revelation. In addition, in Ephesians 4, ‘prophets’ are called ‘gifts’ Christ gave to the church after His ascension. But I think the clincher is Ephesians 3:5, notice what he says, “...in other generations this mystery was not made known in the sons of men.” (Summary Paraphrase.) So, before this, nobody knew about it, “...as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets.”

So, in the context, then, Paul defines these prophets as those who received, in the New Testament era, revelation about the church. So, what is he talking about when he talks about prophets? Listen carefully. He means those men given to the New Testament Church during the Apostolic Age, in the early days, before there was a New Testament, men who spoke revelation from God. As the New Testament was completed, the need for both apostles and

prophets went away; the foundation had already been laid, God had now provided his complete revelation in a Book. And the genuine Christian faith now relies on the Scripture.

The “Counterfeit,” on the other hand, its source of revelation, notice verse 1, “(is) many false prophets (who) have gone out into the world.” Now, we'll come back to that group in a moment, so I won't mentioned more right now.

These two competing versions of the Christian faith, fifthly, “Embrace different fundamental doctrines.” “The Genuine.” in verses 2 and 3, embraces “the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel.” “The Counterfeit,” in verses 2 and 3, embrace “a false Jesus and a false gospel.” Again, Lord willing, we'll come back to that next week.

Number six, they “Have different teachers,” different teachers. “Genuine,” the genuine Christian faith, notice verse 1, has teachers who “are from God.” They’re true ministers. This describes teachers who are controlled by the Spirit of God, verse 2. “The Counterfeit,” on the other hand, notice verse 5, “They are from the world; therefore, they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them.” These are false teachers, false ministers.

And finally, number seven, these two different versions of the Christian faith “Have different members.” “The Genuine” one, notice verse 4, “You are from God;” verse 6, “...he who knows God listens to us.” So, the genuine Christian faith is peopled by believers from God, who've been birthed by the Holy Spirit. “The Counterfeit,” notice verse 5, “...the world listens to them.” The members of this branch of the Christian faith are the world, and notice verse 6, “...he who is not from God does not listen to us.” So, he's talking about this branch of the Christian faith is peopled by unbelievers from the world.

Now, I just sketched through that quickly because that gives a framework for where John's going to go in this paragraph. If you're going to navigate the constant danger that comes from false teachers, beloved, you must understand that those two competing, conflicting versions of the Christian faith exist, they're out there. So, look at "Christianity," and that's what you see. There are two competing, conflicting, never to be reconciled versions of the Christian faith out there because God has originated the true faith through the work of His Son, and through the revelation of His Spirit in the Word of God; and Satan, the ultimate counterfeiter, has come up with his own version to mislead as many as he can. Be on your guard! You've got to understand these exist.

Secondly, because of that, you must "Test Every Spiritual Idea against God's Word," test every spiritual idea against God's Word. That's what John goes on to say in verse 1, and he, first of all, says it negatively. He says, "Don't Be Foolishly Naive." Notice what he writes, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit." The imperative "do not believe" is - constructed in the Greek language in a way to mean this, "Make it your consistent practice, not to believe every spirit; do this all the time."

Now, when he says, "Don't believe every spirit," he's talking about the empowering spirit behind a given human prophet or human teacher. What he's saying is this, don't be foolishly naive and believe that every human who claims to speak for God, who says he's a Christian teacher, actually does speak for God and actually is a Christian. And don't believe that the spirit behind that prophet or teacher is the Holy Spirit. Don't be naïve!

As we saw in the early days of the church, before the canon of the New Testament was completed, God provided prophets who spoke from God to His people. The New Testament

prophet, during the early church, had the gift of prophecy and ability to be a channel of direct revelation, primarily in local churches, which was crucial until the completion of the New Testament. So, Apostles provided revelation, but that tended to be for the entire church. Prophets were usually assigned to local churches. You can see for example, in Acts 13, Acts 15, there were prophets in the church in Antioch. But John's point here, in our text, is that every prophet is a mouthpiece for some spirit, a true prophet for the Holy Spirit, a false prophet for a demon. So, empowering every prophet is a spirit and empowering every spirit is either God or Satan.

John's admonition, the way he puts it here in verse 1, implies that there were some Christians that he was writing to who were tempted to carelessly, uncritically accept all teaching that claimed to be from God. Look back at chapter 3, verse 24. There John tells us that God has given us His Holy Spirit. But in chapter 4, verse 1, he tells us that the Holy Spirit is not the only spirit active in the world. In chapter 3, verse 23, He commands us to believe, "...believe in the name of His (God's) Son Jesus Christ." In chapter 4, verse 1, he commands us not to believe every spirit. This is a warning against personally accepting and believing every spirit who declares his message through a human teacher who claims to represent God, who claims to be Christian, who claims to speak for God. As one author puts it, "The Christian faith is not to be mistaken for credulity. True Faith examines its object before reposing confidence in it." John says, "Don't be foolishly naïve!"

Then he says it positively, and it's this, "Be Spiritually Discerning." Notice what he goes on to say as he spells out "This Duty" to be spiritually discerning. Verse 1, he says, "...but," and in Greek there are different words that are translated 'but.' Some of them are weak, sort of transitional words. And then there are others like this one that are very strong, pointed. He

means, “Rather, instead, on the other hand, be entirely different, test the spirits to see whether they're from God.” Carefully test, carefully put through their paces, investigate the real source of all revelation, all teaching, all prophets, all human teachers, with what goal? “To see (If they're ultimately, notice.) from God.”

Now, the Greek word translated ‘test’ here occurs only in this verse in John's writings. The word means ‘to make a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness, to put something to the test, to carefully examine it.’ For example, this word was used in the ancient world of testing coins for their genuineness; then as now there were counterfeiters who figured out clever ways to take something that wasn't genuine and make it seem genuine. And this word said, ‘test that,’ make sure that it's really genuine.

Normally this verb, by the way, ‘test’ is used of testing in the genuine hope that what you're testing will pass the test. So, this command is not a cover for those internet discernment ministries. This is not a cover for skepticism or cynicism. Rather, this is a command for diligence and carefulness. It's in the present imperative in the Greek language; literally, we could translate it this way, “Be testing.” That implies ‘make this your continual practice.’ And notice, John isn't telling the elders to do this, he's not telling me to do this, he's telling every believer to do this—test, test! And the goal of the testing is to determine the source of that spiritual idea, that spiritual concept, that spiritual teacher, to see if the empowering spirit behind that teacher or prophet is “from” or literally, “out of God,” sources in God, or Satan.

By the way, if you've ever been confused about 1 Thessalonians 5, turn there for a moment. I think this is what Paul is saying here. 1 Thessalonians was written early in the life of the

church; there were still those New Testament prophets before the scriptures had been completed, who spoke revelation. And he says in that context, verse 19 of 1 Thessalonians 5:

Do not quench the Spirit, (Don't say this can't happen.), do not despise (the) prophetic utterances. (Of true prophets sent to speak God's very words to the people). But (Don't be naïve.) examine everything (They say.) *carefully*; (and) hold fast to that which is good, (the teacher who proves to be really from God, and) abstain from every form of evil.

Now, back to our text. Obviously, you can't test the empowering spirit behind a human teacher unless you test the teacher himself. And that's what John is really encouraging us to do. You see, if you carefully evaluate the teacher's content, we'll talk about some other ways to evaluate teachers that aren't in this text, but in this text, if you carefully evaluate the teacher's content, that's what he's going to address in verses 2 and 3, then you'll be able to discern the empowering spirit behind that teacher. And that, in turn, will help you to discern the ultimate source behind that teacher, whether it's God, or Satan.

You see, the real danger with false teachers is that they come in disguise. You know, they don't come in with 'Wolf' tattooed across their forehead. They present themselves as real sheep, as genuine Christians, "I love Christ like you do, I love the Bible like you do," and they try to pass themselves off as genuine shepherds, when, in fact, they are wolves.

Here John calls every Christian to evaluate every spiritual idea. That implies that there is an objective standard that you can use, and I can use to test them, and there is as we'll learn in verses 2 through 6. That standard is God's Word. You see, God requires that His people evaluate everything that they are taught against the Scripture.

And that's not just a New Testament idea, that's an Old Testament idea. Back in Deuteronomy, Moses said there would be other prophets like him that would come along, claiming to speak for God. And he gave them three tests, and he said they have to meet these tests to be true prophets. Number one, Deuteronomy 18, they have to be right every time. If they're ever wrong, they're false, he said. Boy! I wish that standard would be embraced by the church again today. Secondly, in Deuteronomy 13, and I wish I had time to turn there, but we don't, Deuteronomy 13:1 to 5, he says, "If God chose to authenticate a true prophet, He would empower that prophet to work miracles as he did Moses." (Paraphrase.) But thirdly, and this one's key for us, Deuteronomy 13:1 to 5, teaches that the true prophet's message must be in complete agreement with God's previous revelation. In fact, he says it this way in Deuteronomy 13, he says, "So here comes a prophet, and he works a miracle, I mean, like a real provable miracle, and then he says to you, but I want you to believe this, which is something that hasn't yet been revealed that isn't consistent with previous revelation." (Summary paraphrase.) You know what God says, "Reject him, he's a false prophet, whether he can work a miracle or not because it's not in keeping with the scripture." (Paraphrase.) And that third criterion becomes crucial for us in evaluating teachers, that's what we come back to in the New Testament.

For example, in Acts 17, verse 11, Luke, Paul's traveling companion and doctor writes this:

Now these (in Berea Jews) were more noble (minded) than those in Thessalonica, (for) they received the word with great eagerness (They were eager to hear the Scriptures. They weren't cynics. They weren't skeptics. They received the word with great eagerness.), (but they examined) examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so.

Oh, and by the way, who was the teacher they were listening to? The Apostle Paul! Paul authorizes Luke to say, “That’s a really good thing that they’re checking me, the apostle, against the Scriptures.” (Paraphrase.) He says that again; turn over to Galatians, chapter 1, verse 8.

But even if we (meaning Paul and other apostles), or an angel from heaven, (so, if Gabriel showed up here this morning) should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you (In other words, if it’s inconsistent with previous revelation from God, let him.) he is to be accursed! (Let him be damned!) As we have said (to you) before, so I say again now, if any man (one) is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you (have) received, (And that, in New Testament terms, that is talking about what you have received as authorized inspired Word from God, if it’s inconsistent with what God’s already revealed. Let him.) he is be accursed (Damned!)!

Now, that passage implies a couple of really important things. It implies, number one, that believers have both the right and the responsibility to evaluate the teaching they hear, even if it’s a teaching of an apostle or an angel. And number two, that we as believers have an infallible rule to use in that evaluation, and that is the Scripture. That’s why Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4, as he taught as an apostle, he said, “Commending (We commend.) ourselves to everyone’s (man’s) conscience in the sight of God.” “Check me out,” he says, “See if what I’m saying is so.” In the same way here in our text in 1 John, John says, “Test every spiritual idea, every concept, every teacher, against God’s Word,” (paraphrase) that’s “The Duty.”

What’s “The Reason?” Well, look at the rest of verse 1. 1 John 4:1, “...because (Here’s why.) many false prophets have gone out into the world.” This is no hypothetical danger even in John’s day. Now, think about this for a moment. Use your sanctified imagination as my father-

in-law used to say, think about this, you have an apostle in the middle of Asia Minor ministering to those churches, and you still had many false prophets. These were not isolated incidents, “many.” And John says these false prophets “have gone out into the world.” I love the way D. Edmond Hiebert describes it. Listen to this:

These evil spirits, demons, speaking through the false prophets are now making the world of mankind their lecture hall. Having arrived on the scene of human history to carry out a mission from the evil one who sent them.

“Many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

The Greek word translated “false prophet” is literally ‘pseudo.’ That's the Greek word, *‘pseudoprophētēs,’* pseudo prophet. What's a prophet? Well, in the Old and New Testament, a prophet was a person two things were true of. Number one, they claim to be personally sent by God; and number two, they claim to speak the very words of God. They weren't teachers like I am, or preachers, they were saying, “We have received direct revelation from God and we're giving that to you.” So, to be a false prophet or a pseudo-prophet was to be one who claimed that God had sent him when, in fact, God hadn't sent him, and one who spoke words, claiming to be God's words which, in fact, were not God's words, but rather were the words of Satan.

Now, if you've read the Old Testament, you know that false prophets were a major problem throughout Israel's history. There were also, of course, false prophets in the New Testament. Jesus warns in the *Sermon on the Mount*, Matthew 7:15, He says, “Beware of (the) false prophets.” Beware, look out for, be on your guard against, there's never a time, beloved, when this threat diminishes; you must remain vigilant. That's Jesus' order to you. The fact that Jesus warns us to beware of false prophets means this is a very real danger. They exist in every age.

In fact, according to, 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 13, in Corinth, Paul had to deal with false prophets and false apostles.

But in the New Testament, the primary problem wasn't false prophets, the primary problem, they existed all right, but the primary problem was false teachers. Not those who claimed they were getting direct revelation, but those who taught said they were from God, and in fact, were not. During Jesus' ministry, the false teachers were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Apostle Paul warned regularly about false teachers. Listen to this; this is Acts 20, verse 28, when he was warning the Ephesian elders. He says:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Here he goes.) I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

In Colossae, you had the ascetics, in Ephesus, you had Hymenaeus and Alexander, and of course, throughout the New Testament, you had the Judaizers with their works-based righteousness.

Peter warned about false teachers. Listen to 2 Peter 2:1:

False prophets also arose (in the past) among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

Jude, the half-brother of our Lord, wrote his entire New Testament letter about the danger of false teachers. He said, “I wanted to write to you about our common salvation, but this is such an imminent threat, I had to address this issue.” (Paraphrase.) In the 90’s A.D., at the end of the age of the apostles, there were still false teachers, as we’re discovering in 1 John. And when John wrote the very last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, there were false teachers in several of the seven churches in Asia Minor.

What about in our times? Listen, Paul warns us, listen to what he says. He warns us in 2 Timothy 3:13, that throughout this church age, listen, “...evil men and imposters will proceed *from bad* to worse.” It's not getting better; it's getting much, much worse. And in the future, if you fast forward to the end of the age, there will still be false teachers. Jesus, in the *Olivet Discourse*, talking about the very end of this age says, Matthew 24:11, “Many false prophets will arise.”

So, what's the point? Here it is. Jesus, Paul, John, they all warn us about false teachers, and their warnings are every bit as crucial and vital for our faith today as they were in the first century; there are so many false prophets and teachers in our world today. If you doubt that, turn on Christian television. Don't turn on Christian television. Take my word for it. But I'm telling you, there are people, and we'll talk about some of them, right now who say, “I'm getting direct revelation from God. Let me tell you what He said.”

There are many others who are completely described by Jude and 2 Peter and other passages in the New Testament, and they are transparently false teachers. They are not from God; they are wicked men and women, energized by demons teaching satanic damning false Christianity.

Scripture insists that we stay alert for this constant danger. Don't be naïve; don't be gullible. There are these competing versions of Christianity out there; know that, understand that, and test every spiritual idea you're exposed to against the Word of God. Lord willing, next week, we'll begin to examine the chief biblical tests to identify false teachers.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we're so grateful that You gave us this warning because, Lord, it shows us that You love us; that You don't want us, Your true children, to be duped by Satan's counterfeit. You don't want us to be sucked into error that disrupts our spiritual growth. Lord, we thank You that we who are truly Yours can never embrace damning error. The Holy Spirit, the anointing, as John calls it, is on us; we have the Holy Spirit within us, we have Your Word, and You will protect us from believing damning error about Christ or the gospel.

But Father, we want to be on guard. Forgive us for acting like we're at peace, in peacetime. Remind us, oh God, that we are at war, and the battleground is all around us. Help us to be not naïve, but constantly aware that just as there is true Christianity, there is a false, demonic, satanic Christianity.

Lord, I pray for those here this morning who perhaps have embraced that false form of Christianity. They've been sucked into Satan's lies. Lord, use the message even this morning to remove the blinders; help them to see that the real truth, the real gospel is the fact that You, the One true God who created all things, sent Your Son, Your only Son, into the world as one of us. Lord, to help them to embrace the fact that He lived a perfect life; You raised Him from the dead. And, Lord, today, may they truly repent of their sins and put their faith in the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel. Lord, if Satan's blinded their mind, help them to see the truth, turn on the light. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.