

Beware Of False Teachers



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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Beware Of False Teachers

Introduction

A. There are many dangerous things in this life you must watch out for. Some can hurt or kill you physically. Others can destroy you spiritually.

B. One of the great dangers to your soul is false teaching. Therefore, the Bible gives plenty of warnings against false teachers – who appear to speak words of truth, while actually speaking words that distort the truth and will destroy your soul by misleading you.

C. Many people (even many who are sincere and desire to serve God) are misled by false teachers today, resulting in the destruction of souls. Consider a story from 1 Kings 13.

1. A “man of God” went to King Jeroboam of Israel to speak God’s words of warning. Then, God had commanded the man of God not to eat food, drink water, or go back the way he came (v. 9). Yet, an “old prophet” told the man of God that God said it was okay to come home with him and eat some food (but he was lying, v. 18). When the man of God listened to the old prophet, God sent a message saying the man of God had disobeyed and would die. When the man of God left, a lion attacked him on the road and killed him.

2. This story demonstrates how people can appear to be on God’s side and speak words of truth, when they really aren’t and don’t. It demonstrates how good people can be deceived. It demonstrates that God will not spare people who fall for deceptive messages. It demonstrates how there are many who teach messages that claim to be truth when they actually are not – and that it is our responsibility to know the truth and obey what it says!

D. Purpose: To learn the dangerous reality of false teachers and the appropriate way to respond to them.

1. False Teachers Exist Today

A. Matthew 7:15

1. False prophets would claim to speak words from God that God had not actually revealed to them or would not speak all the words God had revealed.

2. Jesus's teaching plainly indicates there are people in this world (i.e. false teachers) who claim to speak words from God that are not really words God has spoken!

B. 2 Peter 2:1

1. Notice the certainty that Christians would have to deal with false teachers just as people had to deal with false prophets.

2. Also notice the certainty that these false teachers would continue. That was true for those Peter was addressing and is also true today!

C. Galatians 1:6-7

1. There were many Christians in Galatia who were no longer following Jesus. Instead, they were distorting Christianity by following laws and traditions found in Judaism.

2. Even then, there were people trying to distort the gospel of Christ. Today, there are still many people who (for different reasons) are distorting the gospel of Jesus Christ!

D. Romans 16:17-18

1. Paul warned the Christians in Rome to watch out for people who would create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching they had learned (the truth).

2. Such people continue to work today. In fact, there may be even more of them now than there were then. Partial proof of this is to examine the number of different religious organizations that believe, teach, and practice different things – yet, all claim to believe, teach, and practice the truth of God's word. Certainly, they cannot all be right since God has only revealed one message of truth in the Bible!

E. 1 Timothy 4:1-3

1. Paul warned Timothy about a time when people would depart from the faith because they would pay attention to those who would deceive and falsely teach them.

2. Although these false teachers may still look like and profess to be "Christians," their influence is actually Satanic and they mislead people rather than helping them be saved.

F. 2 Timothy 4:2-4

1. Timothy's responsibility was only to preach God's word – whether other people would accept it or reject it. For, people would not always be willing to tolerate the sound doctrine that comes from God and would find teachers to tell them what they want to hear!

2. Today, teachers still have the responsibility just to teach God's word – and there are many who still tell people what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear.

2. What Makes Someone A False Teacher

A. Teaches things that are false and/or misleading

1. Romans 16:17. Paul warned of those who would work contrary to the true teaching from God they had learned. Anyone who teaches contrary to what God teaches distorts the gospel of Christ, whether their motives are sincere or not (Galatians 1:6-7).

2. It is possible for people to quote Scripture and make statements that are true, yet still teach false because the Scripture is taken out of context or applied in a way that contradicts other Biblical teaching (i.e. consider when Satan quoted Scripture, Matthew 4:5-7).

- For example: Many teachers quote passages about faith being required for salvation (i.e. John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10) but teach false when they conclude faith (mental conviction) is the only thing God requires for salvation (James 2:24).

B. Works to turn people away from the truth

1. When someone teaches false, it works to turn them away from God and His truth (Galatians 1:6; Galatians 3:1). Some do this intentionally and others do this unintentionally.

2. The nature of false teachers promoting something other than the truth means that when people hear the truth, they will often not accept it as truth. It has been said that if you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it to be truth.

- Not only will those who believe false teachers reject the truth, but they will often also speak against the truth because they have been conditioned by false teachers (2 Peter 2:2). So, the truth doesn't sound right to people and they will not open their minds to accept it because of what they have been taught to believe.

C. Avoids the entire truth

1. A false teacher may teach 99% of what God says but avoid teaching on one subject for some reason. A teacher must not refuse to teach any part of God's word (Acts 20:26-27)!

2. Not every teacher will teach the entirety of God's truth (2 Timothy 4:2-4). Some will only teach whatever is popular and not teach things considered to be difficult or controversial.

- Such a one is a false teacher. Though this may sound harsh, such a teacher does not do all that is needed to help others be saved!

D. Goes beyond God's teaching or stops short of it

1. The word of God must not be added to or subtracted from (Revelation 22:18-19). If a teacher says more than the Bible says, he/she has taught too much. If a teacher says less than the Bible says, he/she has taught too little. But, if a teacher says exactly what the Bible says, he/she has taught in a way that pleases God.

2. Although teachers will explain and help people apply God's words, every teaching, conclusion, and application must fit the teachings of God's word!

- By adding to or subtracting from what God has said, a teacher promotes something other than the sound teaching of Jesus Christ and fails to please God (1 Timothy 6:3-5)!

3. Characteristics Of False Teachers

A. Dangerous

1. They are dangerous to both themselves and those who follow their teaching (2 Peter 2:1). Jesus compared false prophets to wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). And, 2 John 1:9 demonstrates that following such means you do not have God and Jesus Christ!

2. Don't be fooled to think a false teacher is harmless. It doesn't matter how much you like someone, how charismatic someone is, how smart someone seems, how religious someone appears, how sincere someone sounds, how long someone has been teaching, how many others follow that person, or how long you've known someone – false teachers are spiritually deadly! And, anyone can be a false teacher (Galatians 1:8-9)!

B. Deceptive

1. These people don't want you to think they are false teachers. In fact, many deceive themselves! Many are caught off guard by these ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing and led astray by them (Romans 16:18).

2. Satan wants you to believe a religious lie that keeps you from following God! In fact, Satan and his associates (including false teachers) often look like they are Christians so they can pull others away from God (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)!

C. Use smooth talk and flattering words

1. Satan knows how to appeal to people. So, he uses many people who look and sound like Christians to tickle the ears of those who listen to them (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

2. Romans 16:17-18. Satan uses false teachers to tell people what they want to hear, to entertain, and to make people feel good about themselves. But, these things distract people from noticing that what is being taught is actually spiritually harmful to the hearers!

D. Cause God's word to be spoken against

1. False teachers hinder people from obeying the truth by teaching false. But, they also hinder people from obeying the truth by turning them against it (2 Peter 2:2).

2. It is common for false teachers to call the truth "false teaching" and to call true teachers "false teachers"! So, those who have been deceived by false teachers are also then further conditioned against believing and obeying the true message of God (Galatians 4:16-17).

E. Exploit others

1. Satan wants false teachers to look unsuspecting and trustworthy so he can use them to exploit and take advantage of others (2 Peter 2:3).

2. While some want to learn the truth so they can be saved eternally, Satan will use false teachers to accomplish a different purpose. Some false teachers will try to gain a following for themselves or seek a financial reward. Others will have sincere motives, yet still draw people away from Christ and influence them to spend eternity in Hell!

F. Do not deliver on their promises

1. There are fundamental promises religion makes – fulfillment on a spiritual level, seeking of a higher being (often, God), forgiveness of sins, eternal life in Heaven, etc. Certainly, false teachers within “Christianity” make many of the same promises the true gospel offers. Yet, those who follow them will miss out on receiving these blessings!

2. If you follow anything but the truth, you cannot possibly expect to receive the freedom from sin and blessings God promises (2 Peter 2:19)! A false teacher can promise you everything but has no power to deliver that which only God can provide (John 8:32)!

4. Responding To False Teachers

A. Watch out

1. Now that you realize the danger of how Satan is using false teachers to mislead and destroy you spiritually, you must constantly be on the lookout (Romans 16:17-18).

2. They come in many different forms. So, constantly watch out for false teachers!

B. Know the Bible

1. It has been said that those who watch out for counterfeit money do not have to know all the ways people distort money. Instead, they simply must know what the genuine currency looks and feels like so well they can easily identify anything that differs.

2. The ways false teachers lie and deceive are far too numerous for people to know every way it can happen. But, if you know the truth well enough, you will spot distortions to the truth (2 Peter 3:15-18). For example, Jesus did not fall for Satan’s deceptive use of Scripture because He knew the truth (Matthew 4:7)!

C. Evaluate their fruit

1. Don’t fall for the personality and charisma of a false teacher. Don’t just listen to whatever the individual claims. Don’t assume someone is teaching the truth because of his/her following.

2. Jesus taught to test everyone who teaches you (Matthew 7:16-20). Test what everyone teaches by comparing it to what God teaches in His word!

D. Avoid them

1. Don't play with spiritual fire! False teachers will kill you if you let them. If you know someone to be a false teacher, don't give him/her the opportunity to influence you by listening to the teaching!

2. Remember that false teaching is deceptive and often very subtle. It may be difficult to even recognize the small nuances of what is being said that slowly leads down a destructive path. Romans 16:17 says to avoid them! Your soul is too precious to give a known false teacher the opportunity to influence your thinking!

E. Do not follow them

1. No matter how convincing a false teacher sounds, how much something may feel right, how many other people follow the false teacher, etc., you must never follow someone who teaches false!

2. Do not express any kind of approval to someone who teaches false (2 John 1:10-11). You must not want to follow a false teacher a single step!

F. Expose them

1. Not only should you not follow false teachers, but you should also want to help others not follow false teachers. So, do not just quietly sit back and let others be misled and deceived.

2. Through the gospel of Christ, work to teach the truth. In doing so, you will have the opportunity to expose some who are teaching false (Ephesians 5:11). Although others may not like you for this, you must do whatever you can to help people follow Jesus!

Conclusion

A. False teachers are real and active in this world. Those who follow false teachers will be destroyed in Hell because they will not follow the truth God has revealed.

B. Having seen the warnings from God, you do not have to be misled by false teachers. Instead, you can take the necessary steps to guard against false teachers and help others do the same!

Study Questions

Can people look like they are on God's side and work to mislead others?
Give a Biblical example.

1. False Teachers Exist Today

How does Matthew 7:15 prove false teachers exist today?

How does 2 Peter 2:1 prove false teachers exist today?

How does Galatians 1:6-7 prove false teachers exist today?

How does Romans 16:17-18 prove false teachers exist today?

How does 1 Timothy 4:1-3 prove false teachers exist today?

How does 2 Timothy 4:2-4 prove false teachers exist today?

2. What Makes Someone A False Teacher

How does a false teacher teach things that are false and/or misleading?

How does a false teacher teach things that work to turn people away from the truth?

How does a false teacher avoid the entire truth?

How does a false teacher go beyond God's teaching or stop short of it?

3. Characteristics Of False Teachers

How are false teachers dangerous?

How are false teachers deceptive?

How do false teachers use smooth talk and flattering words?

How do false teachers cause God's word to be spoken against?

How do false teachers exploit others?

How do false teachers fail to deliver on their promises?

4. Responding To False Teachers

Why must you watch out for false teachers?

Why must you know the Bible?

Why must you evaluate the fruit of all teachers?

Why must you avoid false teachers?

Why must you not follow false teachers?

Why must you expose false teachers?

