

## Two Teachers

### *Matthew 7:15-20*

#### **Introduction**

What or who comes to mind when you hear the words “false prophets” or “false teachers”? Do you think of Jim Jones who founded the People’s Temple, which grew to about 3,000 people. Jones began as a Pentecostal minister, but over time rejected Christianity as we know it and claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus, Vladimir Lenin, and the Buddha. Jones eventually convinced his congregation to move to what he called Jonestown in Guyana in an effort to create a socialist paradise. After mounting scrutiny and criticism from the outside, Jim Jones convinced most of his 909 followers to drink cyanide mixed with juice. Those who refused were forcibly injected with cyanide through a syringe.

When you hear “false teacher” you might think of David Koresh of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. Koresh had committed much of the Bible to memory and fathered children with multiple women in his compound, while forbidding marriage for anyone else. His compound was raided on April 19, 1993. During the raid the compound caught fire; 79 Branch Davidians died, 21 of those who died in the fire were children under the age of 16. David Koresh died of a gunshot to the head. Koresh taught of himself as a new messiah and the spiritual descendant of King David.

Other cults may come to mind when you think of false prophets or teachers; such as Joseph Smith and Mormonism, Charles Russell and The Watch Tower Society (Jehovah Witness), or the World Mission Society Church of God, which is also known as the “Mother of God cult.”

The World Mission Society Church of God teaches that there are three ages: 1) The age of the Father, which represents the way God interacted with his people in the Old Testament. 2) The age of the Son, which represents the New Testament. 3) The age of the Holy Spirit, which represents the arrival of Ahn Sahng-hung, the group’s founder who was born in 1918 and died in 1985 after suffering a heart attack, followed by a stroke, while on his way to the hospital.

Ahn Sahng-hong became a Seventh Day Adventist and was later excommunicated in 1962, much of his teachings were shaped by Seventh Day Adventist doctrine. In 1964, Ahn founded the Witnesses of Jesus Church of God and took on a mistress while married to another woman; the name of his mistress was Zahng Gil-jah. Some of Ahn’s doctrinal distinctives that shaped what would eventually become the World Mission Society Church of God include the following:

- Sunday worship is pagan and the true day of worship is Saturday.
- The image of the cross is considered pagan.
- Christmas and Easter are considered pagan holidays.
- Every Christian in the world except those belonging to the World Mission Society Church of God is pagan.

- Humans were originally angels who sinned (we have no memory of our pre-existence).
- His partial agreeance with the doctrine of the Trinity, but instead taught what the early Church deemed heretical, which is known as “modelism.” Modelism is the belief that God has taken on three different forms instead of him existing in three different persons (the Father becomes the Son who becomes the Holy Spirit).
- A belief that he restored the true Passover, and that a person could not truly be saved from their sins unless they celebrated the Passover once a year on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month on a sacred calendar Ahn recognized.

After Ahn Sahng-hong died unexpectedly, his Witnesses of Jesus Church of God split into two groups. His wife and three children started New Covenant Passover Church of God, while his mistress and other followers started World Mission Society of God. Under Zahng Gil-jah’s leadership World Mission Society of God has grown rapidly, reporting over three million members worldwide. Here are some of their doctrinal beliefs:

- A person must believe and worship Zahng Gil-Jah as Mother God in order to be saved.
- Ahn Sahung-Hung was the second coming of Christ, who is also understood to be God the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- Other requirements to be saved include: Annual Passover observance, regular tithing to World Mission Society Church of God, attending church (Zion) every Saturday, and to preach often (in places like Walmart, grocery stores, etc.).

I have taken the time to elaborate on the Mother of God cult because, like the Church of Latter Day Saints and the Watch Tower Society have local locations, they have a Zion building in Cheyenne. Cults like these are known for the way they proof-text by taking verses in the Bible out of context to make it sound as though the Bible teaches their doctrines. They are also typically known for claiming some type of secret knowledge that was either lost or hidden that they alone are the faithful stewards of.

Cults are dangerous to be sure, and Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:15-20 are certainly applicable to such groups and their leaders. I think people like Zahng Gil-jah are “ravenous wolves” in sheep’s clothing, but I also think false prophets and teachers like her are easier to spot for anyone who reads the Bible. For starters, Jesus was pretty clear concerning his second coming: First, he said it would be both visible and very obvious (see Matt. 20:30; Rev. 1:7). Second, Jesus warned us of people like Zahng Gil-jah: **“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand”** (Matthew 24:23–25).

There are ravenous wolves who are more cunning and difficult to spot who creep into the church and among God’s people. They are much more subtle than the likes of Joseph Smith, Charles Russell, Jim Jones, David Koresh, Ahn Sahng-hong, and Zahng Gil-Jah. Jesus warns us of such people and how we can spot them to avoid them.

### **The Heart of False Teachers (v. 15)**

The heart of false teachers is that they intend harm upon God’s people. There is a reason why Jesus warns us of these people just after we are told to enter the narrow gate and avoid the wide

gate (vv. 13-14). This is our first clue as to how to spot a false teacher. Do you remember what I said last Sunday? I said of the narrow gate, that it is the cross of Jesus Christ and although admittance through the gate is free because Jesus paid the price necessary to enter, a person can only enter naked. Within the heart of the false teacher Jesus warns us of is a desire to either avoid the cross of Christ or a way to add to the cross of Christ. The false teacher may tell you that the narrow way is a legitimate way to heaven but will insist that you can enter with whatever you would like to bring with you such as your own righteousness, a flippant attitude towards your sin, and your pride. For the false teacher, Jesus is either never enough or too much!

False teachers and false prophets have always found their way among God's people and every time they have been able to deceive and consume those among God's people it is because his people did not listen to God's word or were ignorant of it. God warned Israel of his wrath against the sins of his people, yet in Jeremiah 6:13-19 Jeremiah warned all of Jerusalem:

**“For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. <sup>14</sup> They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace. <sup>15</sup> Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,”** says the Lord.

**Thus says the Lord: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ <sup>17</sup> I set watchmen over you, saying, ‘Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!’ But they said, ‘We will not pay attention.’ <sup>18</sup> Therefore hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what will happen to them. <sup>19</sup> Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it.**

The prophets and priests dealt falsely with the people and assured them that there was no judgment coming (v. 13-14), and by doing so, encouraged them in their sin. Why? Because they did not listen to God's word and worse, they rejected his Law (v. 19).<sup>1</sup> These verses in Jeremiah and Jesus' warning reminds me of a dear friend who confided in a pastor of the church her parents attended about the pressure she was receiving from her boyfriend to have sex with him. The pastor's advice was that if she loved him, then it was okay. My friend listened to the pastor's advice and then called me later because of the guilt she felt as a result. She listened to the pastor because she trusted him; she trusted him because she thought he was safe when in fact he was a wolf.

Daniel Akin wrote in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount: “Disciples of Jesus must never let their spiritual guard down. They must be spiritually discerning, testing every teaching by the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Eloquent speech is not the issue. Faithfulness to the Bible is.”<sup>2</sup> The apostle Paul warned the Corinthian Church of those who claimed to represent God but were something very different: **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even**

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<sup>1</sup> See also 1 Kings 22:1-23 as another example of heart of false teachers.

<sup>2</sup> Akin, Daniel L. (2019). Christ-Centered Exposition: The Sermon on the Mount (pp. 141-42). Holman Reference.

**Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds”** (2 Corinthians 11:13–15). The reason why false teachers and prophets lead others astray is because, like Satan, they are very good at disguising themselves as one who actually speaks on God’s behalf and loves his people when they really bring great harm to God’s people. This is an ongoing threat. Listen to Paul’s sage advice before leaving the Ephesian Church where he spent at least three years trying to strengthen their faith:

**“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”** (Acts 20:28–32)

The way you stay alert and protect yourself from such imposters of the faith is to follow Jesus through the gate he has called us to enter to walk the way he has called us to walk. How do we walk according to his way? By listening to his word and obeying it.

### **The Way to Recognize False Teachers (vv. 16-18)**

Jesus tells us how we can recognize false teachers and false prophets: **“You will recognize them by their fruits.”** Jesus then asks a rhetorical question to drive home his point: **“Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”** The answer is simple: grapes come from grapevines, not thorn bushes. Figs come from fig trees, not thistles. Healthy trees produce good fruit while diseased trees produce nothing suitable for consumption. The point is simple, good teaching comes from teachers and prophets who fear God and love his people. The only way good teachers and good prophets can speak truth on behalf of God is if they have entered Jesus’ narrow gate and are walking Jesus’ narrow way. Again, Daniel Akin is helpful on this point:

Two essential tests will expose those working to slip into our communities of faith: the doctrinal test and the practical test. The doctrinal test asks, Do their teachings line up with the gospel of Jesus Christ that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone? It asks whether they avoid the deadly mathematics of false teachers that add to the Bible, subtract from the person and work of Christ, multiply the requirements of salvation, and divide the people of God by a divisive and destructive spirit. The practical test asks, Are they antinomians on the one hand or legalist on the other? It asks whether they throw off all constraint to the extreme or seek to shackle us with legalistic obligations that are suffocating. If we closely watch doctrine and practice, the rotten fruit will expose a rotten teacher.<sup>3</sup>

The way to recognize rotten fruit is to have a steady diet of eating good fruit. False teachers and false prophets are not interested in the safety and spiritual safety of God’s people equally, as they are only interested in their own glory and self-gain, just as we are warned by Paul in Philippians 3:18-19, **“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk**

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.143.

as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18–19). The apostle Peter also warns of such people:

**But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.** (2 Peter 2:1–3)

These people are on your televisions, in your Christian bookstores, and on your podcasts. They refuse to speak of God’s holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath. They avoid portions of the Word of God that make others uncomfortable such as the fallenness and depravity of man, and the final judgment that is to come.<sup>4</sup> They promise heaven without suffering, blessing without pain, and salvation without a cross. They puff themselves up with pride, fleece the people of God to their own profit, and claim a power of their own that others need. These are the men and women who are described in the holy scriptures as, “**waterless springs and mists driven by a storm.... For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those are who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption**” (2 Pet. 2:17-19). John Gill, an English Baptist Pastor who lived in the 1700’s wrote of such people the following description:

When doctrines are contrary to the perfections of God, repugnant to the Scriptures of truth; when they tend to depreciate the person and offices, blood, righteousness, and sacrifices of Christ, to lessen the glory of God’s grace, to exalt the creature, and to fill men’s minds with notions of the purity, self-sufficiency, and ability of human nature; when they are calculated to feed the pride and vanity of men, to get money and gain applause, to serve their own interests, and gratify men’s lusts and passions—they may be easily discerned what they are, and from whence they come.<sup>5</sup>

The only way, my dear brothers and sisters, that you will be able to identify the wolves who creep in among you is if you are as familiar with the voice of the Shepherd through the pages of Holy Scripture as the air you breath. What I mean is not that your knowledge of the Bible is perfect, but that you know His voice in such a way that it is clear whose words belong to God.

## **Conclusion**

I love the Five Solas of the protestant reformation. They came out of a time where there were so many abuses in the church because the people did not have the Bible in a language they could read and study. The five *solas* include *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), and *solus Deo gloria* (glory to God alone). You have a Bible in a language you can read and study because of the protestant reformation. It is through the Bible that you get to see the God who gave his Son who can be only received through faith alone, by grace alone, not for our glory but His.

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<sup>4</sup> Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount: the message of the kingdom* (p. 250). Crossway Books.

<sup>5</sup> Gill, John (2022). *Church History Study Bible* (p. 1425). Crossway Books.

My hope and prayer for you Meadowbrooke is that you are so helped in your walk on Jesus' narrow way through the songs we sing, the sermons that are preached here, the life groups you participate in, our children's ministries, our youth ministry, and every other ministry here in this church that you will be able to spot the wolves a mile away because you know the voice of God through your time in the Bible in such a familiar way that it is the air you breath! Because his word is the air you breath, you will be able to judge the truthfulness of everything you hear against the truth of God's holy word and walk the narrow way to the tune of that glorious creed that comes from the pages of scripture: "Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as revealed by Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone."

As for the false teachers and prophets, there is an axe, and in the words of John the Baptist: **"Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"** (Matt. 3:10). This axe is not just laid at the root of the false teacher and prophet, but those who walk through the wide gate and onto the wide road with them. This is why it is the mandate of every pastor whose responsibility it is to open the Scriptures and to teach them, that he do so in a way that is honest to the text and in a way that the sheep can hear clearly. The purpose of preaching is not so that you can hear the voice of the pastor, but the voice of God through the faithful exegesis of that pastor who has labored through the week studying the scriptures and proclaims it for the health of Christ's Church. This is my responsibility and I take it very seriously, and God forbid the day comes when I do not take my role seriously, you must then get rid of me. The words from holy scripture that was preached on the day I was charged as a minister of the gospel; I leave with you as a suitable conclusion to this sermon; it is the charge the apostle Paul gave to a young pastor and it is the charge given many pastors ever since:

**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)**

Amen.