**How Do I Identify a False Teacher?**

*by Jeremiah Cox*

False teaching is as old as truth. Peter said, *“There were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you”* (2 Peter 2:1). If there is a truth there will always be a perverted version. Frauds lurk the earth seeking to inflict their false doctrines upon the masses. The naïve have trouble differentiating between truth and error, and as a result often follow the error. This is due to the lack of knowledge needed to identify a false teacher.

The same logic used to identify a false teacher is used in other aspects of life. “Pawn Stars” is a popular reality show on television. The show is set in a pawn shop in Las Vegas, Nevada. The owner of the store, along with his father, son, and nephew, spend their time looking at antiques, technology, and various items to determine if they will help turn a profit. Items range from old magazines, to important historical artifacts, to expensive modern sports cars. While many of the items brought in are legitimate, even more are not. For this very reason, the owner of the shop is in touch with several experts. When there is a question of authenticity an expert is called. There always seems to be a standard the expert references. The item is always compared to something whether it be an identical item that is already authenticated, or a manual that reveals details about the item. These standards expose the counterfeits. What at first seemed to be extremely valuable is now worthless. This is similar to the biblical instructions on identifying a false teacher.

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world”* (1 John 4:1). It is not enough for an individual to say their message is from God’s word. Anybody and everybody who believes the bible is God’s word will claim that their teachings are in accord with scripture. There isn’t a person who appears on “Pawn Stars” who says their item is a fake. They are either fully convinced it is real, and are disappointed to find out otherwise, or they are trying to fool the owner, and are disappointed they failed. For this reason, John gives the brethren a standard by which to test the spirits. *“By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world”* (4:2-3). Things are made clear because they know what the Spirit of God looks like.

Jesus gives similar instruction in Matthew the 7th chapter. Jesus said, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (v. 15). False teachers are disguised as something they are not. They teach things that sound good, and look good, but are not good at all. Paul said, *“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another”* (Galatians 1:6-7). It may seem like good news, but it is not. Replicas brought into the pawn shop serve the same purpose – to fool you into believing they are genuine. They may seem like the real deal, but they are not. How are we supposed to know if the teacher is legitimate? *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit”* (v. 16-18). If the doctrine is bad it comes from a bad tree, i.e. a false teacher. What does the good fruit look like? In John’s account of the gospel, Jesus said, *“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:4-5). If the teaching is not from Jesus, it isn’t true. *“If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31-32). False teachers are not disciples of Christ. Therefore, their doctrine is not identified with Christ’s word.

We must all be capable of identifying a false teacher. In the context of those denying the resurrection, Paul said, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’”* (1 Corinthians 15:33). We must not be naïve to think we can remain unaffected by false teaching. We must be able to *“test the spirits, whether they are of God”* (1 John 4:1). If we find they are not from God we must not condone their teachings. *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”* (1 John 1:5-6). What is a false teacher? The answer is simple – an individual that teaches anything contrary to the standard of God’s word.

**Painless Discipleship***by Joe R. Price*

Church attendance is down in America (that’s not news). One reason recently noted in a blog is the emphasis on children’s sports activities on Sundays (*The Main Reason for Declining Church Attendance: Children’s Sports?*, Christianity Today). Parents take their children to play soccer, baseball, football and more instead of Sunday Bible class and worship services. When we moved to Washington over 15 years ago, I vividly remember being astonished at the amount of children’s sports being played on Sunday mornings. The huge soccer complex near the church’s meeting place was filled with the evidence that many people worship recreation instead of God on the Lord’s Day.

One way churches are addressing this decline is by rescheduling worship services to accommodate families. By offering Saturday afternoon services they remove Sunday conflicts. Folks are free to do as they please.

Painless discipleship is in vogue. Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). By taking children to sporting events instead of worshiping God we are teaching them they are more important than the Lord. We are teaching them they can make plans that hinder them from putting the Lord first (Matt. 6:33). We are teaching them discipleship is adaptable to “me”.

We must not have an inconsequential view toward attending worship services (Hebrews 10:24-25). Does the illness that keeps you from worshiping on Sunday also keep you home from work on Monday? Being a disciple of Christ requires sacrifice; it is not always easy. Children who learn other things are more important than worshiping God will do those other things. So will adults.

Sacrifice is necessary in order to follow the Savior who sacrificed Himself for us (1 Peter 2:21; Romans 12:1-2). Christians gladly offer themselves to the Lord regardless of personal inconvenience. Being faithful means always putting the Lord first (Colossians 3:1-4).