

Recognizing False Teachers

(2 Corinthians 11:7-15)

False teachings permeate our culture. They infiltrate every fiber of our society. Many in education want to include the teaching of alternate lifestyles in school curriculum, beginning in elementary grades. False teachings are also found in politics, science, the arts, medicine, etc. However, none of these are as dangerous as false religious teaching, which affects a person's eternal destination. Therefore, it is imperative to know how to recognize false religious teachers. This requires at least three actions. First is . . .

Detect their motivation (11:7-9).

Highly paid speakers in the world receive amazing sums of money for their speeches. The top three of all time include: #3: Tony Blair, former prime minister of Great Britain who received \$616,000 for two half-hour speeches in 2009 in the Philippines; #2: Ronald Reagan, who was paid \$1 million per speech to give two speeches in 1989 in Japan; and #1: Donald Trump, who was paid \$1-1.5 million per speech in 2006-2007, at the Real Estate Wealth Expos (onlineuniversities.com).

In ancient Greece, as today in our country, speakers were evaluated by how much money they could demand for speaking. That helps us understand what Paul writes: *Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?* (11:7). Paul didn't demand an honorarium or support, but he could have. However, when Jesus sends out the twelve apostles, He gives these instructions: no money in their belts, no bag with extra clothes, and no walking stick (Mt 10:9-10c). Why, according to the last phrase of verse ten?

In Jesus' day, travelers often carried money in their belts. However, Jesus tells His disciples those who hear them preach the Gospel are responsible for supporting them.

For fear of being misunderstood, Paul doesn't ask for financial support when he comes to Corinth. Many popular, itinerant speakers in the Roman Empire, including those who claimed to preach the Gospel, could make huge sums of money from their audiences. Paul doesn't want to appear to be like these *peddlers of God's word* (2 Cor. 2:17b).

Next, Paul makes a very unusual statement in verse eight: *I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.* In this verse, Paul is using hyperbole (exaggeration for effect). The church at Corinth was a wealthy church. However, while he was ministering in Corinth, he was supported by the very poor churches in Macedonia, Northern Greece, which included Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica. This makes it seem to Paul that he had robbed the poor Macedonian believers. That's why he writes that when he needed something, *he did not burden* any of the Corinthians (11:9a-b). Instead, what does he write in the next phrase of verse nine?

Paul continues by declaring he *refrained and will refrain from burdening* the Corinthians *in any way* (11:9d).

To recognize false teachers, **detect their motivation** and ...

Determine their lack of integrity (11:10-11).

We can recognize false teachers by contrasting them with teachers, such as Paul, who exhibit impeccable integrity. He knows that refusing financial support from the Corinthians is a clear rebuttal of the false accusations made against him. Therefore, he writes: *As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia* (11:10). Achaia (uh-kay'-yuh) was in southern Greece.

In Paul's day, as today, one of the clearest indications he is a true teacher of the Gospel is his integrity in regard to money. Paul would rather work, or do without, than appear to be like the *peddlers of God's word* (2 Cor. 2:17b).

Paul's integrity is revealed in the book of Acts. When Paul first arrives in Corinth, he stays with Priscilla and Aquila and joins them in their tentmaking business (Acts 18:1-3). However, when Silas and Timothy join him from Macedonia (northern Greece), he devotes all his time to preaching and teaching (Acts 18:5). He apparently does this because Silas and Timothy bring financial gifts from one of the Macedonian churches. Which church contributed to Paul's ministry (Philippians 4:15)?

Paul *will not be silenced* about the fact he never took money from the Corinthians. Therefore, his integrity is flawless when he is in Corinth.

Next, Paul asks, *And why?* (11:11a). Why does he refuse local support, boast of his integrity, and condemn false teachers who peddle God's Word? He answers by writing, *Because I do not love you? God knows I do!* (11:11b-c). Someone who loves you will make great sacrifices to help you. Also, someone who loves you will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear (Prov. 27:6a). False teachers are skilled at flattery and spinning lies.

Paul is writing harsh, strong words to the Corinthians because he loves them and has their best interests at heart. As a pastor, I love you too much not to tell you the truth. That's why I never pervert or "water down" the teaching of God's Word.

To recognize false teachers, **detect their motivation, determine their lack of integrity,** and ...

Decipher their deception (11:12-15).

To defend his integrity, Paul will not stop boasting about the fact he preached in Corinth *free of charge*. Therefore, he writes he will continue doing what he has been doing (11:12a). Why (11:12b-c)?

Paul wants the Corinthians to come to their senses and look at the clear facts. Unlike Paul, the false teachers are interested in getting money from the Corinthians and not concerned about their spiritual welfare. Therefore, Paul bluntly and correctly describes those who claim to be "super-apostles": *For such men are false apostles* (11:13a). The word translated false (PSEUDES, sue-dace') is the root our word "pseudo," which means "to pretend" or "sham."

There have always been and, until Jesus comes, will always be "pseudo" apostles. God tells Jeremiah-550 years before Christ: *"The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them"* (Jer. 14:14b-c). Then, in the rest of that verse, how does God describe the message of these Old Testament "pseudo" prophets (14:14d-f)?

"Pseudo" prophets haven't changed in more than 2,500 years, and they never will.

Paul also describes these self-proclaimed "super-apostles" as *deceitful workmen* (11:13b). They aren't just wrong or mistaken; *they are deceitful, fake prophets, who are disguising themselves as apostles of Christ* (11:13c).

In our culture of political correctness and a high value of toleration, we need to follow Paul's example and call out false prophets. We must do this because there are always immature or gullible believers who will fall for the deceit. Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees, who are also false teachers. He says they *appear beautiful* on the outside (Mt 23:27). However, what does Jesus tell them in the next verse (Matthew 23:28)?

The truth about false prophets shouldn't surprise us, as Paul explains, *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light* (11:14). Satan never comes with a pitchfork in hand, horns protruding from his head, and a sharp-pointed tail. He is too smart for that. Satan comes disguised as a friend who wants to help us reinterpret what we have been taught about God's Word. It is the same tactic he used with Eve, which we looked at in the last lesson. Although Satan comes as *an angel of light*, he is in fact the prince of darkness (Eph. 6:11-12). How does Jesus describe false teachers in John 8:44a?

Satan desires to pervert God's Word today, just as he did with Eve. As a result, *sin came into the world, and death through sin and so death spread to all men because all sinned* (Rom. 5:12).

Paul writes, *So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness* (11:15a). If Satan can masquerade as *an angel of light*, it should not surprise anyone that his servants can, too.

However, *their end will correspond to their deeds* (11:15b). What is the end of Satan's servants, according to Philippians 3:19a?

This refers to eternal condemnation. The same *end* awaits all who follow these false teachers.

To recognize false teachers, **detect their motivation, determine their lack of integrity, and decipher their deception.**