

You Can Know Them

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I think everyone has heard of the Sermon on the Mount. That was the longest recorded message of Jesus Christ. It was His first message, and it set the tone for His own ministry, as we are going to find out.

Let's turn to Matthew 5 and read the first two verses to set the context, by way of introduction, as we head to our subject. We want to see who He was talking to and where He was. I'm always curious when certain things happen. Where were they and what was going on?

Matthew 5:1. *And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain ... (NKJV)*

This mountain was probably on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee, about twenty miles from His home in Nazareth, which would be to the southwest.

1b) ... and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

2) Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: ... (NKJV)

The Sermon on the Mount was for the disciples. He was teaching them directly. It was addressed to His disciples, and so by extension, it is addressed to us today because we are His disciples. He laid out the basics of Christianity in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 on the Sermon on the Mount.

The Nelson Study Bible says this about the Sermon on the Mount:

Virtually every section of this message is repeated in substance elsewhere in the New Testament.

So this was an outline of what it takes to be a Christian. It was an outline of Him bringing a spiritual application to a law that the Jews were all too familiar with.

Now let's look at the summary of chapter 5, 6 and the start of 7. We'll just skim over it. We know that chapter 5 starts with the Beatitudes. Then Christ says, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." Again, He is talking to His disciples. Then He teaches them about the law, and He talks about anger and He teaches them about adultery, and He teaches them about divorce, and He teaches them about taking oaths. He concludes with teaching us the incredible thought that we should love our enemies. Hadn't heard that one before.

Then in chapter 6, He teaches about the proper attitude in giving money, tithes, and not bringing attention to the self. He talks about prayer and an outline for prayer. He teaches about fasting and how we ought to go about fasting. He ends chapter 6 by

saying we have to trust in one master. You can't have two masters. You have to trust in one master.

Then He starts chapter 7, teaching us not to judge. Then He introduces what we call today, the Golden Rule. We should do to others the way we want people to do unto us.

Today we will cover the conclusion of this sermon. By verses, it's the last fifteen percent.

He gives the disciples all this new teaching and then He wants to wrap it up in a conclusion. You would think that the conclusion to this first sermon has got to be really, really important. In the conclusion of this sermon, He gives a warning to His disciples then and to us today. This is what we want to focus on.

With that in mind, let's go to Matthew 7 and we're going to start the conclusion. We will begin in verse 13. Place a marker here, because we're going to come back from time to time to Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:13. *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. (NKJV)*

It's not the common path.

14) Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it. (KJV)

Or it can be translated "are finding it."

Notice, He starts the conclusion. Notice what He says.

15) Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (KJV)

We'll talk about this in detail as we go forward.

16) You shall know them by their fruits ... (KJV)

Then He draws an analogy.

16b) ... Do men gather grapes of thorns [Well, of course not], or figs of thistles? (KJV)

No. That doesn't happen.

17) Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit.

18) A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit ... (KJV)

We need to think about that. It can't. He goes on to say ...

18b) ... neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. (KJV)

That's impossible, He says.

19) Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (KJV)

Then He repeats in verse 20 what He said in verse 16.

20) Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

21) Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. (KJV)

Those are the ones that are going to enter, not what we say, but what we do.

22) Many will say to me in that day ... (KJV)

We know when the Bible uses the term, "in that day" it's talking about the end time and the judgment day.

22b) ... Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? (KJV)

We've been on television, we've printed booklets, we've done all this kind of stuff.

23) And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity [lawlessness].

24) Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them ... (KJV)

chapter 5 and 6 and the beginning of chapter 7.

24b) ... I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ... (KJV)

This refers to trials, troubles, pressures.

25b) ... and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26) And every one that hears these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (KJV)

Remember these two examples of a house built on rock and a house built on sand are in the context of watching out for false prophets, and is in the context of whether we follow a false prophet or follow Jesus Christ. Remember that.

28) *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:*

29) *For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (KJV)*

Christ takes the last fifteen percent of this very first message and the emphasis is to beware of false prophets. He wouldn't do that if it wasn't important; He wouldn't do that at all.

Now the good news is what He said in verse 16 and verse 20. He said you can know them. You can know a false prophet. That is the title of the sermon.

You Can Know Them

We're going to talk about seven points that we will bring up in this context.

Point One: What and who is a false prophet?

We want to find what we're talking about. In verse 15, it says: *Beware of false prophets.*

The Greek word for "false prophet" is Strong's 5578 and it's "pseudoprophetes" and it's a combination of two other Greek words. The first one is Strong's 5571, "pseudes" which we get the English word "pseudo" and it means *untrue, erroneous, deceitful, wicked, false or a liar*. When we say, for example, pseudoscience, we're talking about false science. We're talking about science that's not true. We're talking about pseudo (false, untrue) prophets.

Then the other Greek word is "prophetes" which is Strong's 4396. Prophetes has two meanings. I think most of us know that. One means a *foreteller; one that can tell the future*. That's typically what we think of when the word "prophet" is used. Strong's 4396 also says that, by analogy, it means *an inspired speaker*. It doesn't have to talk about foretelling the future, but someone who is inspired in their speaking. Strong's, therefore, says about "pseudoprophetes"; it says *a spurious prophet that is a pretended foreteller or a religious imposter*.

That's what we're going to focus on today, religious imposters. That is what Christ was warning about. Zodiates in his Complete Word Study of the New Testament says, "A false prophet. One who falsely assumes the work of a prophet, pretending to foretell things to come." He cites Matthew 24:11. Now he talks about the second meaning of the word, "Teaching false doctrine in the name of God." He uses Matthew 7:15 which we just read, teaching false doctrine in the name of God.

So what Christ is saying is to beware of religious imposters. Beware of that. Look at the latter part of verse 15. These religious imposters come to you in sheep's clothing.

15) Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (KJV)

What He is saying is they appear as brethren on the outside, but He says on the inside there is something totally different.

The Greek word for "ravening" is Strong's 727, and it means *rapacious or predatory*. A lion or a wolf is a predator. The root word is Strong's 726, and it means *to seize, to catch away or to take by force*. He says that the pseudoprophets, these false prophets, want to seize God's people. They want to take them away from the truth. They want to take them by force.

False prophets don't have to be some well-known head of a false Christian religion, or they don't have to be some well-known head in the greater Church of God. They can be anyone who brings false doctrine. They can be anyone who wants to turn you from the truth. They can be anyone who wants to look to a man rather than look to God and Jesus Christ. They can be anyone who wants to put something between you and God. That happens in the Catholic Church where a priest is between you and God. It has happened in the greater churches of God over the years where a minister tries to insert himself between you and God. This is something to be very careful about. It can be anyone who wants to put us in the arms of Satan. This is someone who is used by Satan to carry us away from God into the arms of Satan.

So that's basically who and what a false prophet is.

Second Point: These false prophets promote and speak the spirit of error.

The original false prophet, of course, was Satan. When he was talking to Adam and Eve, he introduced a spirit of error. God told him the truth, but Satan told them the first lie.

Let's go to 1 John 4 and we're going to read the first six verses and cover this in detail. John knew that false prophets were out and about even in his time as we're going to see. He was warning the brethren and warning us today about this, because it is serious. Notice the first thing he says.

1 John 4:1. Beloved ... (KJV)

He's talking to the brethren and us today.

1b) ... believe not every spirit ... (KJV)

The Greek word for “spirit” is “pneuma” and it can also mean, in addition to *a spirit, a mind*. So it is a human being with a mind of a false prophet. He says not to believe every mind.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown says this about “every spirit” ... “Don’t believe every teacher claiming inspiration by the holy spirit.”

Just because they claim it doesn’t mean it is true.

1 continued) ... but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (KJV)

It was happening then and it is happening even more today with the internet, television, social media and all of that.

He said to try the spirits. That means to put them to the test. In Acts 17, we have the example of the Bereans in verses 10 and 11. When the gospel was brought to them, instead of just accepting it, they went to the scriptures daily to prove whether or not it was true. Sure enough, they did prove that it was true.

It’s just amazing how people accept false teachings. They’ve been in the church for decades and they don’t go back and really prove it. They just accept it.

2) Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come [or has come] in the flesh is of God:

3) And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist [meaning against Christ], whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (KJV)

When he wrote these words, Christ had been dead for a few decades. He had been resurrected and gone to heaven. The fact is, the spirit of anti-Christ was flooding the world, trying to wash away the teachings of Christ with messages from an anti-Christ.

Let me give you two examples of this false doctrine of Christ having come not in the flesh.

The first example is the Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception. That was established on December 8, 1854 by Pope Pius IX in what is called a papal bull. In that document, in addition to introducing the immaculate conception, he also introduced the idea of papal infallibility. That began its march through the Catholic Church. A papal bull is named after a lead seal. In Latin it’s called “bulla” and it was added to the end of the letter to authenticate the letter. Molten lead was poured and then the stamp was applied and then the lead cooled. The stamp is called a signet today. This was the signet of the pope. That gave the letter its authenticity. In 1854, this doctrine of the immaculate conception began. It concerns not the conception of Jesus Christ, it concerns the conception of Mary, when she was conceived in her mother’s womb.

What it says is that Mary was conceived in her mother's womb, but she was kept free from (as the Catholics use the term) original sin. This means she was kept free from the nature of Adam that was passed down, in their view, from generation to generation. We would say that she didn't have any human nature. All humans have human nature, but the Catholics say that Mary, from the time in the womb until she died, did not have human nature.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says, "No direct proof of the dogma can be brought forward from scripture." Think about that. Then it has a big "but" and then it goes on to use human reasoning to tell us how they came to the conclusion that Mary didn't have human nature. But they admit fully that it is not in scripture. You cannot prove it in scripture.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's Commentary said, "Rome, by the doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary, denies Christ's proper humanity." What they really mean is Christ didn't come fully in the flesh. This fits into what the Apostle John was saying, that it's anti-Christ if you say Christ didn't come in the flesh.

The second doctrine is the assumption of Mary. That was dogmatically defined by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950. I remember Pope Pius when I was a young kid. The pope was more in the news back then it seems. I remember him with the robes and all that and watching him on T.V. I always thought to myself that he looked like kind of an evil man to me. I was just a little kid. The assumption of Mary teaches that Mary (quoting from the Catholic Encyclopedia) "Having completed the course of her earthly life was assumed, body and soul, into heavenly glory." She didn't go to the grave. She was just raised up into heaven immediately after her time on earth was done. That indicates then that she wasn't fully human.

So these two doctrines teach that Mary was not fully human, therefore, Jesus Christ which came from her womb was not fully human either. So John was saying to beware of this. Sure enough, it has happened. Over a billion people today on earth believe that teaching. It's a perfect example when John says, "Believe not every spirit." Don't believe every mind that comes along and tries to teach you something.

Look at verse 4.

4) You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you ... (KJV)

Referring to the Father and the Son; They will make their dwelling in us.

4b) ... than he that is in the world. (KJV)

Which is referring to Satan.

5) *They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them.*

6) *We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears not us ... (KJV)*

Notice what he says in this last sentence.

6b) ... Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. (KJV)

There is a spirit of error out there and that spirit of error is being injected into God's people by false prophets. This is something we need to be careful of.

False prophets teach the error of Jewish doctrines. One of those errors that is making its way through the greater Church of God today is that we must use specific Old Testament names in addressing God. It's called the Sacred Names Movement. Yet despite the plain scriptures in the New Testament, you don't see any sacred names used in the New Testament. This is a spirit of error from Jewish doctrine.

There is a spirit of error of Catholic and Protestant doctrines. We talked about the two just a second ago. There is Christmas, Easter, the doctrine that birth control is a sin which is making its way into God's church. There is the doctrine that circumcision is mutilation of a young boy. That is making its way around. These are Catholic doctrines that have made their way by the spirit of error into the Church of God.

Then there is the error of worldly teachings. Someone sent me an article from a major Church of God group. I read it thoroughly. Your mind wants to explode, but it said that we should accept into the church practicing homosexuals because by bringing them in, God may be calling them and then by our example, we can help them overcome their sin. Your mind just wants to explode when you read something like that. It's their example to help them change. I thought, Paul didn't have that attitude in 1 Corinthians 5 when this young man was having sex with his step mother. He didn't say, "Oh yes, accept him in and maybe by your example, he will change over time." He did just the opposite. He said, "You're committing sin by having this guy in your midst. Get him out of the church." It just blows my mind that they would say, "practicing homosexuals". We talked about it before. The key is "practicing homosexuals". If somebody wants to come out of that and God is calling them, then yes, absolutely. If they have rejected that and God is calling them, then they can be a member, if they are not practicing it. But this is not what this article implied.

So we see that the spirit of error is coming into God's church. It has from day one and it continues to this day.

Let's go to John 10 and begin in verse 1. Christ is drawing an analogy. We call it the parable of the sheep fold, and it shows us very graphically what is happening when false prophets, inspired by Satan, bring error into the church.

John 10:1. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold ... (KJV)*

Remember a sheep fold is a rectangular area. In those days, the fence was made out of stones. It was high enough so the sheep couldn't jump over and then there was a gate at the short end. There was a gate keeper to let the sheep in and out as required.

1b) ... but climbs up some other way [over the rock wall], the same is a thief and a robber. (KJV)

He wants to get to the sheep.

2) But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3) To him the porter [gate keeper] opens; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.

4) And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them ... (KJV)

He doesn't kick them, whip them and beat them. He walks before them and calls them.

4b) ... and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5) And a stranger ... (KJV)

Meaning a false prophet or a false brother or sister.

5b) ... will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. (KJV)

They are converted enough to know when Christ is speaking and when He is not speaking.

6) This parable spoke Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spoke unto them.

7) Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you ... (KJV)

Now He is explaining the parable.

7b) ... I am the door of the sheep.

8) All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9) I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

Meaning they will find food and sustenance. If you go through the door, if you try to hop over the wall, that isn't so.

10) The thief cometh not ... (KJV)

He is saying what the motivation is of these false prophets.

10b) ... but for to steal ... (KJV)

Meaning to steal the sheep away from the true shepherd.

10 continued) ... and to kill ... (KJV)

Meaning to kill them physically, if possible.

10 continued) ... and to destroy ... (KJV)

Meaning to destroy them so they will not have eternal life. Christ says:

10 continued) ... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

11) I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. (KJV)

We know that. The disciples, when they heard this, didn't understand it at the time, but we know that.

12) But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming ... (KJV)

It's interesting the analogy we've read about the wolf in sheep's clothing.

12b) ... and leaves the sheep, and flees: and the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep.

13) The hireling flees, because he is an hireling, and cares not for the sheep.

14) I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. (KJV)

Through the holy spirit, through study, through prayer. You see, the problem today is that Satan is succeeding with all too many of the sheep.

Last week I was talking with a minister and he said, "I had a member come up to me that has been in the church for three or four decades." This man said, "I've come to the conclusion that there are many gods." It just blew his mind. He believes there are all kinds of gods out there. It makes you wonder where this guy has been. What's going on? Who's whispering in his ear?

Other beliefs coming in regarding false doctrines is that Christ is a created being.

Another one is that Christ sinned as a young boy.

Women don't have to be submissive to their husbands.

Men have the right to abuse their wives. The list goes on and on.

Remember, false prophets want to instill in God's people the spirit of error. A false prophet has the same motive as Satan. Remember Matthew 7:15, they come to you in sheep's clothing, but they are predatory wolves. That Greek word means *to seize or to take away*. That is their motivation, the same motivation as Satan.

So ending this second point, remember that wolves are there to devour. They are not there to help you, but to lead you and me astray. So let's remember the motives of these false prophets.

Third Point: The Bible says clearly that false prophets will be with us until the very end, until Christ returns.

There is not going to be a respite. There's not going to be a vacation. They're going to be there with us until the very end.

Let's go to Matthew 13 and begin in verse 24. This is the parable of the tares and we can draw a very clear connection between false prophets, false brethren and tares, because that is exactly what they are.

Matthew 13:24. *Another parable put he [Christ] forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven [that's the subject] is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:*

25) But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. (KJV)

The Greek word for "tares" is Strong's 2215, and it means literally *false grain*. You could say false wheat. These are plants that look like wheat, but they really aren't wheat, and by analogy, false brethren or false prophets. There was a grain in the Middle East at that time that, when it was young, it looked exactly like wheat. At the time of the harvest when the wheat began to reach maturity, then you could tell the difference between the false grain and true wheat.

26) But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. (KJV)

So we see here that the tares are in the church right beside true brethren. The fact is, both produced fruit. The wheat produced its fruit which we can eat and use, but also the tares produced fruit. True brethren bring forth good fruit. False brethren bring forth evil fruit.

27) So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? from whence then has it tares?

28) *He said unto them, An enemy has done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*

29) *But he said, No; lest while you gather up the tares, you root up also the wheat with them.*

30) *Let both grow together until the harvest ... (KJV)*

This says very clearly that the tares are going to be there with the wheat until the harvest. True brethren, false brethren and false prophets will be together until the harvest. We may as well accept it; it's going to happen.

30b) *... and in the time of harvest I will say ... (KJV)*

Notice, it says, "I will say." Now this is no longer a parable, because He is referring to Himself.

30 continued) *... to the reapers, Gather you together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*

36) *Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.*

37) *He answered and said unto them, He that sows the good seed is the Son of man; (KJV)*

Christ said, "It's Me. I sow the good seed."

38) *The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom ... (KJV)*

These are the firstfruits, the ones that God calls first.

38b) *but the tares are the children of the wicked one; (KJV)*

They are the false brethren, and they are the false prophets.

39) *The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. (KJV)*

It can't be any clearer than this. It is absolutely crystal clear.

40) *As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.*

41) *The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity [break God's law];*

42) *And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (KJV)*

They don't want to go into the lake of fire. "Haven't we done this? Haven't we done that? Haven't we been on TV and haven't we said righteous things and all of that?" There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43) Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father ... (KJV)

Now here is the warning.

43b) ... Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (KJV)

We've got to listen. We've got to understand these words. Remember what Christ said in Matthew 21, "Not everyone that says unto me, 'Lord, Lord' is going to be in the Kingdom of God."

So the third point is: We have to get accustomed to the reality that false prophets are going to be with us until Christ returns.

Fourth Point: The fourth point is a sad point, and that is that some brethren will eagerly follow these false teachers.

They will eagerly follow them. Let's go to Isaiah 30 and see a commentary about Ancient Israel. We know that we are spiritual Israel, so this applies to us. Notice the condemnation of physical Israel.

Isaiah 30:9. That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the ETERNAL: (KJV)

Wow. That's a bad condemnation.

10) Which say to the seers, see not; and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: (KJV)

They want to be lied to because it sounds good, and it feels good.

These false prophets say:

11) Get you out of the way, turn aside from of the path ... (KJV)

Remember, straight is the way, narrow is the way. No, no, you can do whatever you want. You can go way over here to the left or way over here to the right. Don't worry about it.

11b) ... cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. (KJV)

“We don’t want to hear about God. We want to come and be entertained and hear stories. We want to come and hear a book report or current events or the latest psychobabble that’s going on. Don’t tell us about God. Don’t tell us about what the Bible says.”

As I said, the greater Church of God is spiritual Israel, and as with Ancient Israel, guess what? Nothing has changed. The same problems still exist, because people don’t exercise God’s spirit.

Let’s go to Jeremiah 5 and we’ll read verses 30 and 31. This is astounding. This is from the New Living Translation. The mindset of human beings is astounding.

Jeremiah 5:30. *A horrible and shocking thing has happened in this land— (NLT)*

It’s happening before our eyes.

31) the prophets give false prophecies, and the priests rule with an iron hand. Worse yet, my people like it that way! ... (NLT)

That is happening in the greater church. It happened in Ancient Israel.

31b) ... But what will you do when the end comes? (NLT)

Boy, what a condemnation! People like to be led astray. They like to hear smooth things and nice things rather than what comes out of the Bible.

Now, in this context, let’s go to 1 Timothy 4, and see that this exact thing was prophesied to happen in the end days, and we are right now in the end days. We’ll read the first two verses. We’ve read them many times. This brings it home as far as the fact that people will eagerly follow false teaching.

1 Timothy 4:1. *Now the Spirit speaks expressly ... (NKJV)*

This is God’s spirit inspiring the minds of men to write this down.

1b) ... that in the latter times [and we are in the latter times] some shall depart from the faith ... (KJV)

Why do they do that? They follow false prophets or false brethren.

1 continued) ... giving heed to seducing spirits ... (KJV)

Just what we read in Jeremiah 5 and Isaiah 30, giving heed to seducing spirits. Those spirits can be spiritual spirits as in Satan, or they can be physical minds as in false prophets or false brethren.

1 continued) ... and doctrines of demons; (KJV)

Doctrines of demons to make us go astray.

2) Speaking lies in hypocrisy ... (KJV)

They pretend to be sheep, but inside they are wolves and they are hypocrites, he is saying.

2b) ... having their conscience seared with a hot iron; (KJV)

They speak lies to gain a following. They speak lies to get money. Ananias and Sapphira did that. Simon Magus did that, both in the Book of Acts. Speaking lies to have the praise of men; we have seen that. Speaking lies to exalt the self and we have seen that.

Now let's ask the question. Why do brethren like it that way? Why is there a certain group that likes it that way and wants it that way? The Bible talks about it. There are a couple of reasons we will talk about. The first one is that the Bible talks about people with "itching ears".

Let's go to 2 Timothy 4:3. Timothy is telling us why people won't endure the truth and won't endure sound teaching. Paul is telling young Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:3. *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine [teaching]; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; (KJV)*

The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. That is a motivation. They want something to tickle their ears, to scratch the itch in their ears. They desire to hear things that satisfy their lusts, to elevate themselves over others, to elevate their group over other groups, to aggrandize their own knowledge that they know more than you or me or someone else. They're not satisfied with the trunk of the tree. They want to hear something new that titillates the ears way out here on the twigs and branches and leaves. They do not study to correct themselves. They study to prove their superiority over others. We see that in the church a lot. We need to study and correct ourselves. But there's a group out there that studies so they can prove they have superior knowledge, superior intellect. They know more facts, therefore, they are way up here and look down on those of us who are below them. They don't study to correct themselves. So itching ears is one reason.

A second reason is people want to put the burden of their conduct on someone over them. They want to put the responsibility of their conduct on somebody over them. This was years ago, but a lady in the church went to have an interview for a job. I think it was with WalMart. They asked her to work on the Sabbath. Her answer was, "My minister won't let me work on the Sabbath." She was putting the blame on me. I

happened to be her minister at the time. It was my fault that she couldn't work on the Sabbath. She had to obey her minister, but she really didn't want to. "That's what he says, so that's what I've got to do. So will you cut me some slack here?" She said this to WalMart. In other words, she was not taking responsibility for her own actions.

I heard a prophet/apostle/evangelist say, and I'm quoting, "If you obey me and I am wrong, you will not be held accountable." Talk about false teaching! He said, "If you obey me and follow me and I'm wrong, God will not hold you accountable." That is deception of the highest order.

Look at Revelation 20:12. This is the reality. There are people that are hooked on that and they think, "As long as I follow this guy, I don't have to think. I don't have to do anything. I just follow him. If he's wrong, God will hold him accountable, but I don't have to worry about it.

This is how it's really going to happen. Christ is telling John.

Revelation 20:12. *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to ... (KJV)*

Their minister's works? The prophets works?

12b) ... according to their works. (KJV)

You can't get around it, yet some people want to follow a false prophet because it absolves them of that responsibility. Or they follow a false prophet because their ears are just itching like crazy and they want to get it scratched by some "out there" teaching. We must be on guard about false teachers and not follow them.

Fifth Point: We can know false prophets and we can identify false prophets.

This is the good news, and this is the whole point of the sermon really. It's very easy. Christ never gives us a problem that He doesn't also present a solution for, because He is our Savior. He is our Master.

Remember, false prophets come to us in sheep's clothing. Inwardly they are predatory animals. That means if we judge on the appearance, if we judge their demeanor, we can be deceived. The old quote: "You can't judge a book by its cover". Here's a bit of trivia: "You can't judge a book by its cover" was brought forth in a 1962 song by rock and roll pioneer, Bo Diddley. It happens to be true; you can't judge a book by its cover. He performed this song written by a guy named Willey Dickson.

Let's go to John 7:24. Christ says the same thing. Bo Diddley came along a long time after Jesus Christ, so Christ is setting the absolute standard here. Christ said something very fundamental here.

John 7:24. *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. (KJV)*

How do we do that? Christ said we can know these false prophets. In Matthew 7:16 and 18, He said, "You shall know them by their fruits." Then He said, "Can you get grapes from a thorn bush? Can you get figs from a thistle bush?" You can't do that. He said it again: "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, and a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." He said, "You shall know them." The Greek word for "know" is Strong's 1921, and it means to *recognize, and by implication, to become fully acquainted with or to perceive*. You can perceive their intentions. You can perceive what is underneath the outer skin appearing to be a sheep. He said we can know them by watching their fruits, by watching what they do and not necessarily what they say.

What should the fruits be? Let's go to Galatians 5. We've been there many times. We're going to read verses 22 and 23 and then jump to verse 25. We have to analyze whether we are looking at a group or an individual. What are the fruits?

Galatians 5:22. *But the fruit of the Spirit is ... (KJV)*

We have to analyze, does this person or group exhibit:

22b) ... *love, joy, peace, longsuffering [cut people slack], gentleness, goodness, faith,*
23) *Meekness, temperance [self control]: against such there is no law. (KJV)*

There is a warning here:

25) *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (KJV)*

This means what we do. Our behavior and conduct should reflect these values. Christ is telling us to look at the values, look at the fruits. Analyze the individual. Analyze the group by looking at the fruits of the holy spirit. If you see those fruits there, then you have a true brother or a true group of brothers and sisters. If you don't, we'll get into that in a minute.

Sixth Point: How should we deal with false prophets?

What is our responsibility. The first thing we need to understand is that we are not here to judge false prophets. We are not here to condemn them or to be in judgment or to put them on trial.

Let's go to Luke 6:37. Christ had a very clear warning about that. This happens all too often, and I've been guilty of it. We've all been guilty of it. Christ says:

Luke 6:37. *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: (KJV)*

The Greek word for "judge" is Strong's 2919. It's the Greek word "krino" in English. It means to *condemn* or *to damn* or *to sentence*. It means you're acting as a judge. You pronounce sentence, you damn someone or condemn someone. He said, "Don't do that. I don't care who they are. Don't do that." You see, only Christ does that.

Look at John 5:22. When we judge others, we take over the authority of Jesus Christ and we don't want to go there. We don't want to start taking over Christ's job.

John 5:22. *For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son: (KJV)*

Christ is the one who will sentence people. He is the one who will condemn people to the lake of fire, not any of us.

So, if we are not to judge, what are we supposed to do? We are to distance ourselves from false brethren and false prophets. That's what we can do is just put distance between us and people who claim to be true brethren, but are wolves in sheep's clothing.

Let's go to Titus 3:10. This is a principle that we need to keep in mind. There are tares out there, there are false prophets out there, there are false brethren who attempt to associate with and intermingle with the wheat that was planted in the field in the parable of the tares.

Titus 3:10. *A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject; (KJV)*

You give them a chance. You warn them. After the first and second admonition you reject them.

The Greek word for "heretic" is Strong's 141. It's a very interesting word. It means a *schismatic*. The Oxford English Dictionary says of a schismatic; it is a person who promotes division. It's a person who promotes schism. Certainly a false prophet or false brother or sister, in an attempt to divide or take away, promotes division. We are being told here that someone who promotes division, after you warn them a couple of times, then reject them.

Look at 2 John 10. We're talking about putting distance, not arguing, not fighting, not judging or condemning. Just put distance. Here John says it plainly.

2 John 10. *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: (KJV)*

In other words, don't get close to them. If you do not see fruits of the holy spirit, but you see fruits of deception, conflict, anger, arguments, debates, bad feelings; if you see that fruit, just walk away. If you're in a continual fight in a boxing match and you just have this anger and hatred and condemnation and conflict and confrontation, then the best way is to get out of the boxing ring and walk away. So we should treat false prophets by putting much distance as possible between us and them.

I received a call this week from a guy who is having trouble with a tare. He said, "Why don't you come down and talk to this person?" I wrote back and said, "Absolutely not!" I have said everything that needs to be said over and over, so let's just have some distance. The track record is there. We're not going to go there again. We're not going to revisit this problem. We need to keep a distance, and he understood.

Seventh Point: Let's look at what we have to face going forward from this day that involves false prophets.

Let's go to Matthew 24, and we will read verses 21 through 25. It's not a pretty picture, and we better gird up our loins, because this is what we have to face going forward. We are familiar with this scripture, but let's read this with the idea of facing false prophets as we go forward.

Matthew 24:21. *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. (KJV)*

You can see it today. It is starting to build and build. There are forty-one wars going on in the world today. There is Israel and Hamas ... no solution. Syria, Iran, ISIS ... no solution. Russia, Ukraine ... no solution. Ebola ... no solution. All of this is going on and it's building and building. There's never been a time.

22) And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake [our sake] those days shall be shortened. (KJV)

God is merciful.

23) Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. (KJV)

Don't believe him. He's a false prophet. He's a false brother. Or you could say, "Come with me and I'll show you the way to Christ. If you come with me, I'll make sure you get a seat on the bus to the place of safety. I'll make sure you have a leg up on the Kingdom of God if you follow me." That's being a false Christ, because only Christ can save. Only Christ can forgive sins.

24) For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders ... (KJV)

This is a warning because there will be people who claim to be Christ's ministers. There will be people who will claim to be prophets, and to back it up, they're going to be able to perform miracles. We cannot be deceived. What are their fruits? I don't care what the miracles are, what are their fruits? What are they telling us to do or not do? It will be scary times, and some people are going to be deceived, sad to say. They are going to perform great signs and wonders.

24b) ... insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. (KJV)

It's interesting, *if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

25) Behold, I have told you before. (KJV)

He says, "I am telling you in advance."

I thought for years about the very elect, if it is possible to deceive the very elect, and the only thing I have learned is that only we can allow ourselves to be deceived. I am the only one that can allow myself to be deceived. You are the only one that can allow yourself to be deceived. That's what Christ says, "If it's possible, they will be deceived." Only we can allow it.

Right now, you see, we're in preparation for building up our strength, our faith, our knowledge, our understanding so that these times come we will not be deceived.

Let's go to 2 Thessalonians 2. See what we have to look forward to. We'll read the first 12 verses.

2 Thessalonians 2:1. *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, (KJV)*

That's our goal. We want to be gathered into Christ's arms.

2) That you be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. (KJV)

As it gets closer, He says don't be shaken up. Don't be troubled no matter what letter under whose authority it comes, because false prophets are going to be there to deceive you.

3) Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first ... (KJV)

We have seen that to a degree already. At the peak, the Worldwide Church of God attendance was close to 200,000, and look at it today. I know a lot of people have died, we understand that, but well over half just disappeared into the woodwork. They fell away. That is a precursor to this.

- 3b) ... and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;*
- 4) Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God ... (KJV)*

Eve wanted to be equal with God and so did Adam. Here's a guy that says he is God.

- 4b) ... or that is worshipped; so that he as God ... (KJV)*

Meaning he is replacing God. Of course, the pope claims to be the vicar of Christ, the one who is replacing Christ here on earth.

- 4 continued) ... sits in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. (KJV)*

Showing himself that he is God through miracles and wonders that will deceive the very elect unless they are on guard.

- 5) Remember you not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? (KJV)*

Verse 6 I will read out of the NLT because it's clearer than the King James.

- 6) And you know what is holding him back, for he can be revealed only when his time comes. (NLT)*

This man who appears to be God.

- 7) For this lawlessness is already at work secretly [as we speak], and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way. (NLT)*

The one who is holding it back steps out of the way and allows it to come on the world.

- 8) And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:*
- 9) Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan... (KJV)*

A false prophet to the nth degree.

- 9b) ... with all power and signs and lying wonders,*
- 10) And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish ... (KJV)*

It can be translated "are perishing" because they follow this false prophet.

10b) ... because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (KJV)

The love of the truth, the truth that the Bereans proved every day. The truth that is in the Bible, not what some human says or some miracle that draws attention to a person.

11) And for this cause God shall send them [those that lean this way with itching ears] strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: (KJV)

That is what is happening this very day and the solution is, as Christ inspired Paul to write, we have to have a love for the truth and we have to hold onto it with all our being.

12) That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (KJV)

I can remember our old church friends in Lubbock when the change was announced that you could eat pork. That very Sabbath, a group of them went out and ate pork. They had pleasure in unrighteousness. They just couldn't wait. Some had been in the church twenty and thirty years and they just couldn't wait. You see, they had pleasure in breaking God's law and pleasure in satisfying the self. Also, you can have pleasure in elevating the self, pleasure in condemning others, pleasure in judging others and pleasure in not forgiving. There is a certain pleasure in not forgiving someone, holding their feet to the fire. Rather than that we should be like Jesus Christ. What did Christ do? He emptied himself. He sacrificed Himself. He esteemed others better than Himself, and that's what we need to be doing.

So in conclusion, toward the end of the sermon, Christ gave us the bottom line. Let's go back to Matthew 7 and verses 22 and 23. Here is the conclusion of the matter.

Matthew 7:22. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? ... (KJV)*

We have the outward appearance of being your people.

22b) ... and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23) And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (KJV)

That is a scary proposition. This is how Christ will ultimately deal with false prophets and false brethren.

Let's go to Luke 19 and verse 27 for a final scripture. This is the bottom line. This is something we have to keep in mind. Christ loves us, and He has called us and has given us the opportunity for salvation, but it's up to us. If we fail, if we go the way of Satan, this is the bottom line. Christ says it very plainly.

Luke 19:27. *But those my enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them here, and slay them before me. (KJV)*

Christ says, "I want to watch them die, because I want to make sure that they are gone forever with their evil deeds and their evil thoughts and they will nevermore bother My children." He is going to make sure of that personally. That is the bottom line. There is a powerful message here, and that message is, not everyone is going to make the Kingdom of God. Not everyone is going to be in the Kingdom of God.

So what Christ is saying in the conclusion of His very first sermon is to beware of false prophets. We need to heed that. We need to be aware of it to the bottom of our being. What we need to do is use the remaining time wisely to study, to pray, to know God's words so we will not be deceived, and we will be there when the time comes for us to become the bride of Christ and marry our Savior.