

False Teachers May Be In Your Church

Have you ever had reason to wonder if your pastor was a false teacher? Or if not your pastor, is there someone who regularly teaches in your church who has you wondering if they are a false teacher? It can be a valid question. The problem is how do you determine if he or she is a false teacher? When I say “she,” I am referring to women teaching women’s groups, as opposed to being a pastor of a church.

Have you ever seen the survey results where researchers ask individuals if they thought that their pastor was a false teacher? I went on the Internet and I looked to see if somebody had ever surveyed Christians whether or not they were concerned if their pastor was a false teacher. If it exists, I could not find it. It does not seem to be a question of much concern.

I know there are those who have come to the conclusion that their pastor was a false teacher, and then chose to leave the church. I have had people write to Never Thirsty.org and ask if their pastor was a false teacher, and we have had to respond to them,

based on the information they provided.

I think it can be difficult for many people to reach the conclusion that their pastor is a false teacher, especially if they have been sitting under his teaching for some time. Even though it is a difficult subject to deal with, we know there are pastors who are false teachers. Some have large churches with many in attendance. They sit there, and think their church is wonderful. One pastor has a stadium full of 20,000 people

on a Sunday morning. His congregant obviously thinks he is wonderful, but do not realize he is a false teacher. False teachers have existed since Genesis 3, and the first one was Satan. In Genesis 3:1 Satan asked Eve if God had said,

You shall not eat from any tree of the garden? Genesis 3:1 (NASB)

Now, that was not true, because what God told Adam was that he could eat of any tree of the garden, except for one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Satan said, “You cannot eat of any of the trees.” He inserted the word “not.”

In John 8:44, Jesus called Satan the father of lies. Paul refers to Satan as the angel of light. So when Paul refers to Satan as

the angel of light, we understand that what he is saying is that Satan appears to be truthful, but is not. He is a deceiver who deceives people. That is the root problem of false religion. That is the root problem of all other religions, and people who are deceived



by them. Think about how many different religions are in the world. Satan is their architect. The way I like to put it is that Satan has provided a smorgasbord of different religions from which people choose and think they are worshiping the true God. There is just enough truth in them to suck people in. They then follow that religion or cult.

False prophets existed in the Old Testament. We know that Moses defined false prophets in Deuteronomy 18:20. He made

the point that the root problem of a false prophet, teacher, or priest is that they claim to speak for God. In Deuteronomy 18, God tells us how to determine whether or not someone is speaking for God. If they make a prophecy, it will come true. If they say something and it does not come true, they are not from God. The message is they will accurately state what God said. The issue then for the listener is what do they say? Are they accurately communicating what God has communicated? The Bible, both in the Old Testament and New Testament, is full of words that God has spoken. That is why we call it the Word of God. They are God's words, and he has spoken in it. So one of the responsibilities of a prophet, priest or teacher is that we accurately communicate what God has spoken. A false teacher will not do that. A false teacher is not really interested in accuracy—he is interested in a following. That is what he really wants.

Malachi was written to priests, and God had an interesting dialogue with the priests of Israel. In Malachi 2:6, God communicated through the prophet Malachi to the priests in Israel,

True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips . . . Malachi 2:6 (NASB)

God was talking about Aaron, and you can pick that up, if you move back to verse 5.

. . . he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. Malachi 2:6-7 (NASB)

This verse is very important because it tells us what a priest—or we could say a prophet or a teacher—is supposed to do.

For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge . . . Malachi 2:7 (NASB)

Watch this: a false teacher is not interested in preserving knowledge.

Verse 8 says,

But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction . . . Malachi 2:8a (NASB)

Why? Because the instruction is false.

“. . . you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the LORD of hosts. “So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.” Malachi 2:8b-9 (NASB)

Now notice the last part of verse 9. The problem that the priests had was that they were showing partiality in their instruction. That is, in some way they were distorting the truth, perhaps to please the people. That is usually the way this is understood, and that is probably the correct interpretation, that they showed partiality in the way that they taught it—for some purpose, maybe to please the people in order to get a following. The message is: this was written to priests who had the responsibility to teach the law. Instead, they were distorting it. Chapter 3, verse 14 then reads,

You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts? So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.’” Malachi 3:14 (NASB)

What they are doing is complaining. Now watch what happens in verse 16.

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. Malachi 3:16 (NASB)

Verse 16 shifts and starts talking about the true remnant. What does that mean about everything in chapters 1, 2, and most of chapter 3? It was written to priests who were not

believers. They were not part of the remnant. These were men who were priests and were teaching. Listen to that! They were teaching and yet were not believers! Today we would say that they are not Christians, but in the Old Testament, they were not believers. Yet they were in the ministry and were teaching. We have the same problem today. We have people who are in ministry but are not true believers. They are teaching the Bible. Somehow they receive a benefit from it. They enjoy teaching what they consider spiritual truth about something, but they are not real. They are false teachers. They are unbelievers teaching the Bible without the Holy Spirit. What can you expect? Nothing but error. Sometimes they will teach something right, but not always.

FALSE TEACHERS HAVE SLIPPED IN UNNOTICED. Our study is similar to 2 Peter 2, but we are now in Jude verse 4. Our study is about false teachers in the Church. We were given that hint in verse 3 where we were told that we are to contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all handed down to the saints. We made the point that the prophets and the apostles handed it down, once for all. The content of the faith is done or completed. There are no legitimate prophets today with new revelation. There are no apostles today. No one today can add to Scripture. It was the Lord's apostles and prophets of old who handed it down once for all. What we are to be doing today is contending earnestly, fighting for the truth and encouraging people to believe it.

Verse 4 then gives us the transition. Notice the word "for."

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed . . . Jude 4a (NASB)

What Jude is saying was they had to contend earnestly for the faith because there were false teachers in the church. He did not say maybe. Notice the way he put it: "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed." They were in the church. It is not a matter of were they going to be in the church. The point is, they are in churches today. The only question is, are they in your church? Is there a false teacher in the pulpit or in your Sunday school classes or in your Bible study? What Jude does is he lays out five facts about false teachers to help you evaluate.

2 Peter 2 also gives us the characteristics of false teachers. Jude does not give us the entire list. He summarizes it here in

verse 4, and we will see more in the rest of the book. But now we are going to look at only verse 4. The first fact I want you to see is he says, "Certain persons have crept in unnoticed." He is talking about false teachers now.

Sadly the church is often blind to these men and women. He says,

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed . . . Jude 4a (NASB)

It means there can be false teachers in our churches that we do not know about because they snuck in and have been unnoticed. I thought it was interesting he said, "certain persons." Why does he say "certain persons"? Somebody has said, "Why did he not just name who they were?" He could have named this person and that person. Paul did that, he talked about Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17). He actually named individuals who were false teachers. Jude does not do that. I believe one of the reasons he did not mention specific individuals is that such individuals are going to keep showing up in churches. If he had named specific individuals, we might conclude, "Oh, those are the false teachers," and not be on guard. So he just says, "certain persons" and we do not know who they are. So we have to watch; we need to look out for them. They are not going to be wearing a sign saying, "I am a false teacher."

In Matthew 13:36-39, Jesus gave the parable of the tares, where the point was made that a tare looks like wheat. Jesus made the point that the devil sews the tares among the wheat. That means there are unbelievers who have been sewn among the believers. To put it another way, there can be non-Christians in your church who look like Christians. A tare looks like wheat until it is full grown. Jesus made the point that you may not know until the end of the age when judgment comes. They will be in the church, they will look good, they could be in the pulpit, they could be an elder, they could be a church leader, maybe they are on the church board. They might be teaching a Sunday school class and sound good. That is a scary thought.

In Revelation 1:1-2, we read about the church of Ephesus. It is an amazing passage of Scripture. We often think about the fact that this is the church that left their first love. But we should not miss verse 2. God is speaking to the pastor at

Ephesus. When verse 1 speaks about the angel of the church, it is actually referring to the pastor of the church. The word “angel” just means messenger. Revelation 2:2 says,

I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men . . . Revelation 2:2a (NASB)

Not tolerating evil men. That is good.

. . . and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false . . . Revelation 2:2b (NASB)

So these are men who pretended to be apostles, where they were free to teach error, and they wanted the people to believe them. The message is that there are men in churches who have come in unnoticed. The Greek word for “unnoticed” has the idea to slip into a group unnoticed, to sneak in, to secretly penetrate; their entry is intentional. They sneak right into the church and people think they are real. It may be that they know they are not real or it may be that they think they are real. I believe a lot of people in churches think that they are really Christians who are not. Jude is saying that they have crept in unnoticed. They may be in your church or mine. They may be in our pulpits, in church leadership, in Bible studies, or teaching Sunday school classes. The message is that it can be hard to identify them.

The late Dr. J. Vernon McGee had a very interesting comment about Jude 4. He writes this about this verse. He says,

I have been in church for many years, and I have been, and still am, an ordained Presbyterian preacher—although I am in no denomination today, and have no denominational connections at all. As a young person, I remember that the church was by and large sound in the faith. When I went to the denominational college, I began to discover that there were ministers who denied practically every tenet of the faith. That opened up a new world to me. Then, when I went to the denominational seminary, I found that the liberal element was still growing. The day came when I left that denomination and came to California. Here I entered another denomination, and when I saw it was going into liber-

alism, I got out. I was not put out, I just stepped out voluntarily. And during that long period, I saw how these men were able to take over a church. They came in the side door, they came in by professing one thing and believing another. They did not come in the front door—that is, they did not declare their doctrinal position. Many of our good laymen have been deceived by ministers like that. Scripture has warned about them. For instance, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Of such are false apostles and deceitful workers transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if he has ministers who also are transformed into ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). The expression “transforming themselves” in this verse is very interesting. The Greek word has the idea of the act of an individual who is changing his outward expression by assuming an expression put on from the outside. It is a method of Satan.

Over the years I have seen as many as a dozen strong, outstanding churches across America fall into the hands of liberalism by this method. It is the most deceitful method in the world. Let me give you an instance of one church. I will not give the location, because the chances are that you know one like it in the area in which you live. It was at one time a church in which the word of God was preached and people were being saved, and hearts were being blessed. And then the pastor retired and resigned. A new man appeared on the scene. When he met with the pulpit committee, and met with the elders, they asked him about his doctrinal beliefs. He assured them that he believed in all the great doctrines of the faith. You see, he came in the side door because he really did not believe them. He only pretended to believe them and pretended to be sound in the faith, and the interesting thing is that his trial sermon sounded as though he were sound in the faith. He probably read Spurgeon or Warfield or G. Campbell Morgan, and had borrowed enough of their material to preach a good sermon. Hearing him, the congregation thought, “This man is fine.” So they called him as their pastor. But remember that he came in by the side door. He did not believe the doctrine that he preached. Before long they discovered they had a liberal on their hands.¹

1. J. Vernon McGee. 1 Corinthians through Revelation. Thru The Bible. Nelson Publishing. 1983. pp.852.

I am afraid that is common—and not the only way that false teachers get into our churches. They just come in, and all of a sudden they start changing the things that they used to believe. The reason that they change is they were never a real believer to begin with because the Holy Spirit otherwise would have been guiding them and directing them.

FALSE TEACHERS HAVE BEEN PROPHESED. Then Jude 4 gives us the next fact about false teachers,

... those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation . . . Jude 4b (NASB)

It is a long phrase, but basically the phrase is telling us that in the Old Testament, God had already prophesied that false teachers, prophets, and priests would come. Jeremiah 5:13-14 is a great passage about the coming of false prophets. Hosea 4:1-9 is another incredible passage. Hosea 9:7-9 is another passage that warns that false prophets are coming, and they are going to be judged. Zephaniah 3:1-8, and especially verses 6, 7, and 8 in that passage, talks about false teachers being judged.

Hosea 4:1 gives us some more helpful information,

Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel,
For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land,
Because there is no faithfulness or kindness
Or knowledge of God in the land.
Hosea 4:1 (NASB)

Now that is a stunning statement. God is communicating to the nation of Israel through the prophet Hosea, and He says there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. That means that there were prophets and priests, but they really were not teaching. Verse 2 adds,

There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery.
They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.
Hosea 4:2 (NASB)

In other words, murder after murder after murder.

Verse 3 says,

Therefore the land mourns,

And everyone who lives in it languishes
Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky,
And also the fish of the sea disappear.
Hosea 4:3 (NASB)

One of the things we are finding is that sea life is disappearing in the sea. Animals that live in the oceans are disappearing; we are killing them off. I thought it was an interesting statement in verse 3. It is an act of judgment.

Verse 4 explains that no one is ever condemned.

Yet let no one find fault . . . Hosea 4:4a (NASB)

This is an interesting statement! The message is, “Let no one find fault, let none offer reproach.” That is, everything is okay—whatever you do is alright. If you sin, that is okay, we understand. Just let everybody live, and everybody gets to do what they want to do.

For your people are like those who contend with the priest.
So you will stumble by day,
And the prophet also will stumble with you by night;
And I will destroy your mother.
Hosea 4:4b-5 (NASB)

God is talking about judgment. Now watch verse 6.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge . . .
Hosea 4:6a (NASB)

That is, the people really are not interested in knowledge. Keep reading.

I also will reject you from being My priest.
Hosea 4:6b (NASB)

So what is God saying? Who is it that rejected the knowledge? The priests. So here are priests in the nation of Israel, whose responsibility it is to teach the word of God. Hosea, the prophet is telling the priests that they are the ones who were

supposed to be teaching it, but they have rejected knowledge of the word. They are not teaching it. He says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” They are not teaching the Scriptures is the point.

In the last part of verse 6 God says,

Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.
Hosea 4:6c (NASB)

So here are the priests in Israel who were supposed to teach the Scriptures or the word of God. They have forgotten it, and who knows what they are teaching! They may have been teaching wonderful religious application—things about loving people and forgiving people, but they were not teaching Scripture. They were ignoring the content of Scripture. That is terrible.

Verse 7:

The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me . . .
Hosea 4:7a (NASB)

It is talking about the priests.

. . . I will change their glory into shame. Hosea 4:7b (NASB)

In other words, the priests should be something that is glorious. They were supposed to be spokesmen for God!

They feed on the sin of My people
And direct their desire toward their iniquity.
Hosea 4:8 (NASB)

What is this? Not only are the priests not teaching Scripture, but they are sinning. If they want to sin, they just go ahead. It is not a big deal for them. God is loving, God is merciful, God is understanding.

Verse 9 says,

And it will be, like people, like priest;
So I will punish them for their ways
And repay them for their deeds.

Hosea 4:9 (NASB)

This is a very strong passage. I thought it was interesting when God says, “It will be like people, like priests.” In other words, the priests are becoming like the people. And how should it actually work out? It should be the people becoming like the priests. But the priests are becoming like the people. The prophet is talking to false priests. These are not true priests, true to their calling. The false prophets are in the Old Testament. False priests are in the Old Testament, and there are false teachers in the New Testament and in our churches today. Jude says they have crept in unawares—they are here. The only question is, how can we identify them?

FALSE TEACHERS ARE UNGODLY. That leads us now to the third fact. It is also the second characteristic of false teachers. (What we just talked about is a fact, it was not a characteristic). The third fact is that they are ungodly persons. Ungodly refers to the idea that they were living without regard to a standard, without regard to a biblical standard. The early Church fathers used the term to refer to atheists and heretics. That is an important statement. The message is that they play at religion. It implies that they look good on the outside, but what are they like at home? What happens when they have the computer in front of their eyes? What do they actually look at? When no one is looking, what do they do?

I know of one pastor whose church was failing in California, and so he moved to Arizona. Everyone was wondering why this very gifted man had a church that was dwindling in numbers. It was discovered after he had been in Arizona for a while—his son actually stumbled onto it—that he had porn all over his computer. That is why his church was dwindling in California. God’s judgment. God removed his blessing, that is what happened.

One of the characteristics of a false teacher is that he is also into sin, various kinds of sins. He is ungodly in a variety of different ways.

FALSE TEACHERS TEACH GOD IS OKAY WITH LICENTIOUSNESS. The fourth fact, and the third characteristic is that he turns the grace of God into licentiousness. Licentiousness refers to sexual excess, or shameless excess. He is uninhibited when it comes to sex, to various kinds of sexual sins. The

Greek word that is translated as “licentiousness” in the New American Standard is translated as “sensuality” in the ESV. In the NIV, it is “license for immorality” and in the New King James Version, it is “lewdness.” Finally, the New Living Translation translates it as “live immoral lives.” But it is all the same thing. It is the idea that this false teacher is into shameless excess when it comes to sexual things. That can take many different forms. It does not have to be that he is just sleeping with one woman after another.

The question is, what is going on in his mind? What does he do? Does he look at women with lust? Is he on the Internet? Maybe he is a hidden homosexual. The statistics are that 50 percent of all pastors have admitted to watching porn on a regular basis. It is just amazing to think that you can be in the ministry and actively involved in watching porn. But pastors are not the only ones involved in porn. Seventy percent of Christian men and about thirty percent of Christian women are watching porn on some kind of routine basis. What Jude is saying is that false teachers have crept into our churches, they are here, they are ungodly, and they are given to sexual excess, to be specific. In other words, in their ungodliness, one of the things that they are given to is sexual excess. That is a characteristic of false teachers.

I attended a pastors’ conference recently where a very well-known pastor made the comment that he believed that there is a connection between false religion and sex. That was kind of a stunning statement to the whole room filled with 3,500 men and probably about 1,000 men in the overflow room. The whole sanctuary went silent when he said that. I thought that was interesting that the whole room went silent. I started thinking about his comment. I realized that when Adam and Eve sinned, they wrapped themselves in garments because they knew that they were naked. Now, they did not commit sexual sin, but all of a sudden they realized they were naked. It is interesting, they sinned, and all of a sudden they recognized they were naked.

If you read the Old Testament, you learn the Israelites were constantly following after other gods. If you research the pagan gods they followed, invariably there was sex connected with that religion. Romans 1:20-28 tells us those who reject God, He gives them over to sexual perversion. Now

that is a strong proof that the pastor made the correct statement. When people reject God, God gives them over to sexual excess. In that passage it explicitly talks about homosexuality and lesbianism.

If you look at Revelation 2:14-15, and then verse 20, you will see that when false teaching enters into a church, immorality explodes. Immorality is connected with false teaching. We saw in 2 Peter, chapter 2, that false teachers were given to sexual excess. Here in Jude we find the same thing. One of the ways to identify a false teacher is if you can see that he has a problem in the area of sexual excess. That may be difficult, because he is probably going to keep it hidden, but Jude tells us that is a connection. But notice what he says: he turns the grace of God into licentiousness. What would you expect? You would expect that in his teaching he is saying that certain things are okay. He will tell you that God does not say you cannot not do something previously understood to be wrong. You can do it! There are a lot of individuals out there who are teaching that certain kinds of sexual activities and behaviors are okay because the Bible did not say “no.” That borders on turning the grace of God into licentiousness. What Jude is telling us is that it is a characteristic of a false teacher. He is turning the grace of God into permission to do whatever you want to do, and specifically in the area of sexual excess.

FALSE TEACHERS DENY OUR MASTER AND LORD. The fifth fact, or the fourth characteristic is that he denies our Master and Lord and Savior. The word for “Master” is unique. The word for “Lord” is something we are used to. The word for Lord is *kurios*, and it is the normal word we see for the Lord when we talk about the Lord Jesus Christ. The word for “Master” here in the English is despot. The Greek word is *despotes*. A despot is someone who rules with an iron hand. What Jude tells us is that these false teachers deny the Master and they deny the Lord. Master refers to how we are to respond, and Lord has more of the idea of respect or honor. What is also important in this passage is that the Greek grammar for the phrase, “Master and Lord Jesus Christ,” is governed by the Granville Sharp Rule, which means that they are the same. It means “Master” and “Lord” are the same. This is telling us that the false teachers are not going to submit to Christ. They are not governed by Christ. Jesus said that if the Master tells

them to do something, they are going to be independent. They are not going to allow the Lord Jesus to control their day-to-day sexual behavior. They are not going to submit to Christ in their behavior on a daily basis. When it comes to teaching Scripture, they do not care about accuracy. All they want is to influence the crowd. They are not concerned about teaching what God taught—they just want a following.

1 Corinthians 12:3 tells us that all who are led by the Holy Spirit will call Jesus as Lord. The message is that no one can call Jesus his Lord except by the Holy Spirit. False teachers are not Christians. These false teachers are not true believers; they are unbelieving. It is sad. Here are four principles that Jude has talked about that we can use to identify a false teacher. How would you identify a false teacher? Is a false teacher willing to submit himself to what God teaches? Is he willing to submit in the sexual area, in the broader sense of being a godly man? When it comes to the Word of God, is he really trying to teach what God has said? Or is he just looking for a story to tell everybody, and you are not really being taught the word of God? What is the false teacher doing? You might have to listen very closely because remember, he has crept in unaware. He is going to protect himself. He does not want you to discover the truth about him; you will have to look for the subtleties.

CONCLUSION. So what is the application for us? We have to be very careful, because the tares look like the wheat. Most importantly, turn to Titus 1:9. It gives us a criteria for choosing elders. But in the midst of the criteria for selecting elders, notice what the elder is supposed to do. It is also what we are supposed to do. Verse 9 says,

... holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. Titus 1:9 (NASB)

An elder should be able to refute those who contradict. If we are to be able to identify those who contradict, those who are teaching error, what does that mean about us? We have to be faithful, we have to know the word of God, so we can even identify when others are teaching error.

Jude has given us some criteria for identifying false teachers. The application is for us to be on guard, to contend for the truth. One way we contend for the truth is that we need to know the word of God so we know when error is being taught. Let us pray.

