

Keeping The Truth  
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Opening:

The THREAT LEVEL is high! With the events of this week in the killing of Osama Bin Laden, our government has raised the concerns about terrorist attacks.

In today's lesson, Paul wrote to the church in Colosse to say BEWARE...the THREAT LEVEL is HIGH for FALSE TEACHERS to DECEIVE you!

So it raises the question: How Does Scripture Tell Us To Spot A False Teacher?

Group exercise: How Does Scripture Tell Us To Spot A False Teacher?

Group 1

Group Leader: Have all the group members look up these scripture verses/passages and discuss the questions. Make notes and decide on who will report for the group.

1 John 4:1-3

1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

What does verse 1 tell us to do to detect false teachers?

Verses 2 and 3 tell us HOW to do it. What do they say?

Put it in everyday language...how can you as a believer do this?

1 Timothy 6:3-5

3 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, 4 they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

What does verse 3 tell us about false teachers?

What does verses 4 and 5 say about what false teachers try to do in the church?

What does verse 5 say about their motives?

## Group 2

Group Leader: Have all the group members look up these scripture verses/passages and discuss the questions. Make notes and decide on who will report for the group.

### 2 Peter 2:1

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

How do false teachers do what they do?

How does this verse say you can spot a false teacher?

### Romans 16:17

17 I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

What does this verse say about how false teachers operate?

## Group 3

Group Leader: Have all the group members look up these scripture verses/passages and discuss the questions. Make notes and decide on who will report for the group.

### Matthew 7:15-16

15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”

How do false teachers sneak up on God's people?

How does verse 16 say you can spot them?

What does that mean?

### Galatians 1:6-8

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!

What do verses 6 and 7 say about people who follow false teachers?

What do they say false teachers entice God's people to do?

The first verse in today's lesson:

Colossians 2:8 says...

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human traditions and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

What does this verse say is the ultimate standard to use to test for a false teacher?

Step number one in "sniffing out" a false teacher is WHAT DO THEY SAY ABOUT WHO JESUS IS?

If you want to spot a cult...see what they say about Jesus.

The Billy Graham Christian Worker's Guide tells us what various religions and cults say:

- Jehovah's Witnesses: Christ was not God; He was God's first created creature.
- Buddhists: He was a great teacher, less important than Buddha.
- Christian Scientists: Jesus was not God, just an outstanding man, a great teacher.
- Hindus: Christ is one of many incarnations or sons of God. No more divine than any man.
- Muslims: Jesus was only a man, a prophet equal to Noah or Moses and below Mohammed in importance.
- Mormons: Believe that human beings are progressively becoming gods and that the writings of Joseph Smith are divinely inspired additions to the Bible.

In Colossians 2:9-12 Paul makes truth plain about Christ

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh[a] was put off when you were circumcised by[b] Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Christ is the FULLNESS of the Deity (God) in bodily form.

If we go back to the first chapter of Colossians verses 15-19 Paul goes into more detail:

The Supremacy of the Son of God

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

- That's who Jesus REALLY IS!
- The Son of God; The Second Person of the Trinity; The Savior of the World and Lord of all!
- Again, If you want to spot a false teacher start by asking what they say about who Jesus is.
- Who did Jesus say he was?

John 14:6 (New International Version, ©2011)

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

- In our group exercise, all of you used the ULTIMATE WEAPON in spotting a false teacher. What is it? THE WORD OF GOD.
- There's a danger though. How do false teachers ALSO use scripture?
- False teachers can "twist" scripture to suit their teaching.

Example:

Oprah Winfrey has popularized a New Age teacher named Eckhart Tolle. Ultimately, Tolle's system undercuts the person and work of Jesus, the most quoted teacher in both of Tolle's books. At the beginning of *A New Earth*, he denies the deity of Jesus and grossly distorts Jesus' teaching about himself: *"The Truth is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you are the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.'"*

- Did you get that? He's saying that YOU and I should say: "I am the way the truth and the life!" He said: "The very Being that you are is Truth."
- How do we keep them from picking and choosing verses to back up their claims?
- We have to use the WHOLE COUNSEL of SCRIPTURE...the ENTIRE WORD OF GOD.
- You have to test isolated passages against the rest of scripture.
- Scripture never contradicts itself.

- Unfortunately, sometimes false teaching can come from what appears to be a mainline Evangelical Christian source.
- April 14th TIME Magazine did a cover story about a new book written by Rob Bell
- The link: <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2065080,00.html>
- Rob Bell was thought of as one of the "young studs" of the emergent church movement
- He rubs shoulders with many very mainstream evangelical pastors
- In this book Rob bell basically states there is no hell as taught in scripture
- TIME states:  
*He suggests that the redemptive work of Jesus may be universal — meaning that, as his book's subtitle puts it, "every person who ever lived" could have a place in heaven, whatever that turns out to be.*

*"I have long wondered if there is a massive shift coming in what it means to be a Christian," Bell says. "Something new is in the air."*

You can imagine the reaction of evangelicals.

Albert Mohler, President of Southern Seminary called the book: "theologically disastrous"

John MacArthur wrote in his blog (Link: <http://m.gty.org/Blog/B110421> )

*The sad reality is that if Rob Bell does not confess the truth in this life, one day he will realize how wrong his understanding of hell really is. His view of hell will be painfully altered forever when he receives the more severe punishment reserved for those who with a Bible in their hands mock God and trample the blood of Christ underfoot (Hebrews 10:29; cf. 2 Peter 2:21).*

He goes on to write:

*We have a sacred duty to preach what Jesus preached in the manner He preached it—without toning it down or adjusting it to make it more suitable to secular culture. Those who trim or alter the message to avoid the parts that are offensive are not faithful ambassadors of Christ.*

Wolves in sheep's clothing...they look harmless but they their teaching can DEVOUR an unsuspecting believer.

The Billy Graham Association gives some TIPS on recognizing a FALSE TEACHERS and cults:

What Is A Cult?

A cult is any group which teaches doctrines or beliefs that deviate from the biblical message of the Christian faith. It is very important that we recognize cults and avoid any involvement with them. Cults often teach some Christian truth mixed with error, which may be difficult to detect.

There are some features common to most cults:

- They do not adhere solely to the sixty-six books of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. They add their "special revelations" to the Bible and view them as equally authoritative.
- They do not accept that our relationship to Jesus Christ is a reality "by grace through faith" alone, but promote instead a salvation by works.
- They do not give Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, full recognition as the second Person of the Trinity, composed of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Some of these groups are Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, the Unification Church, Unitarians, Spiritists, Scientologists, and others.

<http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?articleid=2072>

As believers we must TEST THE SPIRITS and MEASURE EVERYTHING against GOD'S WORD to RECOGNIZE False Teachers.

We not only recognize we REMEMBER

Colossians 2:13-15

Paul wrote...

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you[a] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.[b]

- We were DEAD IN SIN and God made us ALIVE WITH CHRIST
- He forgave us of ALL OUR SINS.
- He CANCELED the DEBT we owed and NAILED IT TO THE CROSS.
- As we said last week, when we REMEMBER WHAT WE WERE before Christ and REMEMBER WHAT HE DID to save us, we won't fall prey to false teachers.
- Yet, FALSE TEACHERS minimize what Jesus did for us.
  
- Back to our "friend" Oprah Winfrey who was raised in the Baptist church and claims to be a Christian said years ago when an audience member said Jesus is the only way...Oprah said:
  - "There couldn't possibly be only one way."
  - I saw the video and I'm sure some of you have too.
  - Oprah in another show said:
    - "I took God out of the box"
    - That in her 20s when she heard her pastor say that God was a jealous God, she said:
      - "Something struck me...something about that didn't feel right in my spirit. God is in all things."

How can you claim to be a Christian and MARGINALIZE Christ and what He did for us?

If we remember what He did for us...we will RESIST false teaching.

Colossians 2:16-19

Freedom From Human Rules

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with

idle notions by their unspiritual mind. 19 They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

- The false teachers in the church at Colosse were mixing works and rules with Christianity
- Remember, there was Jewish influence in the mix of false teaching confronting them
- They were focused on what was clean and unclean to eat or to touch
- They were focused on rules about certain days or festivals
- We call that LEGALISM

Warren Wiersbe writes:

*People who religiously observe diets and days give an outward semblance of spirituality, but these practices cannot change their hearts. Legalism is a popular thing because you can “measure” your spiritual life— and even brag about it! But this is a far cry from measuring up to Christ (Eph. 4:13)!*

- In verse 18 Paul says: "Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind."
- Ever know anyone who was so legalistic it made them "puffed up"?
- Look at verse 19. What does Paul say in that first few words was their problem?
- They have lost connection with the head JESUS CHRIST.
- It's like that expression...running around like a chicken with its head cut off
- It makes a lot of commotion for a while but without connection the the head eventually it dies.

Here's the point: We are to resist teachings that promote observances, and behavior inconsistent with the grace we have through Christ.

Paul goes on to say in verses 20 - 23:

Colossians 2:20-23

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

- They were teaching asceticism...self-denial: wearing scratchy hair shirts next to your skin, sleeping on hard beds, whipping oneself, not speaking for days...or years, going without food or sleep, etc.

- We can all use some self discipline...but this was just a show to appear holier than thou.

The Life Application Study Bible says:

*To the Colossians, the discipline demanded by the false teachers seemed good, and legalism still attracts many people today. Following a long list of religious rules requires strong self-discipline and can make a person appear moral, but religious rules cannot change a person's heart. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.*

So What's The Takeaway?

- It might be easy to think you'd never be confronted with false teachers.
- However, every time you pick up a book, or watch someone like Oprah, or even read what seems like a Christian author like Rob Bell, there is a risk you could encounter false teaching. You might go to someone for holistic medical treatment or acupuncture and if you're not careful they can begin to take you into Eastern Mysticism that is just one step away from demonic practices.
- As Paul said BEWARE that you might be taken captive.
- Remember to ask, WHAT DO THEY SAY ABOUT CHRIST?
- IS THERE TEACHING IN LINE WITH ALL OF SCRIPTURE?
- DO THEY PROMOTE SOME SPECIAL REVELATION OF MAN TO ADD TO SCRIPTURE?
- DO THEY PROMOTE SALVATION BY WORKS AND NOT BY GRACE?
- If your false teacher radar starts going off...do your homework...talk to a trusted Christian friend...ask God for discernment.