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## JANUARY 2019 “DON’T FOLLOW A WOLF”

Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior!

In Matthew 24:3-24, Jesus gives stern warnings about the impact false prophets will have on people in the time leading up to His return and the end of the world. He goes so far as to declare that even the very elect can be deceived. The very elect are those who, for all intent and purpose, are somewhat mature in their Christian walk, including those who are ministering as Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers.

Jesus warns that some of these false prophets will demonstrate great signs and wonders. The signs and wonders are not what deceives people toward destruction. Instead, the signs and wonders are the bait to get people to swallow the hook, and the “hook” is the false doctrine being taught by the false prophets. You see, the false prophets Jesus speaks of are not simply people called to the ministry of a prophet who begin walking away from Christ. Rather, it is a term used to describe those who, in some fashion, have a public presence and “voice” in the Body of Christ and declare beliefs that do not always line up with truth. Matthew 7:15-20 gives us more clarity on this matter:

***<sup>15</sup>Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. <sup>16</sup>Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? <sup>17</sup>Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.***

Notice that these false prophets come to us in “sheep’s clothing.” This means that they will look and act just like other Christians. Outwardly, we will have almost no way to detect that they are actually deceivers. In fact, Jesus warns that the only way we’ll be able to detect what they really are is by their fruits. He then explains that a good tree produces good fruit and a corrupt tree brings forth corrupt fruit.

Many Christians seem to have concluded that this corrupt fruit means these people will be living open, sinful lifestyles that will be a clear-cut warning they should be avoided. While that may be true in some cases, the fact that Jesus said they will be wearing sheep’s clothing indicates that not all these false prophets will be that easy to identify. The corrupt fruit He is primarily speaking of is the fruit of their doctrine.

On the surface, it would seem as though Christians would have no problem identifying these false prophets. But remember, they are in sheep’s clothing. It means they look right, talk right, are often very engaging in their personality, well liked, popular, talented and so on. In other words, they are very appealing to the masses and readily accepted. As such, too many Believers willingly open their lives to these people Jesus calls ravaging wolves.

For example, not long ago an extremely popular Christian singer was interviewed in a nationally broadcast forum. I listened to the interview, during which this singer - - was asked, "Do you feel that homosexuality is a sin?" Here is a word-for-word transcript of that person's reply:

"I can't honestly answer on that. In a sense, I have too many people that I love that they're homosexual. I don't know. I actually had a conversation with someone last night about it. I can't say one way or the other. I'm not God. So when people ask questions like that, that's what my go-to is. I just say read the Bible and find out for yourself. And when you find out let me know, because I'm learning too."

That answer is from someone who accepted Jesus at a young age; someone who has essentially grown up in church. As such, I was quite amazed at what was said. It raises many questions in my own mind:

- What have the pastors in your life taught?
- You're telling others to read the Bible to find out if homosexuality is a sin, but have you not read the Bible for yourself?
- Are you equally ambivalent about adultery, drunkenness, pre-marital sex, abortion, murder and witchcraft?
- What about your Romans 2:14-15 conscience; have you seared it to the inner conviction which came with your born again life?
- Is it possible you are afraid to speak the truth, concerned it will cost you popularity and income?

What complicates all of this is the fact that the singer in question has a huge impact on all who follow that person's ministry. Christians who are immature spiritually can be greatly influenced by such a person. The truth is, the answer above was given by someone who is not truly sold out to Jesus or is at the least a novice and not ready for any kind of public ministry. I realize many may disagree with and even criticize me for stating as much, but Jesus said we would know them by their fruit and that answer is evil fruit. It is true that we are not God, but we do have His Word which clearly identifies what kind of sexual behavior is sin.

At this point, some pastors might be reading this and declare, "I would never have such a person come and sing in my church, no matter how great their voice or how popular they are!" That's all well and good, but are you using the same amount of scrutiny when it comes to who you allow to stand behind your pulpit and preach to your congregation?

Almost every month I get invited to conduct seminars, conferences, crusades and camp meetings in various churches and nations. Some of these pastors try to influence and manipulate me by saying things like, "You are the man God wants delivering His Word to our people," or "God has shown me that you (are to come/will come) and conduct a crusade in my (church/city/nation)." It is always amazing how God speaks to people or gives them visions about me preaching in their church, yet He never gives me the same information.

When I ask these pastors what they know about me, the typical response is something about me being a great man of God and a servant of Jesus Christ. When I press them for a better answer, asking specific questions about what they know of me, what they usually confess is: They know basically nothing about my ministry, they know little or nothing about my doctrine, they have

never listened to one sermon of mine, and their opinion of me is based on a brief visit to my ministry website.

I have tried to bring correction in these encounters. Pastors should never invite someone to preach about whom they know very little. For all they know, the person invited could be a wolf in sheep's clothing, having doctrine that could lead people astray. Pastors should do everything possible to listen to several sermons by people before inviting them to preach. They have a responsibility before God to guard their flock against well-meaning but unqualified ministers. A ravaging wolf isn't just someone with evil intentions; it is also a person who will devour innocent lambs with good sounding yet destructive teaching. I remind these pastors that they are responsible before God for who they allow to minister in their church.

Furthermore, a pastor is doing his congregation no favors by having a steady stream of guest preachers. A pastor is a shepherd, and a shepherd has a responsibility to feed the flock. Sheep need to hear the voice of their shepherd. Some churches have guest preachers almost every month; some pastors attend one conference after another, yet never develop the kind of spiritual stability necessary to fulfill their calling. The further a pastor goes into God and the more he conforms to the image of Christ, he will realize there are fewer guest preachers he can have minister in his church.

I remember attending a service in a church that had invited a guest speaker. It was the first time I had ever been in that church. During the praise and worship, I began looking around at the congregation and asked God, "What am I seeing?" He replied, "You're seeing a group of people so hungry for Me that they will eat anything that is set before them. The pastor loves these people so much and he wants the best for them, yet he keeps exposing them to error." I later found out that this pastor had been inviting numerous guest speakers to minister at the church.

In another situation, a church had me come and minister on growing spiritually and the results of praying in tongues. After about the third service, a member of the congregation showed me a schedule of upcoming events at the church. One of the events was a guest speaker coming in about two weeks after I was finished. My heart dropped because I was aware of the doctrine of that guest speaker and knew he would be contradicting some of what I had taught.

There may be Christians reading this and thinking, "That's right, Brother Martin, you tell those pastors to get their act together!" Before you get too excited, don't forget that you as an individual are responsible for your own spiritual growth. This is what the Apostle Paul was emphasizing in Philippians 2:12 when he wrote, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Yes, pastors bear a great deal of responsibility when it comes to how they shepherd the congregation before them. But as Christians, we are responsible for applying the truth we are taught.

Furthermore, what preachers do you allow to sow into your life? Consider what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:15,

***For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.***

There was great sarcasm in Paul's words. He was chiding them over the fact that they would submit to the teaching of almost anyone who called themselves a preacher. He was emphasizing

the reality that they didn't have a great number of spiritual fathers. What is a spiritual father? It is not simply the person who leads you to accept Jesus as Savior; more critically, it is a person who is mature in the Lord and has a genuine understanding of scripture in a line-upon-line manner. That being so, do you have a host of instructors in Christ, or do you have any real spiritual fathers?

I have known of Christians who turn on Christian television or radio and let it play all day long, listening to one preacher after another. In theory, that may sound like a good idea. Even so, nearly every Christian TV or radio station will sell air time to any preacher who has the money. This means those stations are broadcasting a plethora of contrasting doctrines which cannot in any way serve to properly facilitate a Christian's spiritual growth. In prisons, inmates enroll in every Christian school that will let them and get on the mailing lists of every preacher they can, never considering that they are potentially subjecting themselves to great doctrinal confusion.

So again I would ask, do you have any real spiritual fathers? Consider the following questions:

- Do you know how to properly meditate scripture?
- What is the real purpose and representation of water baptism?
- Why should a person be baptized in the Holy Spirit?
- What are seven benefits of praying in tongues?
- Why is fasting important and what types of fasts are revealed in scripture?
- What are the two primary themes from Romans 1:1 through Revelation 3:22?
- Why should Christians worship and what role does it play in their walk with God?

Each of the above subjects is basic, foundational teaching for the spiritual growth of a Believer. None of them can be properly taught in just one or two sermons; it takes time - at least five or six sermons each - to even begin adequately presenting from scripture an answer to each. If you cannot sufficiently answer the questions above, it indicates one or more of the following:

- Your pastor has not properly taught about them.
- Your pastor cannot provide answers.
- Your pastor has taught on each, but you have not availed yourself of the teaching.
- You don't have a pastor or any genuine spiritual fathers.

Making this even worse, if you don't know how to properly meditate scripture, then it will be next to impossible for you to study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). If you don't know how to study and rightly divide the word of truth, then how will you ever be able to clearly discern between right and wrong teaching?

If you pray and ask God, He will lead you to spiritual fathers who will be able to nurture you in the Word. This may even include leaving the church you are presently attending to be a part of a different church. One thing is for certain, God will not bring "10,000 spiritual fathers" into your life. The number will be few, maybe only three or four. But you must be serious and willing to stop listening to ministers He knows are not fully serving you from the table of the Lord.

Addressing pastors once more, who are your spiritual fathers? If you cannot answer the above questions, how can you properly feed the flock that is before you? Who is the iron sharpening your iron (Proverbs 27:17)? When a pastor truly understands the value of each subject mentioned

(and even more than those above), he will be diligent to patiently and thoroughly teach them to his church, no matter how many sermons it takes (I once taught a series on biblical prosperity that took 44 sermons). Simply graduating from a seminary or university is not enough; you absolutely **MUST** know how to correctly study and meditate God's Word so you are thoroughly furnished unto the good work of teaching the Word, being instant in season, out of season; reproving, rebuking, and exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16, 4:2).

No matter what our ministry calling - even if we don't yet know our calling - we must diligently guard our hearts concerning who we allow to speak into our lives. As we meditate in scripture and pray in the Spirit, we will begin to know both who we should stop listening to and who God wants teaching us. We don't need 10,000 instructors in Christ; we need spiritual fathers who have truly pressed into God, assimilated His Word and can prepare a feast for us at the table of the Lord.

May God's peace fill your life,

*Jim*

P.S. - If you would like more teaching along these lines, a CD of my sermon, *Beware of Grievous Wolves* can be ordered using the form below.

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☐ Check this box to receive a CD of the sermon, *Beware of Grievous Wolves*

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