

False Teachers

Donald Townsley

False teachers are not something new among the children of God. They have always plagued His people. Peter said, "There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you" (2 Pet. 2:1). Jesus warned of false teachers in Matt. 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Over and over in the New Testament we are warned against false teachers. Let us look at a few of the characteristics and motives of the false teacher.

The false teacher is more interested in gaining popularity than in preaching the truth. He tells men what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear. He preaches, "peace, peace, when there is no peace." He is like the professional politician, he puts his ear to the ground to find out what the people want, then preaches what they want to hear. This, of course, will cause him to be loved and praised by the unconverted, the unbeliever, digressives, and worldlings.

The false teacher is interested in personal gain (2 Pet. 2:3). He is on a constant search for a higher salary, and such a consideration will move him almost inevitably.

Many times the false teacher is dissolute in his own personal life. Peter describes some in the first century as "having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray. . ." (2 Pet. 2: 14, 15).

The motive behind the false teacher is evil ambition (2 Pet. 2:3). It can be for power, popularity, money, or the person of someone (2 Pet. 2: 14, 18; 2 Tim. 3:6).

The method of the false teacher is "feigned words", "good words" and "fair speeches (2 Pet. 2:3; Rom. 16:18). His appearance is "sheep's clothing" (Matt. 7:15) and as a "minister of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11: 15). By these means he deceives the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:18).

The ultimate end of the false teacher is destruction (2 Pet. 2: 3 - ff; Phil. 3:19). "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1).

(From "The Expounder" Nov. 5, 1963)