

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-First Sunday After Trinity, November 9, 2025

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 292:1-5, 260:3, 550:1-5, 406, 373:1.
Lessons: Ezekiel 13:1-12, 2 Peter 2:1-22, Mark 13:1-23.
Sermon Text: Matthew 7:15-23.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“Watch out for false prophets.” “Beware of false prophets!” What is a false prophet? What is a false teacher? False prophets, false teachers don’t only stand in pulpits.

They can be found anywhere.

We are surrounded by false teachers. We can find them on our televisions and in our movies. We can find them on the radio. We can find them in our newspapers and magazines. We can find them in our libraries. Unfortunately, we can also find them among our acquaintances and even among our “friends”.

False prophets aren’t only those who teach, who tell us something false. They also are deniers, those who deny the truths of Scripture. They are also those who don’t agree with the teaching of Scripture. They are also those who accuse us and our churches of being “behind the times”. They are also those who claim that the Bible is “too strict” or “not loving enough.”

JESUS GIVES US A STRONG WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS

- 1. What is a false teacher, a false prophet?**
- 2. Jesus gives good descriptions of them.**
- 3. Beware of them! Avoid them!**

The damage they can do leads to eternal damnation.

How can we know them? Sometimes we can instantly recognize them. Because we have learned from Scripture exactly what God says, sometimes we may easily know that what we hear or read is contrary to what God tells us in his holy Word, the Bible.

The most obvious false, unscriptural teachings are ideas that a Christian, especially one who has stayed close to the Word of God after instruction as a child in the truths of God’s Word can recognize. There are many examples of ideas we can instantly recognize as false teachings. Among them are ideas about exactly when Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead. The Bible, God’s Word tells us that the day of the Lord, Judgement Day, will come like a thief in the night.

But not every false, unscriptural idea is so obvious.

If you don’t immediately recognize them, Jesus tells us ***“By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.”***

He gives us some real, very graphic, practical examples. Where do you get grapes? Not from thorn bushes. Where do you get figs? Not from thistles. Even Jesus’ examples show the contrast between good fruit and no fruit. Thornbushes and thistles provide no benefit, nothing good. Thorns hurt you! Thistles, as when they stick to your clothes, or, even worse, to a little girl’s hair are a nuisance, sometimes a terrible nuisance and worse.

Jesus tells that ***“every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.”*** Perhaps you are familiar enough with fruit trees such as apple trees to know that you need a good apple tree to get good apples. Of course

you need to take care of a fruit tree. You must prune it. Jesus tells us ***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”*** (John 15:1–2, NIV84) You must attack and remove destructive insects and fungi that can make a tree “bad”. And you cannot expect a bad tree to produce, to make good fruit.

In his words today, Jesus even gives a picture of judgment day – eternal fire. He says ***“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”*** The first picture that comes to mind is burning up the wood from dead, useless trees. But Scripture gives us a picture of hell with its unending fire perpetually burning those who did not believe in Jesus, those who rejected him, those who taught others falsely.

False teachers are everywhere and we must beware of them. When you see a sign that says “Beware of Dog” you know that you will be harmed if you get too close to that dog. When you see any sign that says “Beware” you should know enough to stay away, to be alert for, to watch out for, to be on guard against the danger, whatever it is.

Ultimately, Christ will judge and condemn those who are false teachers to the fires of hell.

But while we are on earth, we must beware of, watch out for them. We must be alert and aware! We must keep our eyes open for false teachings and false teachers.

Jesus starts the words of our text with a picture very familiar to his first hearers. The Israelites were by and large a nation that depended on sheep and shepherds. They would be well aware of the dangers of wolves getting into a flock of sheep.

The picture of a wolf in sheep’s clothing presents a vivid picture. If a wolf would look like a fellow sheep, there wouldn’t be much to warn them. Jesus uses the description of “ferocious” wolves. They are vicious, destructively ferocious, ravenous. They want to violently tear apart their victims. So if the ferocious wolves look like sheep, how can you tell they are wolves? Jesus says ***“By their fruit you will recognize them.”***

And, of course, would there really be anything other than a “fierce, ferocious” wolf? Sometimes we see animals like wolves in a zoo when they are not snarling at us and trying to bite us and may think about how soft and cuddly they appear. But what are their fruits?

Divisiveness. Causing offense in the true scriptural sense. Placing stumbling blocks in the paths of Christians. The Apostle Paul speaks this way: ***“I urge you, brothers, 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. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”*** (Romans 16:17–18, NIV84) ***“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”*** (Romans 16:17–18, KJV) Paul especially is talking about religious people who are not people who have simply become a little confused in their thinking and would be willing to correct their teaching if their errors were pointed out to them. They are people who may be accurately described as regularly and intentionally causing divisions and questioning beliefs. They are teachers seeking to win others to their point of view.

False teachers are doing the opposite of what Paul writes to the Corinthians: ***“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:10, KJV)

False teachers tell lies and give misleading words. No matter what synonyms are used for telling lies, they are still lies.

Sometimes we don’t instantly recognize the fruits of false teachers. But when they do not change their ways, we must separate from them. We should have learned this from our church history of the last 75 years.

Jesus then gives some examples he will deal with on judgment day. From these examples, we must be alert and recognize such false teachers and hypocrites. ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”***

The only ones who will enter heaven are those who do the will of God. He says ***“Only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”*** will enter heaven.

And what is the will of the Father? For an excellent example, we look at Jesus’ words at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, after he tells his disciples to ***“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”*** (Matthew 28:19, NIV84)

When we are doing that, we must be ***“teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*** (Matthew 28:20, NIV84) Everything the Word of God teaches us! We are not to add to it, subtract from it or twist it in any way.

But look at the reasons, the excuses that the false prophets come up with. ***“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’”*** But Jesus still condemns false teachers.

When we think of those who claim to prophesy, to speak in Jesus’ name, we may think first of outrageous human prophecies of the second coming of Jesus. No man knows when Jesus will come in judgement.

But think of all those who used Jesus’ name to tell you falsely what they think the words of Jesus mean. And what the Bible means – that are false and untrue. Think of how they twist God’s words to make sin seem good. The human mind has an infinite capacity to justify itself!

But there are and will be false teachers, false prophets until the end of time.

How do we fight them?

We must fight them with the weapons God gives us: his verbally inspired Word, the Bible. The Bible is the source of our beliefs and our teaching. Our teachings do not come from men. ***“Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*** (2 Peter 1:21, NIV84)

And how can you know what is false if you don’t learn what is true?

Where can you learn what is true about God? From God. From his Word. By reading the Bible and Biblical sermons. From regularly joining in worship and hearing God’s Word. By making use of Bible study classes.

When the Apostle Paul left Ephesus for the last time, he said ***“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*** (Acts 20:29–32, NIV84)

Yes, there will be false teachers. But God does not leave us defenseless.

How many times doesn’t Scripture itself tell us to search the Scriptures! There is where you will find truth. How many times doesn’t Scripture remind us, encourage us, and strengthen us with this very idea: ***“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”*** (2 Peter 3:18, NIV84)