

Characteristics of False Teachers

That Satan labours might and main, by false teachers, which are his messengers and ambassadors, to deceive, delude, and for ever undo the precious souls of men (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Eph. 4:14; 2 Tim. 3:4-6; Titus 1:11,12; 2 Peter 2:18,19): 'I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err.' (Jer. 23:13). 'The prophets make my people to err.' (Micah 3:5). They seduce them, and carry them out of the right way into by-paths and blind thickets of error, blasphemy, and wickedness, where they are lost forever. 'Beware of false prophets, for they come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves'. (Mat. 7:15). These lick and suck the blood of souls: 'Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.' (Phil. 3:2). These kiss and kill; these cry, Peace, peace, till souls fall into everlasting flames, &c., Proverbs 7.

Now, the best way to deliver poor souls from being deluded and destroyed by these messengers of Satan is, to discover them in their colours, that so, being known, poor souls may shun them, and fly from them as from hell itself.

Now you may know them by these characters following:

1. False Teachers are Men-Pleasers

False teachers are men-pleasers (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:1-4). They preach more to please the ear than to profit the heart: 'Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy no unto us right things: speak to us smooth things; prophecy deceits' (Isa. 30:10). 'A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so. And what will you do in the end thereof?' (Jer. 5:30,31). They handle holy things rather with wit and dalliance (playful come-on) than with fear and reverence. Flattery undid Ahab and Herod, Nero and Alexander. False teachers are hell's greatest enrichers. Not bitter, but flattering words do all the mischief, said Valerian, the Roman emperor. Such smooth teachers are sweet soul-poisoners (Jer. 23:16,17).

2. False Teaches Throw Dirt at Christ's People

False teachers are notable in casting dirt, scorn, and reproach upon the persons, names, and credits of Christ's most faithful ambassadors. Thus Korah, Dathan, and Abiram charged Moses and Aaron that they took too much upon them, seeing all the congregation was holy (Num. 16:3). You take too much state, too much power, too much honour, too much holiness upon you; for what are you more than others, that you take so much upon you? And so Ahab's false prophets fell foul on good Micaiah, paying of him with blows for want of better reasons (1 Kings 22:10-26). Yea, Paul, that great apostle of the Gentiles, had his ministry undermined and his reputation blasted by false teachers: 'For his letters' say they, 'are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and contemptible' (2 Cor. 10:10). They rather contemn him than admire him; they look upon him as a dunce rather than a doctor. And the same hard measure had our Lord Jesus from the Scribes and Pharisees, who laboured as for life to build their own credit upon the ruins of his reputation. And never did the devil drive a more full trade this way than he does in these days (Matt. 27:63).

3. False Teachers are Driven by Their Own Heads and Hearts

False teachers are venters of the devices and visions of their own heads and hearts. 'Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophecy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart (Jer. 14:14); 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Harken not unto the words of the prophets that prophecy unto you; they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord' (Jer. 23:16). Are there not multitudes in this nation whose visions are but golden delusions, lying vanities, brain-sick phantasies? These are Satan's great benefactors, and such as divine justice will hang up in hell as the greatest malefactors, if the physician of souls does not prevent it.

4. False Teachers Pass Over the Law and the Gospel for Other Things

False teachers easily pass over the great and weighty things both of law and gospel, and stand most upon those things that are of the least moment and concernment to the souls of men. 'Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned; from which some have swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, and understand neither what they say nor whereof they affirm' (1 Tim. 1:5-7). 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone' (Matt. 23:2,3). False teachers are nice in the lesser things of the law, and as negligent in the greater. 'If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strife of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself' (1 Tim. 6:3-5). If such teachers are not hypocrites in grain, I know nothing, Romans 2:22. The earth groans to bear them, and hell is fitted for them, Matt. 24:32.

5. False Teachers use Clever Language and Appearances to Disguise Themselves

False teachers cover and colour their dangerous principles and soul-impostures with very fair speeches and plausible pretences, with high notions and golden expressions. Many in these days are bewitched and deceived, viz. illumination, revelation, deification, fiery triplicity, &c. As strumpets paint their faces, and deck and perfume their beds, the better to allure and deceive simple souls (Gal. 6:12; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Rom. 16:17,18; Mat. 16:6,11,12; 7:15), so false teachers will put a great deal of paint and garnish upon their most dangerous principles and blasphemies, that they may the better deceive and delude poor ignorant souls. They know sugared poison goes down sweetly; they wrap up their pernicious, soul-killing pills in gold.

6. False Teachers Strive to Win People to Their Opinions by Winning Debates

False teachers strive more to win over men to their opinions, than to better them in their conversations. 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves' (Matt. 24:17). They busy themselves most about men's heads. Their

work is not to better men's hearts, and mend their lives; and in this they are very much like their father the devil, who will spare no pains to gain proselytes.

7. False Teachers Gain from Their Followers

False teachers make merchandise of their followers. 'But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not' (2 Peter 2:1-3). They eye your goods more than your good; and mind more the serving of themselves, than the saving of your souls. So they may have your substance, they care not though Satan has your souls (Rev. 18:11-13). That they may the better pick your purse, they will hold forth such principles as are very indulgent to the flesh. False teachers are the great worshippers of the golden calf (Jer. 6:13).