

Beware of False Prophets

At one point in His Beatitudes, Jesus said, “*Beware of false prophets! They come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ferocious wolves.*”¹⁶ *You will know them by their fruits. People do not pick grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles, do they?*¹⁷ *In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit.*¹⁸ *A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.*¹⁹ *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*²⁰ *Therefore, you will know them by their fruits.*

²¹ *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven.*”²² *Many will ask Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, in Your name driven out demons, and in Your name performed many miracles?’*²³ *Then I shall tell them frankly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who do what is evil!’* (Matthew 7:15-23).

Jesus reminds us that we must be on the alert for false prophets.

But do we really need to be ‘that’ alert; after all, we are good and wise Christians. Do we really need to be ‘that’ attentive; after all, wouldn’t we consider that the AELC is one, if not, the most conservative Lutheran Church in Australia? Aren’t things going okay for us? We don’t have much to argue about or to wrestle with. Everything appears to be running smoothly. Besides, don’t we have a pastor who is on the alert for any false doctrine that would try to embed itself in our church? Surely, no catastrophe will come upon us. All will be well with us - no need to sound the alarm and get people too worked up and too intense.

We must understand that it is this kind of mindset that leads to the destruction of the church. You see, a lazy, apathetic, and naive mindset, as we just described, is not only what has led to the destruction of many churches over the ages, but it is also what has led to the destruction of many modern-day churches. You see, Jesus does not say, “*All of you Christians, beware of false prophets, that is, unless you are a part of the AELC. If you are a part of the AELC, you don’t have to take My words too seriously.*”

The call of Jesus to be aware of false teachers has no exception clause. It is a call for all Christians of all generations and various churches to beware of false teachers. It is a call for every single person - regardless of age, status, or sex - to be alert to false preachers peddling poisonous theology.

False prophets come into churches without an invitation or respect for a church’s doctrine. They come uninvited. They just show up, and they spare no one. That is how false doctrine works. It works like yeast - it is small and tiny, but through time, it leavens the whole lump. It spreads and takes over churches, often without being noticed.

Furthermore, false prophets don’t care about what the church calls itself (for example, the AELC) or as solid as it may be. They don’t care about a conservative confession of a church as steadfast as it may be. They simply don’t care. In fact, false prophets can come right out of the pews and pulpits of existing churches. That is right; false prophets can come right out of our seminaries, pulpits, and pews - from within the walls of the church. And so, this is why Jesus tells you and me to beware of false prophets.

But again, (truth be told), Jesus's words ruin things for you and me. Bluntly stated, we often want the church to be at ease. In other words, we naturally desire to see the church as a friendly place of safety, security, and ease.

Now, safety, security, and friendships are certainly not bad, and they do occur in the church. However, please hear this loud and clear: the church is not primarily a social group, resort, or club - it is not the church at ease. Instead, the church has always been and always will be the church militant. The church is always at war. The church is always under threat and always will be.

And so, just as there is safety inside the walls of a castle, with the King, there is safety and security within the church because the church is the bride of King Jesus. But again, because there is safety and security within the church, this does not mean that we are at ease. Never forget that the devil always seeks to kill, steal, and destroy your faith. The ideologies of the world are always opposed to the church. And to boot, false prophets come to deliberately and cleverly twist the truth of God’s Word. Wretched doctrine always seeps into the church to replace the Word of Truth. This is why Jesus tells you and me to be alert, attentive, and mindful of false prophets.

Churches at ease will ‘not’ exist 50 years from now. They won’t make it. A church at ease is like a house built upon sand - unaware that it is founded upon shifting sands. Typically, a church at ease is more consumed with petty squabbling, gossip, and complaints within the church and community than it is with being alert for false teaching. And so, like a house built on the sand, a church at ease will not stand but fall when the waves and winds of false doctrine slam against it.

Therefore, we are not to be a church at ease, for Christ has not called us unto apathy, laziness, and foolishness. Instead, we are His militant church. He has called us to be aware of false prophets and wretched theology that may invade the church and lead us away from the simple message of Christ-crucified.