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**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*“by their fruits you shall know them.”*

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The Jews of Jesus time had had a lot of exposure to false prophets. A prophet, or as it was called in the days of Samuel, the last of Israel's judges... a seer, a seer was someone who claimed to have a **message** from God as opposed to a firm predictions. Often a prediction was contained, but this was not like a medium using a crystal ball. The message came from God. Jeremiah, writing around and into the time of Jerusalem's fall to Babylon at the beginning of the Sixth Century B.C., had talked of false prophets who proclaimed “peace” when there obviously was no peace.

Israel also had had a fair share of Good prophets the most famous of whom was Elijah. He wore a sheep's fleece as a sign that God had spoken to him. Given Elijah's humility and fame other prophets followed him in tradition by wearing a sheep's fleece about their shoulders. Thus, in the case of bad prophets we had the birth of, as Jesus would warn, wolves in sheep's clothing.

While sometimes compared to other dangerous animals such as roaring lions, false prophets most often were compared to wolves. Ezekiel, writing during the Babylonian captivity, described officials as wolves tearing their prey for dishonest gain. Zephaniah, a contemporary of Jeremiah, described bad officials as wolves who left nothing till morning.

Jesus himself warned the Apostles that he was sending them out into the world as sheep among wolves. And St. Paul warned the Ephesians upon his departing that savage wolves would come among them scattering the flock.

This last statement by Paul hit the nail on the head as to the danger false prophets can do. In short, they destroy people by getting them away from where they should be, in particular, near to Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

The problem of false prophets continued into the early Church when many prophets still wandered the land proclaiming messages from God. Christianity's first book, the *Didache* [Did-eh-key], written close to the year 100AD, in very firm language, addressed how to test any prophet to see if he truly was of God or a fraud. Among the cautions: a good prophet doesn’t go “house to house” staying with different folks in the town. Our Lord gave that same advice to his Apostles went he sent them forth on “training missions”.

Today we have two types of false prophets in society. One sees and hears them in Pop culture, usually on television at some point. The first, possibly the smaller group, is composed of people who do in fact “practice what they preach”, but preach something that is false. For example, many *New Agers* are nice folks who would not hurt a fly. Yet, their beliefs about finding universal truth and inner harmony from studying stars, meditation, and living in harmony with nature ignores God, Jesus and the Holy Ghost as the source of Truth and eternal, not just inner, harmony. Thus, they just are wrong.

Similarly but slightly differently, *survivalists* who live and breathe that the end is nigh also are mistaken. Both, as with the Gnostic's of the early Church, started with false first premises and deduced everything from there.

The other type of false prophets are those who may or may not actually believe something, but do not live according to what they believe. They are either frauds or hypocrites. They are the first if they do not believe what they preach, but the latter if they do believe but don’t live it.

One “truth” of today is that mankind's activities are devastating the planet. While some activities do appear to be to us as gravely hurting the upper couple thousand feet of the earth, the magnitude of the damage is a matter of much debate with PhDs disagreeing.

BUT, if one **is** urging people of the need to change, but does not actually believe the need is real, it is safe to assume he suffers from greed and will profit somehow. Similarly, if one really believes drastic change **is** needed, then one should not find him living in a new house built of old growth cedar filled with incandescent light bulbs with an in-ground swimming pool. Such a person is a hypocrite who suffers from pride and believes he is better than others, and does not have to practice what he preaches to them.

Now hypocrisy is also a charge thrown at Christian leaders when they are seen in a fallen state. Traditional denominations such as ours or in the case of the huge Roman Church preach ideas contrary to the ways of the modern world. In revenge for standing against specific practices which permeate society leaders who show themselves to be all too human are called hypocrites. This however is false since Christians who fall down trying to be good recognize what they did as **wrong**, and Not that they are above being judged or better than others. They simply are imperfect.

Good prophets, good role models, TRY to practice what they preach. You can recognize them by their fruit, as Jesus said. (Apples do not grow on pear trees, nor grapes on thistles.)

Good prophets believe and teach things which aim to help all lead a better moral life, even if they themselves fall down sometimes, or often. Appearances may deceive so the “proof is in the pudding” so to speak.

Just as false prophets in ancient Israel dressed the part of **true** prophets by wearing a lambskin, false prophets today may look and sound good. The proof is in their day to day lives. Are they helping others in need and feeding the poor regularly, or only when the cameras are rolling? If the latter, their fruit is not good since it is the fruit of pride or greed.

Sometimes appearances do NOT deceive, but are proven correct by the fruit. We all have seen people in the street whom we thought in passing by, “wow! she looks like she's having a rough time”. We might learn later that, yes, that person's child or spouse was dying.

Good people usually look like good people. My parents once in the 1980s heard the recently retired Abp. Coggin of Canterbury address a diocesan meeting in Chicago. He noted that by age 50 one pretty much looks like the sort of person he or she is inside. If he or she is a good or kindly person, he will look like one... in the face... the eyes. If one is mean or miserly, he will look that way.

The exception of course would be a wolf in sheep's clothing. While a lamb will not dress up as a wolf, except on Halloween, a wolf **will** dress up like a lamb anytime.

Just as the *Didache* of nineteen hundred years ago provided a test to determine whether one proclaiming a message from God was a true or false prophet, we can and should test those proclaiming new ideas or doctrines so that we do not get lead astray by POP culture. We can test whether the proponent is motivated by self interest by looking for telltale signs of greed or pride.

We probably already have been around the block enough to inquire about whether this person or his business is or will benefit from the money or funds being sought? Is someone only willing to offer his bright idea with cameras rolling at prestigious forums such as famous universities, or is he willing to proclaim it in the streets where people might ignore or laugh at him? Does he or she seem arrogant or dismissive of questions? (Sadly, this happens routinely with climate-change discussions.) Does his message of needing funds to feed and clothe the poor fit his own attire?

Besides testing to see if the messenger appears to be a fraud or hypocrite we, however, need to test the **message** also since, again, one can whole heartedly believe something which is just plain wrong. False doctrines about life are ones that may propose that people only have to worry about externals, that motivation is unimportant.

The Pharisees had big problems with that. They believed that so long as one dotted all his “I-s” and crossed all his “T-ss” that he was fine. They were the first “virtue signalers”.

Also false is the idea that one should live by prohibitions. Avoid doing these 999 things and you will be good and live a good life. This was another aspect to the Pharisees' approach to life and God which was mistaken. By focusing completely on ourselves, such doctrines lead to ignoring those in need around us and encourages... pride, which always has been a bad path for Christians to be on.

Lastly, we might ask whether such and such belief rests upon cheap grace? It is commonly assumed today by many in society that since God is love, he will forgive us, and we all will make it to heaven, except maybe Hitler. A loving God would not want us to suffer in hell. This ignores that folks might well end up in hell because in life they never wanted to be **near** God.

The view that God doesn’t want us to suffer also ignores that God lets us suffer through pain in this life, even **though** he loves us. And, while He does love us...greatly, He hopes to be loved back...greatly. But, as parents or anyone who has dated knows, one can not MAKE someone love you.

We may think, “of course I love God”. BUT can we show any fruits of our love? We may have had the experience of falling in love with someone who did not love us back, and how frustrating that made us feel. Likewise, how would we feel about someone who professed great love for us, but somehow never had any time for us when we called for a date? Would we believe that the words of love were true, or just for show? Not deep? Not real?

We live in a time when new ideas come fast and furiously. Lest we be tempted away from our conscience to live as we believe Christ wants us and embrace something new, we need to test ideas. Truth will stand the test of time. (And that is true.)

We need to remember that the bearer, the prophet, may be good and true, or might be a fraud or hypocrite, which is bad. Or the idea may just not make sense to living as a good Christian. “Will this idea help me bear the burden of living a Christian life?”, we might ask. Good prophets teach good doctrine **and** try to practice what they preach.

In the Prayer for the Whole State of Christ's Church we pray for such good shepherds to guide us. We pray that all bishops and other ministers may "both by their life **and** doctrine" set forth God's true and lively word. We pray that they will not be false prophets but bear much good fruit by which they will be known. AMEN. +