

Wolves in Shepherd's Clothing (Part 1)

Romans 16:17-20

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Well in the passage that we come to this morning, Paul actually interrupts himself. We all have experience that. I do that often in conversation; I suspect you do as well. But here Paul interrupts himself, during his closing greeting, to warn the believers in Rome about the ever-present danger of false teachers. I don't know about you, but when I read this paragraph as we just did a moment ago, and we read this warning that Paul wrote to the churches in Rome, it's chilling when you consider what most of the churches in Rome have become today. This warning against false teachers is as crucial today as it was in the first century.

I was thinking about that this week. I grew up in Orthodox evangelical churches. I attended, for most of my youth, Southern Baptist churches and a few independent Baptist churches in the south. I then, after graduation, attended Grace Community Church for some 16 years in Los Angeles. And then, I moved here to Texas and for the last almost 18 years have been here at Countryside Bible Church. I just sat down this week, and I made a list in my mind and documented those people whom I have known, who attended those evangelical churches - people in my life who were deceived by false teachers and were drawn away from the truth into error. Think about this for a moment. I have personally known people in good evangelical Bible teaching churches that have been drawn away through false teachers into atheism, Catholicism, Mormonism, a radical form of Messianic Judaism (that's very close to the New Testament Judaizers), Eastern Mysticism, the Prosperity Gospel (an antinomian lifestyle in which all kinds of sin is pursued and justified), and theological liberalism. And folks, that's not a complete list.

So, the topic of false teachers that we'll consider together this morning is not something for somebody else. It's not something for another church. This is something that is appropriate and essential for all of us. And every single one of us who are followers of Jesus Christ must take this seriously. As we'll see, we are reminded of that priority by the Apostle Paul and ultimately by our Lord Himself.

So, let's look at it together. Just to remind you, we're studying the letter's conclusion. We began at the end of chapter 15 by looking at Paul's reasons for writing. And last week we began to consider his personal greetings to his friends. That's chapter 16:1-24. Last week, we looked at the first 16 verses in which Paul gives his greetings to the Roman Christians and there were some wonderful lessons there. My own heart was encouraged, and a number of you have mentioned to me how you were encouraged by that as well.

This morning we come to something that isn't quite as encouraging in that way, but every bit as important. And that is a serious warning about false teachers, in verses 17 to 20; the paragraph that we just read a moment ago. The point of Romans 16:17-20 is this: false teachers are a constant danger in the Christian church. So, all who have believed in Jesus Christ and the biblical gospel, must be on our guard and reject them.

Now let me just make an initial observation. Because these verses are so unlike Paul's normal closing in his other letters, some have even gone so far as to suggest that they weren't originally part of this letter at all. But there's no manuscript reason to reject this. It appears in all of the manuscripts that we have of Romans. In addition, Paul often includes warnings at the end of his epistles. You can see it at the end of Galatians. You can see at the end of 1 Corinthians. In addition, here in Romans, Paul has just given his greetings in verse 16 from all the churches. And you can imagine as he dictates that, his mind goes back to all of those churches that he's had a part in founding and rehearses the joys that he's experienced in those churches, and also the trouble and even the threats that those churches have faced - threats that he knows, as an Apostle, will soon come to Rome. In addition, in verse 16, he's just encouraged us to accept one another as family. Remember? "Greet one another with a holy kiss." Accept one another as close family, as friends. Having said that, Paul immediately realizes that there is a legitimate reason not to receive everyone who claims to be a Christian. Certainly, that's true in the case of those who are false teachers.

Now, who are these people that he's warning the Romans against? There are a lot of suggestions for who these teachers were. The two most common are libertines, perhaps even pre-Gnostics - those who said you can live however you want. "Confess Christ and then you go to the feasts in

the pagan temples, and you engage in all that's involved in a pagan lifestyle. It's okay! You're saved." The other possible crowd are the Judaizers - those who appear throughout the New Testament, who take the legalism of first century Judaism and try to wed it to the message of Christ. I'm not convinced, to be honest with you, that Paul had any specific false teachers in mind. Rather, I think it's best to see this as a general warning. Paul was an Apostle. He knew that there are always enemies to the gospel. In this letter, he has explained the biblical gospel to the Roman churches. And now, it's appropriate for him to warn that that gospel will always have its enemies.

In the verses, that we're going to look at together this morning, Paul gives us several important insights about false teachers. Let's consider these insights together and let me just warn you, we're only going to the first one this morning, alright? The first insight is this: the perpetual danger of false teachers, the perpetual danger of false teachers. Verse 17: "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned..." Paul is here really reflecting our Lord's ministry.

In the conclusion of our Lord's most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned of three great dangers regarding His kingdom, three great dangers. The first danger is trying to get in using the wrong entrance. That's Matthew 7:13-14. And he reminds us there, that the only entry point that leads to internal life is Jesus Christ and the biblical gospel that He taught. There is no other way. Every other gate, Jesus said, leads to destruction - that wide gate in which there are many paths you can follow that leads only to destruction but there's this narrow gate of Jesus Christ alone and His gospel alone that leads to eternal life.

A second danger Jesus talks about there, not only trying to use the wrong entrance, but making a false profession of faith. That's actually the third danger he cites. It goes from chapter 7:21 down through verse 27. But in between those two, the second danger Jesus warns about is listening to false prophets (Matthew 7:15-20). Why is that? Because one of the chief ways that people end up entering the wrong gate and get on the wrong path and end up at destruction when they thought they were headed toward eternal life, is because they are misled by false teachers. Jesus says as you seek to find and enter the narrow gate, watch out! There will be those who

deliberately try to lead you astray. Paul, here, essentially gives the Romans the same warning. Look again at what he says: “Now I urge you, brethren...” That’s how he began, you remember, back chapter 12:1, where he urged us to give our bodies as a living sacrifice. It’s how he frequently signals he’s changing subjects as well. And this word “urge”, as we learned in chapter 12, has a wide range of meaning. Here it means “to urge strongly, to exhort.” It’s somewhere between a request and a command. It’s an exhortation that comes with the authority of an apostle, in other words, with the authority of God’s Word. Paul is here claiming an obedience that you and I are obligated to give. So, it’s not merely a “do this if you get around to it”. No! This is a request that comes a plea that comes with apostolic authority.

He says, “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on...” Now that’s interesting. That actually translates a single Greek word. It’s a word that means “to pay careful attention, to lookout for.” In fact, it’s interesting. The Greek word is *skopeó*. You can recognize an English word in that, *skopeó*. It’s the word from which we get our English word “scope” as in microscope, telescope. Look out for them! Scrutinize, pay attention! At times this word is used in the sense of “watch someone carefully so you can follow their example” as in Philippians 3:17. But here it’s “watch out for so that you can avoid”. By the way, in verse 17, both of those imperatives “keep your eye on” and “turn away from” are in the present tense in the Greek text. So, we could translate it like this “keep on being on the alert for and keep on avoiding. Make this the practice and pattern of your life”.

Now the false teachers Paul is talking about here, likely were not already in the churches in Rome. There’s no hint in this letter of that. Instead, he’s talking about the reality that there were, attached to the Christian church generally, these false teachers. They were pastors, they were Christian leaders, they were purported missionaries. Jesus had warned of the same reality, as I said, back in Matthew 7:15. Here’s how He put it: “Beware of the false prophets...” Jesus uses a different word than Paul. “Beware” means to be in a state of alert, to be on guard against a very real danger. And like Paul’s command here in Romans, Jesus’ command in Matthew 7 is also in the present tense. We’re to stay constantly on the alert, constantly on the guard. There is never a time when this threat against our souls diminishes.

Do you believe that? Do you believe, as a Christian sitting here at Countryside Bible Church, that your soul is always under the threat of being exposed to false teaching that would lead you astray? You need to remain vigilant. The fact that both Jesus and Paul warn us to continually beware of false teachers makes it clear that this danger is very real and it's constant. False teachers are prevalent in every age and will be a potential problem throughout our lives. Wherever there's truth, Satan produces a counterfeit.

You can see this throughout the Scripture. I mean it starts in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 13 and Deuteronomy 18, Moses warned God's people that there would always be false prophets. And of course, in Moses' own books, we meet the first or at least the first one and that was a man named Balaam in Numbers 22-24. Balaam was a prophet for hire, willing to craft his message to accommodate the highest bidder. There was nothing Balaam wouldn't say for money. But you remember God thwarted his plans and made him prophesy blessing against Israel rather than a curse. Balaam is just the first in a long line of false prophets in Israel, throughout the Old Testament. You remember. The false prophets were those who prophesied peace and safety when God promised judgment. They prophesied victory when God said there would be defeat. They refused to tell the people the truth. Instead, they always told him what they wanted to hear throughout the Old Testament.

When you come to the New Testament, you find that false teachers are just as prevalent. During the ministry of Jesus, of course, the false teachers were whom? The scribes and Pharisees - the Pharisees, the Sadducees. In Matthew 23:15, you remember what Jesus said to them? Now think about this. This was on Tuesday of the Passion Week. Jesus is standing there on that massive Temple Mount, some 35 acres of territory. And He is teaching a large crowd. And on the outskirts of that crowd are the scribes and Pharisees. And Jesus says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees... you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." Yowser! The Apostle Paul regularly dealt with false teachers. In Corinth, there were false prophets and apostles. In Colossae, there were the ascetics, you remember, who had all these rules about what you could and couldn't do. In Thessalonica, the false teachers prompted Paul to urge the believers there to test all prophecies against the Scripture before they accepted them. In Ephesus, Hymenaeus and

Alexander sought to undermine the ministry of Timothy, according to 1 Timothy 1. And of course, in Paul's life and ministry, there were always the Judaizers lurking in the dark corners of the church with their works-based righteousness. Peter, the Apostle, in his second letter warns about false teachers. Jude, our Lord's half-brother, wrote an entire New Testament letter about the danger of false teachers. When you come to the mid 90s AD, at the end of the age of the apostles, there were still false teachers. 1 John 4:1: "...many false prophets have gone out into the world." 2 John 7: "[There are] many deceivers..." When John wrote the very last book of our New Testament, the Book of Revelation, there were false teachers in several of the seven churches. We'll see one of them tonight. And Paul warns us, that throughout the church age in which we live, evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse. And if you fast forward to the very end of the church age, they're still going to be there. Jesus, in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:11 says, "Many false prophets will arise..."

Here's the point I want you to get. Why did I walk you through all of that history? Jesus and Paul's warnings about false teachers are just as crucial for us to understand as they were in the first century. There are so many false teachers today. Do you know that? Are you aware? Are you alert? Are you on your guard? Paul insists that we stay alert for this constant danger.

Now, why are false teachers such a danger? Why? The answer is: because they look like genuine believers and true shepherds. That's the problem. Most false teachers don't look like false teachers. Oh, there are some! I mean, I don't know about you, but I watch some guys on television. I'm thinking, how could any, like intelligent person, watch this guy and think there's anything legitimate about this? But there are some that are good. They're smooth, they're slick, they're believable, and they peddle themselves as Christians. Most false teachers don't have "wolf" tattooed on their foreheads. In fact, I haven't met one. It's not a bad idea. But outwardly, they behave spiritually. They speak piously. They try to pass themselves off as one of us.

In fact, turn over to 2 Corinthians 11, 2 Corinthians 11:13. Paul talks about the false teachers that were in Corinth, the false apostles. And he says in 2 Corinthians 11:13, "For such men are false apostles..." Now remember, folks, this is a church Paul founded. And in this church, there

are “false apostles, deceitful workers [notice this], disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” They were selling it hard that they were actually true apostles. And there were people in Corinth who were buying it. Verse 14: “[Don’t be surprised at this] No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” Bringing good, you remember, even in the garden. ‘You know, I’m here for your good, Eve!’ “Therefore it is not surprising [notice this] if his servants [those are false teachers, his servants] also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”

Look at Matthew 7. I’ve alluded to it several times, but I want you to see it, Matthew 7:15. As Jesus finishes His Sermon on the Mount, He says, “Beware of the false prophets [notice this], who come to you in sheep’s clothing...” By the way, notice they come to you. You don’t have to go looking for false teachers. They’re going to find you. And they come in sheep’s clothing. Like the wolf in Aesop’s fable, they try to look like sheep. They disguise their true nature. They want us to believe that they’re Christian brothers. One author puts it this way: “A false teacher does not announce and advertise himself as a purveyor of lies. On the contrary, he claims to be a teacher of the truth. Not only does he feign piety, but he often uses the language of historic orthodoxy in order to win acceptance from the gullible, while meaning by it something quite different, something destructive of the very truth he pretends to hold.” That’s an important point by the way. Not all false teachers come presenting words that are clearly error. Often times, they use the same words we use, they just redefine them to mean something entirely different. He goes on: “We must not be dazzled by a person’s outward clothing, his charm, learning, doctorates, and ecclesiastical honors.” So, the real danger with false teachers is they come in disguise. They present themselves as real sheep and as genuine shepherds. That’s why I entitled today’s message, “Wolves in Shepherd’s Clothing”, because that’s how they come.

But Jesus, notice verse 15, reveals their true nature. Inwardly they are ravenous wolves. Outwardly, they look like real sheep but inwardly they are wolves. They’re not real sheep. They’re not real Christians. And they’re not real shepherds. They are predators. Matthew Henry writes: “Every hypocrite is a goat in sheep’s clothing, but a false teacher is a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Not only not a sheep, but the worst enemy the sheep have, that comes to tear and devour, to scatter the sheep, to drive them from God, and from one another.” And notice,

Jesus adds, “they are ravenous wolves”. They are hungry, vicious, predatory. False teachers don’t care about sheep. They feed on sheep. They use and destroy the sheep for their own lusts.

Now, let me just say this. Don’t misunderstand. Some false teachers are complete charlatans and hucksters. In other words, there are false teachers out there who know absolutely that they are lying frauds. Some of them are transparent - Robert Tilton or, you remember, Peter Popoff. Some of you will remember that name - a man who passed himself off as a healer and, when he decided he wanted to get out of the business and he had enough, he actually recorded himself pulling off of his tricks and frauds on people and laughing and making fun as he counted their money on his hotel bed. Some know they’re like this. Others, however, listen carefully, other false teachers are deceiving the people they teach about certain things in their lives and ministries, but at the same time, they themselves are being deceived by Satan. 2 Timothy 3:13: “But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse [listen to this], deceiving and being deceived.”

So, let’s go back to Romans 16 because Paul unmasks false teachers in our text. He unmasks them. He reveals them for who they are. He allows us to see them. He pulls off their little Red Riding Hood disguise to show them for the wolves they are. Now, he identifies false teachers here in three ways.

First of all, they’re those who cause dissensions, those who cause dissensions. The Greek word translated “dissensions” occurs only two other times in the New Testament. And one of those, Galatians 3:20, it’s linked with two other words that help us understand. It’s linked with “disputes” and “factions”. False teachers are argumentative against the normal truth of the Christian faith, and they create dissensions and factions. The word “dissensions” means “a state of divisive opposition”. They come into the church with their smooth words, and they convince people that they’ve believe the wrong thing - just like Satan did in the garden, right? ‘Oh no! You misunderstand! You’re not going to die in the day that you eat.’ That’s how they come. But that creates, because there are those who still believe the truth, that creates a dissension, a disunity created by their aberrant teaching.

Secondly, Paul identifies them as those who cause hindrances. The Greek word is *skandalon* from which we get our English word “scandal”. Originally, this word referred to a trap that animal trappers would use, specifically to the bait stick that tripped the trap. But in context here, it refers to that which traps people. It refers to the teaching or actions by a teacher that trap others, that tempt others to act contrary to Scripture. That can happen by heretical teaching, it can happen by a sinful lifestyle, but usually the two go together.

Now Paul provides a third way to identify false teachers that is the most important of all. Notice what he says - those who teach act “contrary to the teaching which you [have] learned”. Now that is absolutely important because sometimes, folks, divisions are important and necessary. They can be for the truth as Paul did in Galatians 1, you remember, when he stood up to Peter who was compromising the gospel. Sometimes truth can be a stumbling block. 1 Corinthians 1: the cross was a stumbling block to many. The real test of a false teacher is this: is what he is teaching contrary to the faith once for all delivered to the saints? Is it contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture? The Roman believers were grounded in the truth. And they were, Paul says, to examine every teacher to see if what that teacher lived and what that teacher taught was contrary to the Scripture they had received, “to the teaching which you learned”. You see, there’s a doctrinal and ethical standard that we must follow. And we must be alert for any teacher that contradicts it. And that standard is preserved in the Scripture.

Turn over to 2 Timothy 3, 2 Timothy 3. Sometimes we quote this passage completely out of its context, but I want you to notice Paul begins by talking about false teachers. This chapter is describing false teachers. And verse 8 he gets to the point. There are these men in the church who like those who “opposed Moses...oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.” Verse 13: “But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” False teachers are going to always be around, and as the church age unfolds, they’re going to get worse. “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings...” That’s the standard. Take a look at the sacred writings, the Scripture, and measure the teaching and lifestyle of those who purport to be representing Christ and see if they match.

Teaching that's contrary to Scripture can take many forms but let me just give you an overview. There are two main categories of false teachers. First of all, there are those who teach the worship of false gods, Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Here comes a false prophet and he says let me tell you about who God is and that God is not the God of the Bible. The second main category of false teachers are those who claim the true God but teach some combination of the following errors. And I say combination because it can be one or more of these things combined. And you find usually they are combined. First of all, they teach a false source of authority that contradicts God's previous revelation. 1 John, look at 1 John 4, 1 John 4:6. John the Apostle says, "We [the Apostles] are from God; he who knows God listens to us [that is, listens to the Scripture]; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Whenever somebody starts adding to the Word of God, they start giving you some new form of revelation or they become the authoritative voice that you need to believe rather than the Scripture itself, mark it, you're dealing with a false teacher.

Secondly: a false Christ or a false gospel, a false Christ or a false gospel. 2 John 9: "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ [the teaching about Christ], does not have God..." Somebody comes to you and says, "Christ is a created being, that He is the product of a physical union between God and a woman." If he comes to you and says, 'Christ is not the second member of the Trinity', if he comes to you and says anything wrong about Christ, then you are dealing with a false teacher. Same thing is true when it comes to a false gospel. In Galatians 1:8-9 Paul says this: "But even if we [that is, Paul himself], or an angel from heaven [let's say Gabriel], should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you [in other words, what you have received already and is encapsulated in the Word of God], he is to be accursed [damned]! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received [in the Scripture], he is to be accursed [damned]!" So, understand this: no matter how pious somebody looks, no matter how well they present themselves, no matter how much you might look at them and go 'Wow! There's somebody to be admired', if they are teaching a gospel other than the biblical gospel, they are a false teacher. And let them be accursed, let them be damned.

A third error that often accompanies false teachers is a lifestyle of license as opposed to personal holiness, a lifestyle of license. Turn back to Jeremiah. Jeremiah spends this entire chapter 23 dealing with the true shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ, in contrast to all the false shepherds that Israel had. And let me show you what false shepherds, what false teachers do, how they teach. Jeremiah 23, look at verse 14: “Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: / The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood...” So, they themselves are living that way. “And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, / So that no one has turned back from his wickedness. / All of them have become to Me like Sodom, / And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.” This is what false prophets always do or often do. They mix in license. Verse 17: “They keep saying to those who despise Me, / ‘The Lord has said, ‘You will have peace’; / And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, / They say, ‘Calamity will not come upon you.’ [God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life].” When there is a lifestyle of license as opposed to a pursuit of personal holiness, you’re dealing with a false teacher.

Number 4: legalism and asceticism as opposed to personal holiness. This is the other side of it. Sometimes, false teachers don’t come with a “live however you want”, they come with a kind of teaching that appeals to your pride - “I’m going to be better and holier than everybody else”, “I’m going to add these things that other people aren’t doing”. So, you have that in Matthew 23 where Jesus castigates the scribes and Pharisees, in Colossians 2 the aesthetics in Colossae, and in 1 Timothy 4 he talks about doctrines of demons being not allowing people to eat certain foods. So, sometimes false teachers come with legalism and asceticism to appeal to your pride.

Number 5. Another error is false teachers often just tell people what they want to hear as opposed to God’s truth. Look at 2 Timothy 4, 2 Timothy 4:3. He’s just told Timothy, as a faithful preacher, to preach the word (verse 2) and do so when it’s popular, when it’s in season and when it’s not, when it’s out of season. Verse 3: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...” Who’s “they”? People sitting in churches. “...when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” There’s always a false teacher who’s more than happy to tell people what they want to hear. False teachers, inevitably, give people a false sense of security.

They make them comfortable in their sins. They don't warn them about God's coming judgment. The most dangerous thing about false teachers is what they don't say. They emphasize the love of God but avoid the holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath of God. They emphasize the value of man but avoid our total depravity and sinfulness before a holy God. They offer the wide gate and easy salvation, but they avoid Jesus' demands for discipleship. We must remain constantly vigilant for those who are guilty of these aberrations. Mark it, folks! They are false teachers, and we must beware.

Now, using that standard, looking at those realities, what are some of today's false teachers? I just need to throw some of these out there. These are the most common false teachers. There are others, but these are some of the most common ones that are out there you need to be aware of - Pope Francis and the entire Roman Catholic system. Why? Because they have a different authority than the Bible itself, and they teach a works-based gospel that will damn the souls of those who truly believe it. Cults - like Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses. They have a different Jesus, a different gospel. Those in the Church of Christ who still teach baptismal regeneration - that you have to be baptized to be saved, as that church historically has. Postmodern teachers who undermine the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. Faith healers, Word of Faith preachers on television who preach the Prosperity Gospel. And listen, this is not a small percentage. Even those in the Charismatic Movement estimate that more than 50% of the movement worldwide is the Prosperity Gospel. I think the number is higher. But it's at least 50% - people like Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Copeland, Paula White, Jesse Duplantis, Robert Tilton, Todd Bentley, and of course two of the most well-known Benny Hinn and Joel Osteen. Folks, those are false teachers. Beware! Those are merely representative. Sadly, there are countless others. On one end of the spectrum, you have the gaudy deceivers, the TBN Benny Hinn crowd. On the other end are the erudite academic intellectuals with their sophisticated dress and their smooth ambiguous postmodernism. Some use publishing and conferences to spread their deception. Listen carefully, those of you have kids in Texas schools. Others stand in the religion classes in a college with a Christian heritage like Baylor or TCU and pretend to love Jesus Christ, but they systematically undermine the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Beware! Christ and His apostles have warned us.

Now what do we do with all this? Well, if you're here this morning and you are not a true believer in Jesus Christ, you need to understand that Satan desperately wants to keep that from happening. And he will try to use false teachers to keep you from truly entering the narrow gate, the only way that you can be right with God. He wants you to believe in a Christ who's not the Christ of the Bible. He wants you to trust in your own goodness and your own works as the way to get into heaven rather than in the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ. He wants to blind you to the true gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4) and he'll do everything he can to do so. I plead with you: respond to the Scripture, read the gospel of John, ask the Lord to open your eyes to the true Christ, to the true gospel, and respond to that gospel in repentance and faith.

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, false teachers (and here's the encouraging part for us), false teachers will never lead you into damning error. Let me say that again. If you're a true believer, false teachers will never lead you into damning error. They will never lead you to believe in a false Christ, a false way of salvation, or a flawed view of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. How do I know that? Listen to our Lord. Matthew 24:24: "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." It's not possible! However, if you're a true believer, false teachers and their teaching can thwart your spiritual growth. Ephesians 4:14 talks about spiritual children, true Christians, who are "tossed here and there ... by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming..." It's a real danger. Look at 2 Peter. The teaching of false teachers can confuse you and distract you from kingdom priorities. 2 Peter 3:17: "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but [instead] grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." And here's another problem, Christian. False teachers can use you, if you're not careful, to propagate their error into the lives of others.

So, how do we recognize them? And how should we biblically respond? And Lord willing, we'll consider that next time. Let's pray together.

Our Father, help us to be on our guard. Don't let a single one of us, who profess Jesus Christ, not take this warning seriously. Because Father, thank You that You use such warnings to keep us on the path of righteousness, to keep us in the truth. And I pray You would use this morning to do just that for those who are here, who are your own. And Lord I pray that You would give us discernment, wisdom, without giving ourselves to being hypercritical and cynical. And Father I pray for those who are here this morning who are not in Christ. Oh God, help them to see they are at such risk because there's nothing Satan would love more than to direct them to a Christ who's not the Christ of the Bible and a gospel that is not the saving gospel. Lord help them to pursue You in the Scripture and may You open their minds and hearts to understand. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!