

## **False Prophets Penetrate The Church In Disguise**

*“I can't disguise myself with a wig and dark glasses - the wheelchair gives me away.”* (Stephen Hawking)

Too often, we think of disguises only for a party that features them. Or, famous people attempt to disguise themselves when in public to avoid unwanted attention. Even parents sometimes hide an odious task for their children within a hidden desirable one.

Famous Bible characters used disguises to hide their personas. For example, King Saul put on other raiment when he went to see the woman at Endor, seeking a familiar spirit. (1 Samuel 28.8) Jacob put on fake garments to fool Isaac to think that he was Esau. (Genesis 27.15-17) King Ahab died in battle because he attempted to hide his royalty. (1 Kings 22.29-35)

Often, disguises portrayed in the Bible do not end well. That describes the result to Christian's fooled by false prophets. Jude, a brother of Christ, wrote a letter to Christians sometime between 70 – 80 AD. (1) His great concern for them over the presence of false teachers in the Christian Church prompted his epistle.

He recognized that false teachers had penetrated the Church under the guise of following Christ. They did not follow Christ in reality, but they came to destroy His true followers. In his warning, Jude described several characteristics of these false believers who came to disrupt the Church.

### **Jude's Warnings To The Early Believers**

#### **False prophets: depravity of conduct**

Jude described their depravity of conduct.

*“...certain men crept in unawares.”* (Jude 4)

These false prophets snuck into the Church. People did not notice them because these fakes called themselves Christians. However, they portrayed a false image which hid their true character. Their duplicitous ways hid their deepest thoughts with clever words and actions. Their hypocrisies contradicted their pretenses.

They did not trust Christ.

Jude called these hypocrites ungodly men. Not only did they behave in a false manner, they also perverted the grace of God. Jude said that they had turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. (Jude 4)

Further, Jude described the wickedness of these imposters who lived after the satisfaction of their own lusts: they copied those who lived in...

*“...Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh”* (Jude 7-8)

These false prophets lived to satisfy their own fleshly desires and used their positions of influence and authority to subvert and entice the unsuspecting. They crept into the Church and, in essence, said, “Because of God's grace and His goodness, He has saved me. Therefore, I can live any way I want to live.”

#### **False prophets: disrespect for authority**

These deceptive leaders rejected the Lordship of Christ. In addition, they spurned authority. (Jude 8) To satisfy their lusts, they indulged in all manner of sexual immorality and perversion, contrary to God's law. Their behavior caused them to defile their own bodies.

They became a law unto themselves, answerable to no one in the Church. The false prophets set their own rules and did not submit themselves to authority within the congregation or from other Church leaders.

### **False prophets: deficiency of knowledge**

Jude identified another trait of faulty leadership, a deficiency of knowledge. He explained it this way,

*“But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.”* (Jude 10)

They never learned the truths of God, so they tried to explain Scripture without knowledge of it. Jude called them brute beasts. They followed their natural instincts and behaved in ways that seemed normal and natural to their humanness in the same way that animals live in accordance with their natures.

Therefore, they spoke falsely. Not knowing God, they spoke evil of things that they did not understand. They did not see things from God’s perspective nor understand His will and ways. They call good evil and evil good, because they really do not know the truth.

Jude gave a warning. He said these men crept in unawares.

### **False prophets: destitution of character**

In a series of pictures, Jude described the false prophets as destitute characters. He gave a lengthy list of characteristics to illustrate their destitution. These vivid descriptions explain their lack of character.

*“Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.”* (Jude 11)

Jude identified three men in the Bible who carried out notorious acts.

- Cain killed his brother.
- Balaam attempted to prophesy against the Israelites as they traversed the wilderness toward the Promised Land. He gave counsel to Israel’s enemies on how to lead God’s people into immorality, which succeeded.
- Korah (Core) attempted to overthrow Moses, God’s chosen leader of Israel. God judged him by causing the earth to open up and swallow alive Korah and his followers.

Jude urged his fellow Christ followers to reject false prophets who commit dishonorable acts against God’s law and government.

*“These [people] are spots in your feasts of charity...”* (Jude 12)

The false prophets attended Israel’s feasts, boldly acting like Godly men. The literal meaning of this verse portrays them like rocks hidden under the water. They posed a danger to God’s people, because, without shame, these hypocrites waited for the opportunity to cause believers to slip as if on rocks hidden under water.

*“...clouds they are without water, carried about of winds, trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”* (Jude 12)

What good is a cloud without life-giving, refreshing water? It is worthless. That explains the true worth of false prophets. He also depicted their worthless character by calling them trees without fruit. Obviously, a fruit tree without fruit is valueless and succumbs to the axe.

*“...raging waves of the sea...”* (Jude 13)

The waves of the sea move in response to the wind. They move in whatever direction that the wind blows. The strength and direction of the wind determines the ferocity of the waves.

The false prophets formed their messages and direction upon the whims of man, fluctuating like the wind,

which drove them like wild wind-driven sea breakers.

*“...wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.”* (Jude 13)

Stars in the heavens have a fixed path. Here, Jude used a Biblical type of using stars for leaders. However, these stars wandered, following no fixed path. Thus, God’s people could not follow them, because the leaders did not know their direction, leading the flock one way this time and different way another time. Jude’s friends could not rely upon their leadership.

*“These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage...mockers walking after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not having the Spirit.”* (Jude 16-19)

Jude categorized the false prophets of his day as hypocrites, worthless, and ungodly. His lengthy list of the poverty of character of these corrupt leaders describes their sinful practices.

### **Purpose of Jude’s Warning**

Jude wrote his letter to his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. At first, he wanted to write to them of their common salvation. (Jude 3) However, his great concern for them over the presence of false teachers in the Christian Church altered his design.

He recognized that false teachers had penetrated the Church under the guise of following Christ. They did not follow Christ in reality, but they came to destroy His true followers. In his warning, Jude described several characteristics of these false believers who came to disrupt the Church in order that he might protect them from spiritual danger.

### **Correlation**

Jude’s concerns thousands of years ago apply to the professing Church of Jesus Christ today.

#### **False prophets: depravity of conduct**

Throughout history, false teachers have followed this pattern. For example,

- They claim to have made a “decision for Christ” at some time in their lives, but the experience produced a temporary feeling, not a life changing faith in Christ.
- Others have made no choice at all. They assumed the role of a Christian, thinking that one becomes a Christian by behaving like one.
- Some come as messengers of the evil one intent upon destruction of the Church.

All of these various types of “Christians” inhabit the Church. Some possess positions of leadership. Like Jude’s description, many people today give the impression that they follow Christ yet pursue a lascivious lifestyle.

They say, “I am free in Christ.” By that, they mean this:

*“Since I have made a decision for Christ, I can do anything I want and live any lifestyle I choose. No one can criticize my behavior, because I have made a decision for Christ. One day I will inherit eternal life. Once saved, always saved. I am free in Christ.”*

Such an attitude fails to describe true Christ followers. The Bible teaches that when you become a follower of Christ, you become His servant. Your lifestyle changes, and you become increasingly more like Christ.

Therefore, if we follow Christ, we cannot live any way that we please. Those who trust Christ do not have the freedom to live selfish, licentious, lascivious lifestyles. We cannot pursue the gratification of our own fleshly lusts and desires. In Christ, we become new creatures; the old, sinful things pass away. (2 Corinthians 5.17)

Jesus did not live His life according to His own will. He lived after the pattern, dictates, and commands of His Heavenly Father. He lived a holy, just life. He commands those who truly trust Him to live holy lives, too.

Though written thousands of years ago, Jude's description of the false prophets in the Church of his day depicts conditions prevalent in the Church today. Many pastors and Church leaders live self-seeking lifestyles. They mislead unknowing multitudes into a condition of false security and hypocrisy.

Jude's warning rings true now, too. The depravity of the conduct of false prophets leads them to deny Christ. They claim to follow Him, but, by their deportment, they reject Him. Their actions betray their speech. They deny His authority over their lives. You cannot claim to follow Christ and reject His authority over your life at the same time. If Christ is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.

Many untrustworthy teachers today separate salvation from lordship. They preach that someone can come to faith in Christ and, at a subsequent date or perhaps not at all, come to recognize Jesus as Lord. They teach the error that professing Christians can live as they please.

Yet, Jesus never separated these issues. Christ's disciples must deny their fleshly lusts, the world's enticements, and submit to His lordship over their lives and His commands for their behavior. Jesus rejects all others. (Matthew 16.24-25)

### **False prophets: disrespect for authority**

Today, many false leaders in the professing Church follow the same practice as Jude identified. They do not submit to any authority in their congregations, or from other leaders in the Christian Church. Some hold a virtual dictatorial position in the churches that they lead.

This resistance to authority affects their response to government, too. It is not unusual for false leaders to refuse to submit to government. Too often, it shows itself when the government sets restrictions on religious organizations and the lavish lifestyles of their leaders.

The pursuit of money has blinded the eyes of false prophets so that they have lost control of their behavior. It saddens me to see prominent Church leaders hide behind the Church to reject legitimate government authority. Paul in Romans 13 admonishes believers to obey government and give respect to its officials.

But government does at times overstep their bounds. Peter and John faced a dilemma with government edicts soon after Christ's ascension into heaven, as did Daniel and his three friends in Babylon. Their examples remind us to stand for God's commands when governments demand that we obey them instead of God.

On occasions of direct conflict between man's law and God's law, we must submit and follow God's law. However, Jude's warning centuries ago that disrespect for legitimate Biblical authority marks a false teacher, an often-overlooked characteristic in our day.

### **False prophets: deficiency of knowledge**

The Church today experiences a dearth of leaders who know God. You cannot know God by osmosis. You cannot know God unless you spend time with Him in study of His word and in prayer, conversing with Him.

Praise God, there are a few people in positions of leadership who know God and spend time with Him. They stand in stark contrast to the many who try to represent the God they do not know. Do not follow them or listen to them. They talk about things they do not really understand, because they do not know God.

We need leaders who take time to know God and to study His word. They do not give a brief lecture on the goodness of man or a few steps on how to cure emotional ills. They tell you something about God and what they have come to know about Him by experience. They encourage their listeners to pursue after God in intimate fellowship with Him.

### **False prophets: destitution of character**

Today, the professing Church elevates to positions of authority and responsibility men and women who fit these same descriptions. Some leaders commit notorious acts against other believers and the government without repentance

In brazen behavior, they act like believers but live lives of hypocrisy. They are like clouds without water, trees without fruit, without value and worthless in character. These false prophets conform to the changeable winds of the culture.

They form their messages and direction upon the whims of man, fluctuating like the wind, which drives them like wild, wind-driven sea breakers. Thus, God's people dare not follow them, because these false leaders do not know their direction, leading the flock one way this time and different way another time.

Jude categorized the false prophets of his day as hypocrites, worthless, and ungodly. His lengthy list of the poverty of character of these corrupt leaders describes the sinful practices inherent in false prophets of our day, too.

## Implications

We can learn from Jude's first century warnings. His explanations provide guidance to us in our quest to ferret out the errant Christian leaders in our day. Thousands of years ago, Jude gave his warning out of love and concern for his friends and for God's honor.

As he exhorted his fellow Christ followers, I, too, urge you with this same caution.

- Do not follow those whose character and practices coincide with these warnings.
- Do not listen to them.
- Do not buy their books.
- Do not watch them on television.
- Do not subscribe to their magazines and newsletters.
- Do not send them money as "seed faith offerings."

They will not lead you to God, because they do not honor and exalt the Lord Jesus in their own lives. I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see the truth of God's Word as revealed in Jude's warning to his friends.

God has provided it for your protection, too. He loves His own, those who know God and have trusted Christ Who cares for them like a shepherd cares for his sheep.

Heed these warnings from Scripture on false prophets. Listen to the Spirit of God Who will instruct you to identify the false and to follow the true. I pray the Spirit of God will do that for you and lead you to fullness of joy, the rightful possession of the children of God.

## References

1. *The Ryrie Study Bible*. Ryrie, Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Th.D, Ph.D., editor. "Introduction To The Letter Of Jude." Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL. 1976, 1978. p. 1890.

## Questions For Reflection And Application

01. Is it possible for a person to believe (s)he is Christian, when (s)he is not? If so, how does this happen?
02. How can these people be identified and helped?
03. Do these people fulfill church needs such as Sunday School teachers, worship leaders, youth leaders, deacons and/or elders? Why or why not?
04. What does it mean to be "free in Christ?" How can misuse of this truth become dangerous?
05. Why is it necessary for church leaders to submit to authority? In the local church, how can "authority" be provided through the congregation?
06. How does a church leader learn the truths of knowing Christ?
07. List some activities in which false prophets demonstrate dishonorable acts against God's law and government.
08. When someone and/or the church congregation identifies a false prophet, what responsibility do(es) (s)he

and/or they have?

*Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your great love for us, which You have demonstrated in so many ways. You have preserved this letter from Jude to his friends warning them of false prophets and urging them not to follow them, with clear descriptions of what they would look like and how they would act.*

*Father, that description fits our day as well. I ask You to send forth Your Holy Spirit to us to open our eyes to identify false prophets, to turn from them, and to seek after that which is true. Help us to recognize the true messengers whom You have sent so that we might learn from them; come to know and trust You more fully, and to experience that joy and peace that is ours in Christ because we are Your children.*

*We will give You thanks, praise, and honor, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for what You accomplish.  
Amen.*