

# A NECESSARY EVIL

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False prophets were a regular part of Israel's life in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 explained the reason why it was necessary for them to be around: as a *test* for the people: "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: *for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*" God knows for certain who loves Him with all their heart when they refuse to listen to or follow any other way than His way. For this same reason, we have been promised to have false teachers *among us* (i.e. within the body of Christ itself) in the New Testament: "*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you*" (2 Pet 2:1). First Corinthians 11:19 says, "*For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*" Those who resist false doctrine (heresies) are the ones who have God's approval. Jesus Christ also foretold this in Matthew 18:6-7: "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offenses! *for it must needs be that offenses come*; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!" The scriptures also give extensive warnings about the methods false teachers use to offend God's children and cause them to fall away.

## **Wolves in sheep's clothing**

False teachers do not come into the church of Christ by announcing with a trumpet that they are wolves and are ready to begin devouring the sheep. In Matthew 7:15, Jesus gives this warning about false teachers and the methods they will employ to infiltrate us: "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*" The wolves will try to make themselves look like sheep. Paul said, "*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness*" (2 Cor 11:13-15). Satan does not try to make evil look evil. He is very subtle and crafty and tries to make evil look good. Satan deceived Eve by making the forbidden fruit to look like it was "good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise" (Gen 3:1-6). False teachers operate

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in the same manner (2 Cor 11:3-4). They “privily bring in” (Strong’s #3919, *pareisago*, meaning “to lead in aside,” or introduce surreptitiously, secretly or craftily) their “damnable heresies” (2 Pet 2:2). They use “feigned” (Strong’s #4112, *plastos*, meaning “molded” like plastic) words (2 Pet 2:3), “good words and fair speeches” to “deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:18). Ephesians 4:14 says they “lie in wait to deceive” with “sleight” (Strong’s #2940, *kubeia*, meaning “gambling” from the word for “cube” as in a die) and “cunning craftiness” (Strong’s #3834, *panourgia*, meaning “adroitness”). False teachers *creep in unawares* (Jude 4; Gal 2:4). They come in “privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (Gal 2:4).

### **Known by their fruits**

Since false teachers present themselves as ministers of righteousness and as genuine sheep (Matt 7:15; 2 Cor 11:13-15), it is crucial to be able to discern between a true sheep and a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Jesus explained how to do this in Matthew 7:16-20: “*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*”

Judging only by the outward appearance, there is no way to tell a real sheep from a wolf that is in sheep’s clothing. Some of the Corinthian Christians were looking on things after the outward appearance (2 Cor 5:12-17; 10:7-10), and thus were accepting false apostles because they could not see the difference between a true one and a false one. A person’s deeds come from the heart, and that is the fruit that must be discerned (Luke 6:42-44). Only in judging by the heart and inspecting their fruits is a Christian able to try these imposters and find them liars (Rev 2:2). Such an examination reveals that false teachers do not preach the same Jesus or the same gospel as the New Testament does (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tim 6:3-5), and their works are not according to God’s ways. Their fruits are corrupt, and, therefore, they are corrupt trees.

### **2012 ATTENDANCE AVERAGES**

Sunday mornings:	57.4 (65.7 in 2011, 53.7 in 2010)
Sunday evenings:	51.4 (56.1 in 2011, 45.8 in 2010)
Wednesday evenings:	47.5 (51.5 in 2011, 41.4 in 2010)