# False Leaders

## WISDOM, WARNINGS AND GUIDELINES

- **Who are false leaders?**
- **What motivates them?**
- **How do they gain entry?**
- **How do they act?**
- **How do they impact people?**
- **What do they teach?**
- **What will happen to them?**
- **How should we respond?**
- **What are some Biblical reference points to consider?**

## INTRODUCTION

Deception is glamorized, sprinkled with Scripture and propagated by attractive messengers. It spreads like a contagious plague.

Jesus and the Apostles taught that deceivers and their trickery will increase as the Lord's return nears. Anyone can be led astray by false leaders and teachers. Jesus and the Apostles taught and demonstrated what Kingdom leaders are to be and not be. Jesus will hold all believers account able. He will judge all false leaders with righteous justice.

We* desire to be faithful followers of the King of Kings and represent Him with godly hearts and character. We desire that others do the same for the health and growth of the Bride of Christ, His Church.

We are burdened for the purity and expansion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are deeply concerned that so many deceptions and false leaders detract from our focus on Jesus and His Kingdom work in the world. We must take these devastating realities seriously.

## OUR GOALS

1. Provide this document as a simple tool to help believers identify and deal with false leaders.

2. Provide New Testament teaching about false leaders that has international input and affirmation.

3. Provide a humble, principled, self-reflective, and discerning approach to this topic.

4. Call leaders to faithful Christ-focused leadership. (See The Leader's Covenant for a simple yet profound overview of Christ-like leadership.)

## PRAYER

Lord, you desire truth in my innermost being. I confess that in my flesh I can be blind to attitudes and practices that do not honor you. I long for a purity of focus on Jesus in my own life and among those whom I influence. Grant me grace to see and wisdom to know how to address this topic in my own life and ministry. Open my eyes to see decep tion around me. Allow me to see if or how deceivers have used me to influence others. Lord, I desire to honor and glorify you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

## WHO ARE FALSE LEADERS?

False leaders are those who lead people away from a focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. They can also undermine or misuse the Scriptures and lead the saints away from faith ful, godly living. (1 Tim. 6:3-5; 1 Jn. 4:1-6; Jude 4)

We see four types of leaders who lead others astray.

1. Some are un-taught who need additional understanding. (Acts 18:24-28)

2. Some are in sin or embrace the practices, philosophies and pathways of the world. (Matt. 6:1-18; 1 Cor. 3:1-4; Gal. 2:11-14; 2 Tim. 4:10)

3. Some are deceived and may or may not be true believers. (1 Cor. 3:13-15; 1 Tim. 6:3-5)

4. Some are driven by their father, Satan. (Jn. 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:13-15)

In the New Testament false leaders are called:

• False prophets (Matt. 7:15-23)

• Sons of the devil (Jn. 8:44)

• Blind fools. (Matt. 23:16-26)

• Brood of vipers. (Matt. 23:33)

• Hypocrites (Matt. 23:1-36; Lk. 12:1-3)

• False teachers (2 Pt. 2:1)

• False apostles (2 Cor. 11:12-15)

• Deceitful workers (2 Cor. 11:12-15)

• Antichrists (1 Jn. 2:18-22)

• Deceivers (2 Jn. 7-8)

• Many other descriptions (2 Pt. 2:17; Jude 12-13)

***Caution: Some people may behave or have beliefs we disagree with, but they may not be false leaders. Use the following material to discern. (Lk. 9:49-50; Rm. 14:1-12)***

**Take a moment for reflection or discussion:**

1. What has been my experience in observing false leaders and false teaching?

2. Where have I seen damage caused by false leaders?

3. Why is this topic important to me?

## WHAT MOTIVATES THEM?

False leaders have a variety of sinful motives. They may:

• Want to do the deeds of the devil. (Jn. 8:41-44)

• Want to gain power by controlling people. (3 Jn. 9-11)

• Seek to undermine the authority of Scriptures and the Lord's true servants. (Phil. 1:15-17; 2 Pt. 3:16)

• Seek praise and honor from people. (Matt. 23:5-7; Jn. 12:42-43; Gal. 1:10)

• Seek personal financial gain. (Jn. 12:4-8; 2 Pt. 2:3; 2 Pt. 2:12-16)

• Promote their fleshly lifestyles. (2 Pt. 2:17-22)

• Promote their own teaching. (1 Tim. 1:3-7)

A false leader's motives, with time and discernment, will become obvious. Observe the fruit of their words, life or ministry to discern their motives. (Matt. 7:15-20; Matt. 12:33-37; Gal. 5:19-25; 1 Tim. 5:24)

**Take a moment for reflection or discussion:**

1. How have I discerned motives of others in the past?

2. How can the principle of "observing fruit" assist me to discern motives of false leaders?

3. If fruit reveals motives, what motives does the fruit of my life reveal?

## HOW DO THEY GAIN ENTRY?

False leaders come among us in many ways. They can:

• Creep in secretly. (Acts 20:28-31; 2 Cor. 11:14-15)

• Attract people through enticing fleshly desires. (2 Pt. 2:1-3; Jude 4)

• Say what people want to hear. (2 Tim. 4:3; 2 Pt. 2:1-3)

• Seek unstable and weak people. (2 Tim. 3:6-7)

• Claim to be a deliverer or even Christ himself. (Matt. 24:5)

• Use smooth speech. (Rm. 16:17-18)

• Use the sponsorship of groups or crowds. (Gal. 2:11-14)

• Use worldly wisdom and principles that ignore following Christ. (Col. 2:8)

**Take a moment for reflection or discussion:**

1. How have I observed false leaders or teachers entering ministries?

2. In my culture, how do false leaders most easily enter a group of believers?

3. What inner warning signs do I experience when I observe one of these tactics being used?

## HOW DO THEY ACT?

False leaders act in dangerous ways. They can:

• Disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. (2 Cor. 11:12-15)

• Follow twisted sexual desires despising God's authority. (2 Pt. 2:10; 2 Pt. 2:18)

• Claim to be important, giving themselves titles and power. (Mk. 12:38-40; Lk. 22:24-27)

• Manipulate by using empty traditional beliefs, superstitions or fears. (Col. 2:8)

• Cause divisions through worldly-minded teaching and tactics, devoid of the Spirit. (Jude 16, 19)

• Dominate, control and manipulate people using worldly strategies and tactics to maintain their power and position. (3 Jn. 9-11)

• Use eloquent speech and flattery for the sake of gain. (Rm. 16:17-18; Jude 16)

• Attract attention to themselves seeking praise and honor from people. (2 Cor 5:12; Matt 6:1-18)

• Pretend to be loving and faithful while cheating others. (Mk. 12:38-40)

• Follow their natural desires. (Phil. 3:18-19)

• Care only for themselves. (Jude 12)

**Take a moment for reflection or discussion:**

1. In my culture, how do false leaders often act?

2. Where have I acted like a false leader?

3. How does this list of false leader's actions motivate or warn me?

## HOW DO THEY IMPACT PEOPLE?

False leaders harm believers. People may be:

• Manipulated to believe destructive heresies. (2 Pt. 2:1)

• Deceived to become disciples of the false leader rather than the Lord. (Matt. 24:9-14; Acts 20:29-30; 3 Jn. 9-11)

• Urged to follow fleshly ways. (2 Pt. 2:2; 2 Pt. 2:17-19)

• Exploited financially. (2 Pt. 2:3)

• Trained in abuse, envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicion and constant friction. (1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Pt. 2:14-19)

• Persuaded to minimize Christ, oppose the truth, and follow fleshly passions. (2 Tim. 3:1-9)

• Confused and upset. (Gal. 1:7; Gal. 5:10; Tit. 1:10-11)

**Take a moment for reflection or discussion:**

1. What damage have I seen false leaders do to individuals or groups?

2. How have false leaders harmed me?

3. How does this damage make me feel?

## WHAT DO THEY TEACH?

False leaders teach subtle errors, half-truths or blatant errors and lies. They can:

• Undermine confidence in Jesus' life, ministry, works and authority. (Col. 2:8; 1 Jn. 2:18-24)

• Promote false beliefs and contrary doctrines. (Mk. 7:1- 13; Rm. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:3-4; 2 Pt. 2:1)

• Oppose truth or emphasize half-truths. (1 Tim. 1:3-7; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:8; 2 Pt. 3:14-17)

• Distort Scriptures or take verses out of context for their own agenda. (Matt. 4:1-11; 2 Pt. 3:14-17)

• Exalt human and worldly thinking and actions over God's ways. (Col 2:8; 2 Tim 2:16-18; 2 Pt 2:18-19)

• Pervert the gospel. (Gal. 1:6-10)

• Entice people to follow fleshly lusts. (Jude 4; Rev. 2:14, 20)

**Take a moment for reflection or discussion:**

1. What are some false teachings that are common in my culture?

2. Where do these false teachings undermine or misuse Scripture?

3. How does this list of what false leaders teach, motivate or warn me?

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THEM?

The Lord warns, rebukes and condemns false leaders.

• Jesus is Lord, King and Judge. Each of us will be evaluated and held accountable by Him according to His standards. (Jn. 5:22-23; Phil. 2:9-11; Jm. 3:1)

• Some false leaders may be true believers but have been deceived themselves. They will be purged with fire and lose their reward but be saved. (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Jn. 7-10)

• "Woe to them." False leaders who are not in Christ (the Lord knows who they are), "… the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved". (Matt. 13:24-30; Matt. 13:36-43; Matt. 23:29-33; Phil. 3:18-19; 2 Pt. 2:3-10, 17, Jude 5-16) (Note Jesus' righteous anger toward false leaders in Matt. 23. He will judge harshly.)

**Take a moment for reflection or discussion:**

1. How do I feel about the severity of Jesus' condemnation of false leaders?

2. How should the reality that I will stand before Jesus to give account for my life and ministry shape my motives, actions and teaching?

3. In light of the end that awaits them, how do I feel about false leaders who clearly deceive others?

## HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

Jesus and the Apostles provide clear instructions and examples for dealing with false leaders. They describe them, warn about them, and focus on revealing the errors of their teaching, character, motives, actions, and impact. Sometimes they rebuke them by name.

Personally, we are instructed to:

• Allow ourselves to be reproved, corrected and trained in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 1 Jn. 1:7-10)

• Be watchful for Satan's attacks. (2 Cor. 10:3-4; Eph. 6:10-18; Jm. 4:7; 1 Pt. 5:8)

• Conform our life, character and relationships with what Jesus wants from His people. Confess any sin in our life, teaching and leadership. (2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Jn. 1:9)

• Seek mentors or trusted believers to help us recognize our motives and actions that might lead to any form of false leadership and help us repent and ac cept the Lord's forgiveness. (2 Tim. 3:10-17)

In our ministry, we are admonished to:

• Instruct others about the issues of deception and false leaders. (Matt. 23:1-36; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Tim. 3:1-17)

• Equip believers so that they are "no longer children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes". (Eph. 4:12-15; 2 Tim. 4:1- 5; 2 Pt. 3:1-18)

• Engage with others to be watchful and alert to false teaching and to expose false leaders and their deceptions. (Acts 15:1-11; Acts 20:25-31)

• Seek to redeem false leaders who are not evil in their intent but are deceived or fleshly. Following the Lord's directive, we will do well to go to a person indi vidually and then with others if there is no response. (Matt. 18:15-17; Lk. 17:1-4; Gal. 2:11-21; Gal. 6:1-5)

• Rebuke, exhort, teach, avoid and reject false leaders in a spirit of humility and gentleness. (Rm. 16:17-18; 2 Tim. 2:14-19; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Tit.3:10; 2 Jn. 7-11; 3 Jn. 9-11; Jude 3-4)

**Take a moment for reflection or discussion:**

1. What are some areas of my life that need to be more conformed to the ways of Jesus?

2. Who are some trusted believers that I can discuss this topic with?

3. If I could personally talk with a false leader who is clearly deceiving others, what would I say?

4. How can I use this document to equip and instruct people I influence?

## WHAT ARE SOME BIBLICAL REFERENCE POINTS TO CONSIDER?

Satan is the author of deception. He controls the world and blinds eyes to the things of Christ. Satan is the de ceiver. He can disguise himself as an angel of light. Satan commissions false leaders to disguise themselves as ser vants of righteousness. (Jn. 8:41-47; 2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Cor. 11:13-14; Eph. 2:2; Eph. 6:12)

Jesus and His Apostles warn that false leaders will infiltrate, deceive and lead the saints astray. The Gospels,

Acts and every New Testament epistle, except Philemon and James, address the issue of false leaders. (Matt. 24:5, 24; Acts 20:29-31)

False leaders will often reject or undermine one or more of these four vital Biblical reference points:

1. The Trinity, one God, yet in unity, three eternal and equal Persons, is our foundation. (Matt. 28:19; Jn. 6:27; Jn. 16:5-11; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:8)

2. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified, buried, resurrected from the dead, and now seated at the right hand of God the Father, is coming again. He must be the central focus of our life and ministry. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. (Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 1:23; Col. 1:15-23; Col. 3:1-4; 1 Jn. 4:1-6; Rev. 1:7)

3. The Gospel, focused on Jesus' life and work, and explained in Romans, Galatians and other passages, must be accurate and clear. (Rm. 1:1-16:27; Gal. 1:6-10)

4. The Old and New Testaments are the pure and only true authority by which all leaders, teachers and teachings are to be judged. (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pt. 3:16)

## PRAYER

Lord, search my heart. Are there any traits or motives of a false leader in my life? (Take time to seek the Lord's face on this question. Confess any sin or error in your life, leader ship or ministry that the Spirit reveals to you.)

Lord, this is a weighty topic. I can hardly bear it. I know I am not perfect, but by your grace, I want to purify myself for your work. Putting aside my own interests, I want to follow and serve you and your Kingdom in humility and faithfulness. Create within me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*We, the authors and editors of this document about False Leaders, are made up of 39 ministry leaders from 21 nations and 30 denomina tions and ministry organizations. For further background and context, please see False Leaders at MentorLink.org.

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