

# Genuine Or Counterfeit?

## Matthew 7:15-20

(The following text is taken from a sermon preached by Gil Rugh in 1985.)

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As Matthew 7 provides the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus draws attention to the necessity of placing your faith in Him as Messiah and Savior. He draws a contrast in verses 13 and 14 between those who believe in Him and those who do not believe in Him with the analogy of a gate and a way. He continues in verse 15 with a warning about following the way of false prophets.

### 1. A Strong Warning Against False Prophets

Jesus gives the exhortation in verse 15, **“Beware of the false prophets.”** The word translated *“beware”* is a strong word indicating the need to be on the alert about something. It is a command to give attention and to be watching out for false prophets.

A prophet was one who had a message from God and who came to proclaim it to the people. Since these individuals are described as *false* prophets, that immediately indicates something about them. They are prophets who are false. These are individuals who claim to represent God and speak the truth, but they are false. The Greek word which describes them is the basis for our English word *“pseudo.”* These are the pseudo prophets; they are not genuine.

Verse 15 goes on to give a further description of them: **“who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”** This description shows their vicious character. They present themselves as genuine, and they look to be genuine. They are prophets even though they are false.

They are dressed as sheep. That also tells you something about them. They are going to be disguised to look like believers. That is a crucial point. They will not appear to be someone who is “off the wall,” someone who has obviously departed from the Scripture. These false teachers are dressed up like believers, but in their inward character they are false, they are ravenous wolves.

They bring destruction and ruin.

## 2. False Prophets in Israel

This is not a new situation for Israel. The Old Testament is full of references to and accounts of the ministries of false prophets. Any time God has a genuine message to proclaim to people, Satan follows it with his own spokesmen who corrupt and twist it, offering something that is not true to the original.

False prophets usually proclaim something that is true, but they misuse and misapply it. In addition, something is missing from their message; they are preaching only a partial message. Jeremiah's ministry was plagued by false prophets. Jeremiah 6 gives a description of them: **"For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely. And they have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace"** (vs. 13,14).

It is characteristic of false prophets to preach a message people want to hear. They preach about peace, love, success and goodness. There is a place for preaching about all of these things. God does bring peace, love and prosperity, at least spiritual prosperity, into the lives of His children. But false teachers distort this message because they proclaim peace to people who have not yet come to grips with their own sinfulness. They jump over the issue of sin and talk about peace. But peace only belongs to His children, those who have come into a personal relationship with God. Isaiah wrote, **"'There is no peace for the wicked,' says the Lord"** (Isaiah 48:22). The false prophets bypass the issue of wickedness and sin and talk about experiencing God's peace and blessing.

Jeremiah wrote again in Jeremiah 8:11, **"And they heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace"**. They pass over the need; they heal the affliction superficially. They fail to come to grips with the reality of the brokenness and sinfulness of the people. They just tell them that God will make it all right. They tell people that God loves them and that He wants to do something good for them, that He wants to bring blessing into their lives, but they avoid the issue of sin.

Jeremiah continues to describe the work of false prophets: **"Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord. 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"'"**(Jeremiah 23:16,17). God goes on in that passage to say that if these prophets had really heard from Him, they would have been preaching about sin and redemption.

The characteristic approach of these false prophets is to come to the people of God and present themselves as genuine prophets. They take a portion of the message of God regarding His peace, love and blessing, but they corrupt it because they do not deal with the issue of sin. God is the God of peace, but He only brings peace to those who believe in Him. He is the God of love, but the demonstration of His love is the provision of salvation in the person of His Son. To address people as though they were the recipients of God's blessings without having addressed the issue of their

sinfulness and the need for salvation in Christ is to distort the message.

Even in the Old Testament, Israel was plagued by prophets who proclaimed a corrupted message to the people. Unfortunately, the people followed them. Earlier God directed Jeremiah to proclaim that these prophets prophesied falsely and the people loved it that way. Who does not want to be told that God wants to bring peace, that He wants to give prosperity, that God wants to do something good in your life, that He's going to do a miracle for you today? These are all things we would like to hear, but where is the issue of sinfulness? God promises only destruction and condemnation for those who do not experience His redemption. But that point is missing from the message of false prophets.

### 3. Warnings by Paul

As I have been studying this portion of Matthew 7, I have been impressed again with how much of the Scripture is given over to warning of false teachers and false doctrine. It amazes me that believers have been lulled into the attitude and philosophy of the world by accepting things that God has forbidden for centuries. The Word of God has stood against such false teaching for thousands of years, yet many believers have slid into complacency by accepting things that are so unbiblical.

In Acts 20 Paul addressed the elders of the church at Ephesus. He said, **“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock”** (vs. 28,29). Notice that Paul used the same description of false prophets that Christ used in Matthew 7. In saying **“savage wolves will come in among you,”** he is referring to their coming in among the Church of Jesus Christ. They profess to be believers, but they are savage wolves who bring ruin and havoc to the flock of God. Paul continued to warn the Ephesian elders, **“and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them”** (Acts 20:30). These false teachers are wise men among the Church of Jesus Christ who profess to be believers. Yet they have as their goal to draw away the disciples of Christ.

Do you have firmly in your mind who these false prophets and false teachers are? They are from within the Church of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that they are believers, but they are among the Body of Christ; they profess to be believers in Christ, but in their character, they are savage wolves. Paul continued the warning in verse 31, **“Therefore be on the alert.”**

Paul is also concerned that the Corinthian believers will be led astray by false teachers. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:3, **“But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”** He describes these false teachers in verse 13, **“For such men are false (pseudo) apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”** These false teachers do not come in to the Church saying that they are against Christ; they never indicate that they do not believe in Him. Rather, they claim, *“We are followers of Christ and we believe in Him. Here is the message we have from Him.”*

Paul continued his warning in verses 14 and 15: **“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises**

**himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.”** Paul says that we should not be surprised that this happens. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. He will use his followers in the same way. He will dress them up as believers in Christ, and this will make them very effective. They will even use Scripture. In Matthew 4, when Satan tempted Christ, he threw Scripture at Him.

Today there are still undiscerning Christians who listen to someone just because he stands up and mentions Christ. If he uses a verse or two of Scripture, they think he must be a believer. The next thing you know, they are listening to him and are hooked. We have been warned about these types of teachers. They are going to come from within the church to deceive us.

#### **4. Warnings by Peter**

Peter gave a similar warning in 2 Peter 2:1: **“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.”** The danger comes, not from those outside, but from those within, from professing believers. In the Old Testament these false teachers were from within the nation Israel. Today they are from within the professing church.

Isn't it amazing that among professing believers there will be false teachers who will secretly introduce destructive heresies? By their subtle twisting and their distortions of the Word of God, they will even deny the finished work of Jesus Christ. It amazes me that someone can infiltrate the Church of Jesus Christ and have that kind of impact, but it is going on. This kind of message is being proclaimed even today in a message like, *“Something good is going to happen to you,”* and from those who proclaim the power of positive thinking. Just listen to the testimonies of people who were influenced by some of the television ministers of our day.

Recently I heard a man say in a testimony, *“I was helped to believe in myself through this ministry, and that helped me believe in God.”* The truth of the Word of God is that you must stop believing in yourself so that you can begin to believe in Jesus Christ. To say that after one began to believe in himself, then he could believe in God, is only twisting the Scriptures. Anyone who says he learned such a thing through a particular ministry leaves a red light flashing. Either he completely misunderstood the ministry, or the producers are simply offering his testimony as a promotion of their ministry. If that is the case, that says something else about them, they do not understand at all what the message is about. The big problem with people today is that they are believers in themselves. Only when they stop believing in themselves, recognize their own sinfulness and believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ can they have eternal life. To do anything else is to secretly introduce destructive heresies. Such individuals deny the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Peter continued his warnings in this section. **“And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep”** (2 Peter 2:2,3). The danger in this is that believers will be sucked in and exploited by false teachers. The tragedy of many of these kinds of ministries is that they are supported by believers. There is no excuse for that.

Peter continues to describe these false teachers in verses 17 through 19: **“These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption.”** These individuals have come to know who Jesus Christ is, but they have not believed in Him. They have turned back to their own ways. They are like the dog returning to his vomit and the pig returning to wallowing in the mire.

## 5. Warnings by Jude

Jude also wrote about false teachers in his book: **“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”** (Jude 3). Notice that this is a call to battle.

Some people get upset when we consider these kinds of false teachers. But we are called to contend and do battle for the truth of God. Verse 4 tells why: **“For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”**

It amazes me how a person who denies Jesus Christ can creep in unnoticed among believers. It can only happen because believers are no longer paying attention. All the unbeliever has to do is say some of the right things, talk about Christ, talk generally about sin, throw in a few verses, and he is accepted. If anyone speaks against him, someone cries out, *“My, that’s terrible; you are unloving and unkind.”* But we are called to recognize false teachers and to warn others about them.

False teachers and false prophets are very sneaky and clever. How can you identify a false teacher? How do you know I am not one? I use Scripture, so do false teachers. I preach, but false teachers preach also. We take an offering, but false teachers take offerings as well. In order to determine who is a false teacher, we must come back to the Word.

## 6. Examine the Fruit

Jesus tells in Matthew 7 how to recognize false teachers. He is not sending His followers on a witch-hunt. Some people tend to go overboard here. They think they must examine the Sunday school teacher to see if he dotted his “i” and crossed his “t.” But this is not the kind of thing Jesus is addressing. If you are spiritually discerning, false teachers are obvious.

Jesus gave a clear indication of how false teachers can be identified by an analogy he presented in Matthew 7:16: **“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?”** The simple instruction is that you will know them by their fruits. In biblical times in Palestine, there was a thorn bush that produced a berry which at first glance looked like a grape. There was also a thorn bush which had a leaf that from a distance looked like a fig. It was easy to be deceived. But if you examined it closer, you could see that it was not genuine.

Jesus continued His description in verses 18 and 19: **“A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”** In this description Jesus is saying that you produce according to your nature or character. Banana trees produce bananas; apple tree produce apples; thorn bushes produce thorns. So it is with human beings. Those with a corrupt nature who have not experienced redemption in Christ will produce the character of their father, Satan. Those who have been born into God’s family will produce the character of their Father, God. That is an established law of God. Therefore, you can know them by their fruits.

The fruit includes two areas--both the conduct of the life and the doctrine that is taught. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:8 about the character of unbelievers’ lives: **“For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.”** Then he wrote about the fruit of the believer in verse 9: **“For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.”** The believer’s fruit is in the realm of goodness, righteousness and truth. In addition, the believer must operate in adherence and submission to the Word of God which is the standard. False prophets and false teachers must be measured in light of the way they live their lives and by the doctrines they teach.

## **7. The Evidence in Conduct**

This is not new material. John the Baptist proclaimed the same thing in Matthew 3, verses 7 and 8: **“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’”** Certain individuals came to John wanting to be baptized, but John said there was no evidence in their lives that they had repented. When one repents, he changes his mind about himself and sees himself as a sinner guilty before God. True repentance means that one has believed in God’s salvation. That brings about a transformation of life which will be manifested in one’s conduct.

John told his hearers that such a transformation was missing from their lives. He demanded proof of repentance. When that proof was lacking, he gave a warning in verse 10: **“And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”** This is the same idea Jesus is referring to in Matthew 7. If there is not good fruit, you are destined to destruction. God’s children manifest God’s character, and the Devil’s children manifest the Devil’s character. That is a fixed law of God. Sometimes the emphasis of Scripture is on the conduct of life. Sometimes it is on the doctrines that are taught. These two obviously go together and cannot be separated.

Paul wrote in Romans 6:21 about life before becoming a believer: **“Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.”** The Greek word translated *“benefit”* in this verse is *karpos*, the same word which is translated *“fruit”* in Matthew 7. Romans 6:21 could be translated, **“Therefore what fruit were you then deriving from the things of which you are ashamed?”** There was no fruit of God’s character produced in that situation.

He continues in verse 22, **“But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit (fruit), resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”**

Unbelievers do not have the fruit of the light in the area of the truth. Some individuals seem to crave to know Jesus Christ; yet when you look at their lives, there is nothing of the character of Christ in them. The fruit of light consists in goodness, righteousness and truth. A teacher's life must be measured in light of the Word regarding both his conduct and his teaching.

## 8. The Evidence in Doctrine

Some people are led astray by teachers who seem to perform miracles. That will be considered in more detail in the next study, but a brief introduction to the subject will be useful in this study. This concept is so simple, yet so old. It goes all the way back to the days of Moses, fifteen hundred years before Christ. But Christians are still confused by it today because they are not paying attention to the Word of God.

If someone made a prophecy and it came true, doesn't that mean the prophet has to be from God? Not necessarily. Moses wrote about this in Deuteronomy 13. **"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death"** (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). It does not matter that he does miracles; it does not matter that he prophesies the future and it comes to pass. If he leads you away from the truth concerning the God of the Bible, do not listen to him. Why? Because he fails to meet the test of the truth. What he proclaims about God and salvation is not according to what the Scripture says.

The standard has not changed. The masterstroke of the Devil has been to get Christians in a state of ignorance concerning what the Bible says. The true and the genuine must be measured in light of the Scripture. Unfortunately, the average Christian who is tuned in to the television listening to some of these teachers does not have the foggiest idea of what the Bible says. As long as there are some verses thrown around and mixed in with the message, he is happy. Isaiah 8:19 and 20 says, **"And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."** In other words, go back to the Word of God to see what He has said. If the prophets do not speak according to the Word, it is because they are in darkness and do not have the truth.

The Word of God must be the standard. You must measure a prophet in light of the truth of God. If you were there when he raised somebody from the dead, that is not the issue. What did he say concerning the truth of God? Are his doctrines in line with the Word? The real issue is the truth of the Word of God. If he does not speak according to the Word, he is against Christ and against God.

The Apostle John wrote that we are not to believe every teacher or every prophet that comes along. We are to put them to the test to see if they are genuine. **"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone**

**out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:1-3).** He continued in verse 6, **“We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”** John, writing under the inspiration of the spirit, said that those who listen to the Word of God are from God. We must know the Word in order to be able to test them on that basis.

## **9. Teaching on Personal Sinfulness**

Since I have been studying this material over the past few weeks, I have watched to evaluate through the Word of God some of the men who have programs on television. Some preach the truth and some do not. One of the key points in evaluating their truthfulness relates to what they say about personal sinfulness. Do they say that you are a sinner under condemnation and lost apart from Christ? Do they say that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh as the Son of God to pay the penalty for sin? Do they say that by believing in Him you can have eternal life?

Some of these television speakers are terribly lacking in these areas. One I listened to in particular talked about Christ. I thought he was going to get there in his explanation. He mentioned sin, but never as a personal issue. He just talked about it generally.

Then he went into an analogy which was as close as he got to describing a relationship with Christ. He said, *“Have you ever been in a room and felt someone staring at you? Then you turned around, and there they were looking at you? That is the way it is with Christ. Have you ever felt Him looking at you and turned around and met Him?”*

**How** can you come to grips with your own personal sinfulness with such an approach? The danger is that some Christians will identify with that saying, *“Yes, I have come into that personal relationship with Christ. He is here with me, and I have turned to Him and met Him. I now enjoy that personal relationship with Him. Isn’t this guy wonderful? Where is my checkbook?”*

The speaker I just referred to then interviewed a person on the program who never once mentioned Jesus Christ. This was followed by a series of testimonies promoting his program. Not one of those individuals who gave a testimony indicated that he was brought to the reality of his sinfulness and a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. That key element was totally lacking.

One of my children was watching this program with me and asked, *“Is he a true teacher or a false one?”* I would have to say that from everything he is doing, he is a false one. He did not tell the listener about his sinfulness, he did not tell him that there is no hope apart from Jesus Christ.

## **10. Teaching on the Work of Christ**

That, by the way, is another part of the test. What does the teacher say about Jesus Christ? Is He the One who came to pay the penalty for your sin? Or is there just the general knowledge that the teacher talked about the family of God? The truth is not so difficult to discern in such cases.

John’s caution regarding false teachers carries into his second epistle as well. His concern is



always that believers not be led astray by false teachers. **“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds”** (2 John 7-11).

Believers are forbidden to give such teachers a greeting or to encourage them along the way. I do not know how many Christians are going to stand before Jesus Christ and account for sending checks to these kinds of teachers. If the teachers are not straight on why Jesus Christ came and what He did, and if that is not the heart of their message and their ministry, believers are to have nothing to do with them! Matthew 7:16 says, **“You will know them by their fruits.”** It is just that simple. Are they manifesting the character of God in their lives?

In his first epistle, John said that the children of God and the children of the Devil are obvious because the children of the Devil practice sin and the children of God practice righteousness. It is just that simple. What is the character of their lives? Do they manifest the character of Christ? Secondly, is their teaching consistent with the Word of God? Do they proclaim man’s sinfulness? Do they clearly proclaim redemption in Jesus Christ alone?

The principle is clearly fixed in Matthew 7:17 and 18: **“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.”** That is a fixed law of God.

## 11. Carnal Christians

What about a believer who has sin in his life? I can have sin in my life, and I do; I am not perfect yet. I do not want to present myself as being perfect. Believers will not be brought to perfection in our experience until we are brought into glory. Unfortunately, there is considerable misunderstanding about what a carnal Christian is. A carnal Christian is not someone who at some time had an emotional experience, but has no evidence of the character of God in his life. Rather, a carnal Christian is one who, in spite of the manifestations of the character of God in his life, has glaring inconsistencies. That is clear in Paul’s writings to the Corinthians. There is abundant evidence of the work of God in the lives of the Corinthian believers. But there are also glaring inconsistencies, areas of sin they were still tolerating. However, there is abundant evidence of God’s character.

One who does not have any evidence of the character of God in his life is not a carnal Christian, he is not a Christian at all. The principle is true again--a good tree cannot produce bad fruit. Some who are not Christians and who are false prophets or false teachers look like believers. But you must also look to see if there is something lacking either in the way they live their lives or in the doctrine they teach. You must be careful in your examination. You may think these unbelievers are believers. They may claim to have had an emotional experience when they were seven years old. They may profess to have gone to the altar, cried, wept and been saved. But have their lives been different since that time? If their lives are no different, they are not children of God.

There is an illustration of such an experience in my own family which I can share with you. When I was ten years old, my cousin and I went to a meeting where the gospel was preached. When they gave an invitation at the close of the service to come forward to trust Christ, we both went forward that evening. We both knelt at the altar and wept. That night I trusted Jesus Christ and was saved. My cousin went through the same motions I went through, then, by his own testimony, he got up and walked away an unchanged person. His life was no different; there was no evidence of the character of Christ in his life. A few years ago, by the grace of God, he was saved. Now he is on his way to France as a missionary.

You must be careful. There is a danger that you may be looking back saying, *“Oh yes, I had an experience.”* What is your life like today? Did that experience change your life? You are not saved by an experience; you are saved by personal faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, **“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”** Without that transformation of life, you did not experience God’s salvation. You need to be careful that you understand that. The same is true of everyone, including false prophets and false teachers.

## **12. A Tragic End: False Teachers Destroyed**

The end of false teachers is clear in Matthew 7:19: **“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”** The next study will repeat that the conclusion of false teachers is destruction. It is repeated each time that you read about false prophets in the Scriptures. God reminds us that their end is destruction because they are on the broad way. It is not so difficult to know them, because you can know them by their fruits. How discerning are you?

When did you recognize your own personal sinfulness before God and understand that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for your sins? Stop and think a moment. Have you believed in Him? Think again. How has your life changed since that time? That will tell you how genuine your experience was. If you experienced the transformation of the new birth, you will see a difference in your life. There may be areas of your life that are discouraging, areas with which you are not satisfied, things that are not all they ought to be in light of the Word of God. But there will be a difference if you are a child of God.

For those of us who are believers, this is a reminder of the importance of submitting our lives to the Spirit of God so He can produce the glorious character of Christ in us. It is also a crucial reminder of the overwhelming importance of presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ with clarity. I am concerned that often believers follow the pattern of false teachers by talking in generalities about God or about Christ. It is easy to talk about the good things that God does in our lives. But I have another question for you. Have you ever confronted those unbelievers who are closest to you with their need of Christ and the message of salvation in Him? Have you confronted them with the fact that they are personally sinful and guilty before God, on their way to hell? Have you told them that their only hope is to believe in Jesus Christ, the One who died on the cross to pay the penalty for their sins and rose again from the dead?

Believers often talk in generalities about God when they are around those they work with, close friends or family members, or those considered to be social equals. They talk about what God has

done in their lives or that they found Christ to be the One who can meet their needs. They may speak about God in these generalities, but that does not bring people to the issue of their own personal sinfulness. Until unbelievers come to grips with that, they cannot experience salvation. If believers stand around and talk about these generalities without coming to grips with the basic issue, they are no better than a false prophet.

**H**ave those people you are in contact with heard the message from you with clarity that there is no hope apart from Jesus Christ? We are sometimes intimidated when we think that they may not like it if we confront them in that way. Or we may feel that they are not ready for the gospel. Would Jeremiah have ever preached his message to Israel if he had waited until the people were ready? Do not try to make God's decisions for Him. If you are there and people are lost, then you know what your job is. Be sure you tell them the truth of their sinfulness and the finished work of Christ. It is God's job to decide if they are ready or not. They will be ready when He in His grace draws them. We must pattern our lives after Jesus Christ and other true teachers and true prophets of the Scripture who have proclaimed the reality of the sinfulness of people. We do not want to be like false prophets who pull back because they are afraid to speak of sin in a personal sense and of salvation which is found only in Christ.

**I**t is true that people do not want to hear that. Unless God does a work of grace in their lives to soften them and prepare them for the message, they will not like it. You may feel that such an approach is not acceptable among your social peers. You may consider it rude to involve yourself in someone else's personal life. But it has always been rude as far as the world is concerned to bring up the issue of their personal sinfulness and to tell them that Jesus Christ is the only answer. We are called to represent Jesus Christ faithfully and to make Him known to those around us. What a glorious privilege! Many are proclaiming the broad gate with the broad way which leads to destruction. But we have believed in Jesus Christ and we have the truth. Therefore, we are called to proclaim the truth concerning Him and make sure that our lives manifest the transformation of character that accompanies true faith.