

# **Wolves Among the Sheep**

Beware of False Prophets

Anthony J. Carter

Wolves Among the Sheep  
© 2009 by Anthony J. Carter

Published by East Point Books  
A ministry of East Point Church  
PO Box 90818  
East Point, GA 30364

All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission.

Printed in the United States of America.

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 7:15



Sheep are a curious lot. They are docile, humble, even timid, yet unaware creatures. They are easily led astray. They are not very aggressive and have a herd mentality that is practically unmatched by others in the animal kingdom. It is said of sheep that if one is being devoured by a predator, the others will pay no attention and continue to graze despite the danger of being next on the menu. Indeed, they require constant oversight and protection by the shepherds. Often they are their own worst enemy. They meander about grazing and not paying much attention to their surroundings. They become easy prey for even the least industrious of predators. Perhaps these are some of the qualities that God has in mind when the Bible frequently refers to His people as sheep.

Apparently, one of God's favorite occupations in the Bible is that of Shepherd. Many of God's faithful men were shepherds when He called them to his service. Abraham was a shepherd, as was Jacob, Moses, and David. Each of these fulfilled roles of leading the nation of Israel at various times and thus fulfilling the role of shepherding God's people. Yet, the greatest respect shown for shepherds is the fact that God is called a Shepherd. In Psalm 23, David refers to the Lord as his shepherd. In Psalm 80, God is called the Shepherd of Israel. In Ezekiel 34, God promises to be the True Shepherd Israel has longed for and prom-

ises to gather His sheep and to protect them from the wild beast. And like all the promises of God, this promise finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible clearly states that Jesus is the True and Good Shepherd (John 10). He is the one, who feeds and protects the sheep; who lays down His life for the sheep. And the sheep are those who hear His voice and follow Him. And yet, even though they belong to him, they are yet a curious lot. They are easily led astray and are preyed upon by those who would seek to devour them to satisfy their own bellies. Jesus understands the dangers that lie in wait for His sheep and therefore He warns them and particularly those who would lead them that they must be on guard against and always looking out for wolves among the sheep.

The wolves to which Jesus refers are not your everyday wolves. On the contrary, they are wily, sinister and crafty. They come in among the sheep even as sheep, but with the intention of picking off the weak ones and devouring them for the fulfillment of their own lustful hunger and greed. Thus Jesus warns his disciples in Matthew 7:15 – 24:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are raven-

ous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Jesus understands the dangers that face His sheep. Therefore, he warns those whom He would give charge over His flock to watch out for those who would pose of members of his flock, but inwardly have nothing but a desire to devour the flock. These Jesus refers to as false prophets. Thus, Jesus here establishes the precedent of faithful preachers and pastors doing the diligent job of shepherding the flock of God by warning them of the dangers of false proph-

ets. Apparently the Lord's disciples took this to heart. Apostle Paul picked up on this theme as he addressed the leaders in Ephesus.

When Paul was leaving the church of Ephesus for the last time, he sat down with the elders and shared his heart with them. An important aspect of his heart felt words were his strong warnings against tolerating false teachers and preachers. He reminded them, in Acts 20:27-30, that he (Paul) ...did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

The Bible reminds us that false teachers and preachers are to be found wherever the truth of God is being proclaimed. Faithful preachers and pastors must warn their people of these false prophets and prophetesses. So important is this responsibility that the Apostle Paul included it in his final address to the leaders of the church in Ephesus. This is the work of the faithful shepherd. The supreme example of this work is seen in Jesus Christ.

The work of the faithful preacher is not only to feed the sheep, but also to guard and warn the sheep as well. Jesus is the Faithful Shepherd and thus he warns us, his sheep. He says, “Beware! Watch out! Look out for false prophets.” And just as they were prevalent in Jesus’ day, they are even more prevalent in our day.

Turn on your local religious television channel and you have over 90% chance of seeing and hearing a false prophet. Go into your average Christian bookstore and you will find the isles and shelves stocked with books and music by men and women who fancy themselves prophets and prophetesses, preachers and teachers, but whose words are filled with error and untruth. They are false prophets in that they make false assertions concerning what is and false assertions concerning what is to come.

We are to be aware of these false prophets. We are to identify them and stay clear of them and their teachings. How are we to do this? Jesus tells us how we are to identify them. They are identified by their Phony Clothing, their Fruitless Conduct, their False Confession, and their Fitting Conclusion.

## **PHONY CLOTHING** (v.15)

These wolves or false prophets come in sheep clothing. As we saw earlier, sheep belong to the Shepherd. The Bible refers to God's people as His sheep, those who belong to His pasture (Ps. 100:3). Jesus, again, refers to himself as the Good Shepherd and those who follow Him as His sheep. The sheep are those who belong to Christ. In other words, they are Christians. Jesus says that false prophets and prophetesses give the impression that they belong to Christ, that they are Christians. But Jesus reminds us that we are not to be fooled by their appearance.

The ways of the enemy are far more deceptive and deceitful than many of us want to believe. More often than not, the enemy comes as an angel of light (2Cor. 11:14). The enemy pawns himself of as "men and women of God." He uses lofty, religious words. He uses biblical phrases and wears religious garb. They appear on religious television. They write religious books. They become best sellers and the world likes to refer to them as religious leaders. They know the Christian lingo and can quote the Bible with ease and apparent authority. Yet, Jesus says that we are not to be deceived by their words.

We must understand that they don't hang out signs

saying “Here preaching is a false prophet!” There are no subtitles at the bottom of the television screen deciphering the error of their teaching for us. No one breaks into the broadcast of these false prophets and prophetesses with a warning declaring, “Broadcast Alert: Listening to this man or woman is hazardous to your spiritual and financial health!” On the contrary, they are applauded on and off the screen. Their books sell by the truck loads. And people clamor into stadiums and domed arenas to hear them spew the latest and greatest revelation from God. They assume lofty religious titles. We call them prophets and prophetesses, bishops and evangelists, pastors and teachers. Yet, Jesus calls them “ravenous wolves” and warns us to be ware of them. For as sheep they may appear, but the truth is that their appearance is a façade and their clothing is phony. And sooner or later their conduct will reveal it.

## **FRUITLESS CONDUCT** (v. 16-20)

Jesus here reminds us that false prophets and prophetesses eventually reveal their true selves. The work of the Spirit in a true believer will produce fruit, the fruit of the Spirit unto God’s glory and God’s glory alone. Unfortunately, some fruit trees are not distinguishable from a distance. Often you have to wait until you can get close to really make a call.

On a recent trip to Michigan, my children were out back of my brother's house climbing on the trees, picking fruit from the top portion. I asked my brother if the apples on that tree were ripe and ready to be eaten. He quickly reminded me that it was not an apple tree they were climbing, but a pear tree. From a distance, the pear tree was hardly distinguishable from the apple tree. However, once it was pointed out to me and I was able to examine it in light of the information my brother gave me, I immediately concurred that it was a pear tree.

The determination of the tree was based upon the inspection of the fruit. Likewise, the determination of true versus a false prophet is based upon the inspection of the fruit. But sooner or later the truth of them and their teachings will come out. You look for the arrogance. Look for the self-promotion. Look for the self-aggrandizement. Eventually the truth will be manifest because Jesus reminds us that no good, profitable, honorable fruit can come from a corrupt, rotten, dishonorable tree. It may poise as a fruitful vine for a time, but sooner or later what is in the root will manifest in the fruit.

Inevitably I know someone will say, "But I heard her say some good things. I read his book and it was helpful to me. He even quoted some scripture and

referred to Jesus.” I like what Matthew Henry once said: An apple may be stuck, or a bunch of grapes may hang, upon a thorn; so may a good truth, a good word or action, be found in a bad man, but you may be sure it never grew there.

The problem here is that many of us believe ourselves more wise and discerning than Christ. Jesus says unequivocally that no good fruit can come from them. Yet, we insist that something good can come from them. Dear reader, the bottom line is that when you truly examine their teaching and the fruit of it you see that their teachings do not produce godliness in themselves or in others.

They teach erroneous doctrines that are contrary to sound doctrine, making people lovers of themselves and lovers of money and not lovers of God. They perpetrate the lifestyles of the rich and famous. They flaunt their ill-gotten wealth and esteem on television and in magazines. They make themselves the envy of the religious public. Unfortunately, too often we have had to witness the shipwreck, public shipwreck of their lives as their marital infidelity and unscrupulous financial dealings are made public in the streets for all to see. The world mocks and laughs as those who claim to speak for God reveal that they really only speak for their own bellies and greed and glory.

God will not hold these guiltless who preach and teach such false doctrines. Jesus promises that He shall take His axe of avenging justice to these fruitless corrupt trees and cut them down. Not some of them, but all of them shall be cut down. Where will you be when His justice is displayed? Will He find you relaxing under the phony shade of these trees and taking in the teaching of these false prophets? The teacher's error does not excuse the pupil. We will be held accountable for whose teaching we followed.

### **FALSE CONFESSION** (v. 21-22)

The oldest confession of the church is "Christ is Lord." The false prophets often make this claim. Frequently they will preach from pulpits and platforms where in the background are signs that read, "Jesus is Lord." Knowing who the Lord is, however, is not sufficient for entering the kingdom. Those who enter the kingdom must know who the Lord is, but simply knowing who the Lord is does not guarantee that you will enter the kingdom.

Besides, the Bible reminds us that the demons know who the Lord is and tremble at this truth (James 2:19). Don't be deceived, God command us to be doers of the word and not just hearers (James 1:22). Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom. The fact is that the Lordship of Jesus is not

just about what we say, but more so about what we do. Our fruits, whether they be unto our own glory, esteem, and prosperity or unto God, reveal whether we are true or not.

The ones who enter the kingdom are those who don't just say Jesus is Lord but live it. They are not a law unto themselves but they revere the law of God. They pursue the will of God and not their own will. What is the will of God? The will of God is that we glorify Christ, repent of our sins, lay down our lives, take up our cross, and follow Christ.

These we rarely hear from the false prophets. This we rarely witness in the life of the false prophets and prophetesses. On the day of their exposure, they will think that they have the favor of the Lord because they received the favor of people. But rather than God's favor they will receive God's disdain. Whereas they have been able to fool many sheep, they can not fool the Great Shepherd.

And so they say, "Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name?" Oh, this is the favorite pastime of these false prophets and prophetesses. They love to stand up and declare, "God told me this" and "God told me that." They love to get in front of the microphone or stand before the cameras and proclaim that God has given them some special revelation knowledge.

They love to prophesy and cast out demons and heal and perform mighty miracles. They hold large crusades and claim powers of healing and miracles. By this many people, including some Christians, assume these false prophets must be from God because they say such profound things, write such wonderful words, and do such marvelous miracles. They speak as if Jesus is their friend, but all the while He is their enemy.

Oh dear reader, they may fool the world. They may even fool the sheep. But they can not; they will not fool the Great Shepherd. The world may be fooled by their confession, but the Great Shepherd is not. Christ will surely bring them to their fitting conclusion.

## **A FITTING CONCLUSION** (v.23)

Surely the most distressing words anyone could have the terror of hearing from of the Judge of the Universe is, “Depart from me, I never knew you, you who work lawlessness, you who did the work of iniquity, you who had disdain for the law of God and worked your own man-centered, materialistic law.”

The irony of it all is that those who claim to know the Lord so well will find out that the Lord never knew them. They, who had so much to say on earth,

will stand speechless as they are exposed for who they really are. They are not gatherers of the sheep, but they are wolves, devourers of the sheep. They are not workers of God-glorifying miracles. They are workers of lawlessness. This lawlessness is a clear indication that one does not belong to Christ.

Jesus says in Luke 6:46:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”

The Bible says in 2Tim. 2:19:

“The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”

The tragedy is that those who refuse to depart from iniquity will hear Jesus telling them to depart from Him.

Dear reader, we make much of our confession of Jesus. And well we should. The Bible does tell us that if we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus Christ and believe that God has raised him from the dead, we shall be saved (Rom. 10:9). However, the other side of this indispensable truth is that more important than your confession of Jesus is Jesus’ confession of you. Jesus has a confession for the lawless and the

faithful. To the lawless he says, “Depart from me.” To the faithful he will say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant...Enter in to the joy of the Lord” (Matt. 25:23). The question for you is, “Which confession will you hear?”

Jesus tells us which one the false prophets and prophetesses will hear. Are you trusting them to tell you the truth? I plead with you today; don't trust in these modern day prophets and prophetesses. Don't trust in miracles, trust in Christ.

Don't give attention to these large religious television personalities, give attention to Christ. Be discerning of them and their ostentatious displays of wealth and flamboyant lifestyles. Don't listen to them. Don't read them or pay your money to see them. They are false and foolish teachers whose God is their own bellies and lust and whose end is determined.

However, I am convinced that God has better things for those who belong to Him. He has sent us the prophet of all prophets. The Bible says that God has in previous times and in various ways spoke through the prophets but now has spoken once and for all to us through His son, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1). It is Jesus! Friend, we don't need special words of knowledge, we have Jesus. We don't have to have miraculous healings and demonstrations, we have Jesus. Will

you trust Him?

When the false prophets and prophetesses come to the end and are looking to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, they seek to put the Lord in remembrance of what they have done. They say, “Lord, look at what I’ve done. I’ve prophesied in your name. I’ve cast out demons and performed mighty miracles in your name. I’ve written books and held large crusades in your name.” Yet, Jesus will soberly and clearly remind them that those who belong to Him are those who hear His voice; they make less and less of themselves and more and more of Jesus. He will say them and all their deeds, “I don’t know you.”

Reader, when the day of the Lord comes and judgment is begun, nothing we have done will merit us entrance into the kingdom of Heaven. Only Jesus will do. Those who really know Him know that He is enough now and will be enough then. They declare, “Money or no money, just give me Jesus. House or no house, just give me Jesus. Job or no job, just give me Jesus. Miracle or no miracles just give me Jesus.”

In that day, when all self-righteousness is stripped away and all that we have been commended for on earth is revealed as worthless, and the false prophets and prophetesses are looking to themselves and their work for hope, will you be able to say with the hymn

writer,

My faith has found a resting place,  
Not in device or creed;  
I trust the ever living One,  
His wounds for me shall plead.  
I need no other argument,  
I need no other plea,  
It is enough that Jesus died,  
And that He died for me.

The next time one of the false prophets seeks to pawn his error off on you, I hope you are able to soberly, clearly, and confidently say “I need no other argument. I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.” And de-fang and de-claw these wolves among the sheep.





## **About the Author**

Anthony J. Carter is the lead pastor of East Point Church in East Point, GA. He is the author and/or editor of several books including *On Being Black and Reformed*, *Glory Road: The Journeys of 10 African-Americans into Reformed Christianity*, and *Blood Work: How the Blood of Christ Accomplishes our Salvation*. Besides his duties as a pastor, he is the husband of Adriane and the father of Anthony Jr., Rachel, Sarah, Siera, and Ana. They live in the Atlanta area where he enjoys studying, golf, and chillin' with the family.

For more information on East Point Church or to order more copies of this book visit online at:

[www.epointchurch.org](http://www.epointchurch.org)

Or write:

East Point Church  
PO Box 90818  
East Point, GA 30364

Other East Point Books:

*What is the Gospel?*

*The Holiness of God*

*Fighting Sexual Temptation*

*Intimacy in Marriage*

*Eternal Life Together*

