

Hallmarks of False Teachers

by Erik Olsen

The following is a partial list of red flags to look for in false teachers, though not every false teacher possesses all these characteristics.

SUMMARY OF HALLMARKS:

1. PREACHING "A DIFFERENT GOSPEL"
2. PREACHING "ANOTHER JESUS"
3. ADDING TO SCRIPTURE AND TWISTING SCRIPTURE
4. OVER-DEPENDENCE ON INDIVIDUAL TEACHERS + NOT ENOUGH DEPENDENCE ON GOD
5. DIVISIVE OVER "FOOLISH DISPUTES"
6. ESOTERIC DOCTRINE & "SELF-IMPOSED RELIGION"
7. OVEREMPHASIS ON PERFORMANCE INSTEAD OF RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
8. OVEREMPHASIS ON MATERIAL THINGS

1. PREACHING "A DIFFERENT GOSPEL"

- Galatians 1:6-8: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a **different gospel**, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to **pervert the gospel of Christ.**" (Galatians 1:6-8)
- **one version of "a different gospel: salvation based on our good works...** contradicts Scripture: "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore **by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.** But now **the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed**, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, **through faith in Jesus Christ.** Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that **a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.**" (Romans 3:19-28)
- **another version of "a different gospel": salvation based on grace so good works don't matter...** contradicts Scripture: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! ..." (Romans 6:1-2) "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, **who turn the grace of our God into lewdness** and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." (Jude 4)

2. PREACHING "ANOTHER JESUS":

- 2 Corinthians 11:2-4: "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches **another Jesus...**"
- most false teachers teach that Jesus is not God
- Scriptural evidence that Jesus Christ is God: www.lettersofchrist.com/qa_deity_of_christ.htm

3. ADDING TO SCRIPTURE AND TWISTING SCRIPTURE:

- 2 Peter 3:16: "...untaught and unstable people **twist [Scripture] to their own destruction**, as they do also the rest of Scriptures."
- even **Satan twisted Scripture** out of context in order to try and tempt Jesus; Jesus debunked Satan's lie by saying "It is written..." and properly quoting Scripture. (Matthew 4:1-11)
- we need to **follow the example of the Bereans and "search the Scriptures daily"** to make sure what teachers are teaching lines up with Scripture. (Acts 17:11)

4. OVER-DEPENDENCE ON INDIVIDUAL TEACHERS + NOT ENOUGH DEPENDENCE ON GOD:

- the apostle Paul warned, "Also from among yourselves **men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves**. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to **warn everyone night and day with tears**. (Acts 20:30-31)
- 1 Corinthians 3:5-8: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. **So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.**"
- 1 Corinthians 1:11-17: "For it has been declared to me concerning you... that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, *I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ*. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. ... For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel..."
- 1 Corinthians 2:1-5: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.... And my speech and my preaching were **not with persuasive words of human wisdom**, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

5. DIVISIVE OVER "FOOLISH DISPUTES":

- Titus 3:9-11: "**But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless**. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned."
- 1 Timothy 6:4: "...obsessed with disputes and arguments over words..."
- 2 Timothy 2:22-24: "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife."

6. ESOTERIC DOCTRINE & "SELF-IMPOSED RELIGION":

- Colossians 2:8: "**Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit...**"
- Colossians 2:18: "Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, **intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind... the commandments and doctrines of men?** These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in **self-imposed religion**, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."
- 2 Corinthians 11:3: "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be **corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.**"

7. OVEREMPHASIS ON PERFORMANCE INSTEAD OF RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD:

- Romans 8:15-16: "For you did not receive the **spirit of bondage again to fear**, but you received **the Spirit of adoption** by whom we cry out, Abba, Father."
- Galatians 3:3: "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"
- Romans 8:13: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if **by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

8. OVEREMPHASIS ON MATERIAL THINGS :

- 1 Timothy 6:6-10: "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And **having food and clothing, with these we shall be content**. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil**, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness..."
- Colossians 3:1-4: "If then you were raised with Christ, **seek those things which are above, where Christ is**, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."
- Overemphasis of earthly treasures robs us of enjoying spiritual treasures!