

7 RED FLAGS OF FALSE TEACHERS



INTRODUCTION

False teacher existed throughout history. Who was the first false teacher and what was his message? It was the serpent and his lie that he told Eve in Gen 3:4-5..... “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Actually, it was not a serpent speaking, but the father of lies, Satan. We know the ancient serpent was actually Satan, not because of this scripture, but because of Rev 12:9..... The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Keep in mind that original motive for disobedience was caused by man’s desire to “be like God, knowing good and evil.” Many false teachers go beyond scripture to pretend they know as much as God about good and evil. They distort scripture to meet their own version of the truth. They try to show hidden truths that do not exist, so that they might look wise.

It is important to realize that almost all lies are either directly or indirectly from Satan. I do not say all lies are evil because the story of Rahab the prostitute muddies the water (Joshua chapter 2, James 2:25). I guess God can take a bad thing and make something good out of it. Lies can also happen like an accident - they are unintentional misstatement of facts.

False teachers often told the people of the Old Testament to disobey God. False teachers told people to sin and to worship idols. Satan, the master of confusion, made it necessary for God to give Moses a set of written laws for all of mankind. Over the years, false teachers perverted the law and Christ came to clarify and fulfill the law. Jesus not only simplified the law but made it easier to obey the law by giving us the power of the Holy Spirit.

We encounter false teachers everywhere - in the media, in our schools, in our government, in our circle of friends, and even in some of our churches. It is important that we identify false doctrine in order to please God and to protect us from evil. Therefore, I have come up with 7 warning signals that should cause us to be cautious. Just one or two of these 7 red flags may not indicate false teaching, but several red flags should cause you to run from possible deceivers.

RED FLAG #1 – WHO IS THIS PERSON?

If you have never heard of the person, do not personally know the teacher, or have a friend who knows the person, then a red flag should start to go up. Knowing a person's credentials for either formal or informal Biblical knowledge is part of knowing the person. A knowledge of how the person lives their life is also part of the equation. Jesus warns us these deceivers are often hard to identify. 1. Matt 7:15-17..... "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from

thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

2. Jesus even warns us of false Christs and false prophets who will do great signs and even miracles (Matthew 24:11-24). Jesus tells us that many will be deceived. We were told this would happen after his death and continue until the End Times.

Peter and Paul also warn us of false teachers. We see that false teachers can be motivated by ignorance, greed, and a desire to promote controversy.

1. “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.” (2 Peter 1-3).

2. “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” (2 Corinthians 11:13)

3. “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work — which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1 Tim 1:3-7).

As we see, Peter and Paul, both tell us these false teachers will get their just punishment. Some of these false teachers will be dealt with harshly by God even though they have good intentions. This judgement is addressed in the book of James. Both Jesus and James make it very clear that teaching is a big responsibility, and we need to be careful of teaching false doctrine for any reason.

1. Matthew 5:19..... Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven

2. James 3:1..... “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

RED FLAG #2 – YOU LEARNED THIS DOCTRINE WHERE?

I admit that I receive red flag #1 from most of my FB friends because they do not know me personally. However, Red flag #2 is even more important. I get my information primarily from the Bible. I also use other sources to add to my understanding. These sources are encyclopedias, well known Bible concordances, Bible commentaries, Bible expositives, Bible dictionaries, secular dictionaries, Strong's concordance, and over 45 years of Bible study. I use the 2011 version of the NIV, but I like the 1984 version better and compare the two if I have any questions. I also check as many as 12 or more versions when I am not sure about the message. I care about the message and not the words or a word count. If I wanted the exact words, I would have learned Greek and Hebrew. Even then, not all translators agree based on the ancient manuscripts used. Contrary to the misguided beliefs of some people, translation is a compromise between textual and contextual correctness. If I have any question about the textual translation into English, I use an interlinear Bible and Strong's concordance. No teacher, including myself, should base a theology on one

translation. Remember one thing – All English versions of the Bible have changed every word of original language scripture.

Red flags should go up if someone tries to convince you of a doctrine by getting you to go on YouTube or some obscure website. Why don't they refer you to a well-known unbiased academic, encyclopedia, or mainstream Bible affirming website? A red flag should go up if someone tell you to listen to Joe Smith or Harry Jones. I know Jesus and I know Paul, but who are these people? Remember this story in Acts 19:13-16 NIV?..... "Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. [One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding."

Why do some teachers post one website or video after another on their FB page? Why do these teachers often quote other obscure teachers? The answer is simple. They can't speak for themselves because the doctrine is usually so contrived, they don't fully understand it themselves. I have to laugh when I am easily winning a debate and a frustrated person answers with a video. As a chess player, I take that as a checkmate. In other words, the person is really saying, "I give up, but maybe this other unknown guy can beat you. Furthermore, a video can't debate you either, but at least it can indoctrinate you." I talk about winning the good fight, but a debate is not just about winning or losing – it's about right and wrong. It's about truth and untruth. Viral videos are for enjoyment; not for learning religious doctrine.

RED FLAG #3 – IS THIS A ONE TRICK PONY?

A red flag should go up if a person is obsessed with just one idea or doctrine. The teacher doesn't care about anything the Bible says except the scriptures he wants to use to support his doctrine. His website or Facebook page is mostly about one doctrine. The teacher feels so important because he is now an expert on something, and supposedly knows what few other people know. If you ask him to discuss another subject, he will probably pass out. I just thought of this idea, but I think I might try it someday. I'll say to the person, "You may have a point, but let's talk about covenants and dispensations. – Hello, are you still there?"

RED FLAG #4 – YOU BELIEVE WHAT?

You will often notice that a person who is obsessed with just one doctrine usually believes something unique and bizarre. The person's one doctrine is usually very contentious. The false doctrine never seems to be a subject such as the love of Christ or his miracles. These subjects are not controversial enough. The Apostle Paul emphasized the need for unity in the church. 1 Cor 1:10-15..... I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name.

It is partially for the reason of peace and unity that I stay away from two subjects, evolution and the book of Revelation. Both subjects are interesting to talk about, but not worth causing arguments.

Since we have no proof of how God created Adam, or when the end is going to come, these subjects cannot be proven. Some teachers of these subjects enjoy the subjects for proper reasons, but others discuss such subjects because they enjoy controversy, and a big bonus is that nobody can ever prove them wrong.

Genesis was written to tell us WHO made the earth and not to be a scientific textbook on how God did it. If God used evolution to make man, there is no way man could have understood it. God certainly had to dumb down his message, despite the fact that many believe they are as smart as God. We do the same thing to little children when we try to explain concepts their little minds cannot comprehend. Remember, Christ had to tell parables and use many metaphors and analogies to get people of his time to understand his messages. I will have no problem standing before God someday and asking, "How did you do it"? Others will arrogantly try to tell God how he created the earth.

Revelation is also an interesting subject, but likely to cause arguments if we pretend to have all the answers. The reason Revelation uses so much symbolism is because we are not supposed to know all the answers. Perhaps the whole book is a test of our humility. Remember, original sin was caused by man wanting to be as smart as God.

By nature, false teaching causes quarrels because the doctrine is usually something not believed by most Bible believing Christians. The doctrine is often something that only a select few people follow with a cult-like obsession. The false teacher would have you believe the doctrine is either widely accepted or revealed to a chosen few. Teachers of these false doctrines probably repeat their doctrine to themselves every night. It doesn't matter how prepared these teachers are, I believe truth can triumph if we know the whole Bible.

RED FLAG #5 – YOU READ IT, BUT DO YOU UNDERSTAND IT? Many people are false prophets because they don't know how to read the Bible. I always say, The Bible is not open to interpretation - it is only open to misinterpretation. In other words, there is only one correct interpretation, and it is our job to find it. To expose false interpretation, you need to understand basic principles.

1. We need an appropriate version. For precise study, we should always use a literal translation and not a paraphrase Bible. If necessary, we may need to compare other versions.
2. We need to make sure we are aware of the context of the verse, the context of the chapter, the context of the testament, and the context within the whole Bible.
3. We then need to discern whether we are reading a literal passage or a figurative passage. For example: The Bible states that Satan comes as a wolf in sheep's clothing. It certainly does not mean that the Devil will dress up like a sheep. In other words, we must be able to identify metaphors, analogies, and allegories (parables). Some metaphors are obvious, but others are hard to see.

Aside from not understanding the Bible, another reason false teachers say ridiculous things is because they do not do their research. I always encourage all my FB friends to check out what I say, because if I am wrong, I want to be the first to know. Opinions and different interpretations can often not be proven, but facts can be proven either correct or incorrect. I am not perfect, but I do pledge to do everything possible to do exhaustive research on any facts I present.

Finally, beware of people who try to change the meaning of scripture by telling you what a word really means in Greek or Hebrew. These people possibly read a book written by someone

who was at the bottom of their class in Greek 101.

We should be aware that sometimes the root or origin of a word has a totally different meaning than the final word, and that textual accuracy also comes into play in translation. Some false teachers even find that using Greek or Hebrew is an easy way to win a theological discussion because who is going to refute their claim? Remember that the translations we have today were written by not only one person, but by as many as 100 linguistic experts. Of further importance is the fact that several of today's most popular versions are endorsed by the many Christian denominations. Only accepted academic sources such as Strong's Exhaustive Concordance should be accepted when researching the original languages. Why would we believe an unknown person on a YouTube video or some obscure author of a book instead of many Christian experts in Greek and Hebrew?

As an example, I recently encountered false teaching based on the misinterpretation of two words. I stated secular dictionaries, Bible dictionaries, Strong's concordance, and a Greek lexicon. I asked for one source that proved their understanding of the words since I could not find any. Nobody could name one source that defined either word the way they understood it. Instead, I was to compare other scripture based on the same misinterpretation of these words. Any logical person could see that this teaching was not based on fact.

RED FLAG #6 –INCOMING!!!! (SHOCK AND AWE)

False teachers eventually bomb you with a cult-like barrage of scriptures and information. The idea is that the sheer number of proof sources will cause you to surrender. I often find that teachers who distort one scripture distort them all. Are 50 misinterpreted scriptures more persuasive than just one that is misinterpreted? It shouldn't be, but it can be frustrating. I recommend an approach I call the strong man approach. I tell the false teacher that he should give me his best proof source. If I can answer his strongest claim,

why should I waste my time with the easy ones? After all, if a strong man can lift 500 lbs., why ask him to prove he can lift 325?

Usually when such a person sees his logic is false, he will not admit he is wrong, but instead try to jump to another point. I try to never go to the second point but keep asking questions about his strongest argument. I once had a person try to quote other scriptures so many times, it was ridiculous. I kept going just to see how stubborn he really was. I kept asking him the same question about the first scripture. He would ignore my question and email me several more scriptures and essays. I ignored him in return and kept asking him the same question. This went on for days. He finally asked if I can only talk about one scripture. I said, "no, but I talk about one at a time." I said we can move on only after we resolve the first one. He then said we should agree to disagree, and he stopped emailing me. He never admitted he was wrong, but something was wrong with him if he didn't realize it.

Sometimes the person may use one scripture to support another or some other tactic that makes once and done hard to do. I then play baseball – three strikes and you're out. The main idea here is very simple – don't get frustrated by numerous proof sources. If someone wants you to read a 10-page manifesto or watch a 30-minute video, just tell the person all you need is one claim to refute. Tell him to make sure he gives you his strongest claim because you are going to play "Strong Man."

RED FLAG #7 – Do you want to discuss or indoctrinate?

A false teacher is not the same as a person with a different opinion. A person with a different opinion usually wants to discuss and learn. He can usually admit when he is wrong. A false teacher, on the other hand, wants to indoctrinate and never admits he is wrong. After all, it is his job to be superior. Remember what Christ said: "Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will

be exalted" (Matt 23:10-12).

A false teacher who is losing a debate will turn it into an argument by attacking the messenger. He cannot disprove your message, so he must attack you. He will inevitably turn to statements that can be neither proven nor disproven. He will say things like you are of the Devil or you do not have the Holy Spirit. He will say you are ignorant or do not know Christ. If he is really nice, he will say he will pray for you. However, this statement is meant as sarcasm and relays the same judgmental message that you are lost. After all, if he really wanted to pray for you, he would do it without a public announcement.

Christ gave us good advice on what to do when a person continually refuses to accept the truth: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces"(Matt 7:6). Jesus also told his disciples to leave a town if the town and wipe the dust from their shoes if people reject their message.

We are to be bold in spreading the word of God, but we have to know when it's time to walk away. Hopefully, my 7 red flags will help you in this endeavor.