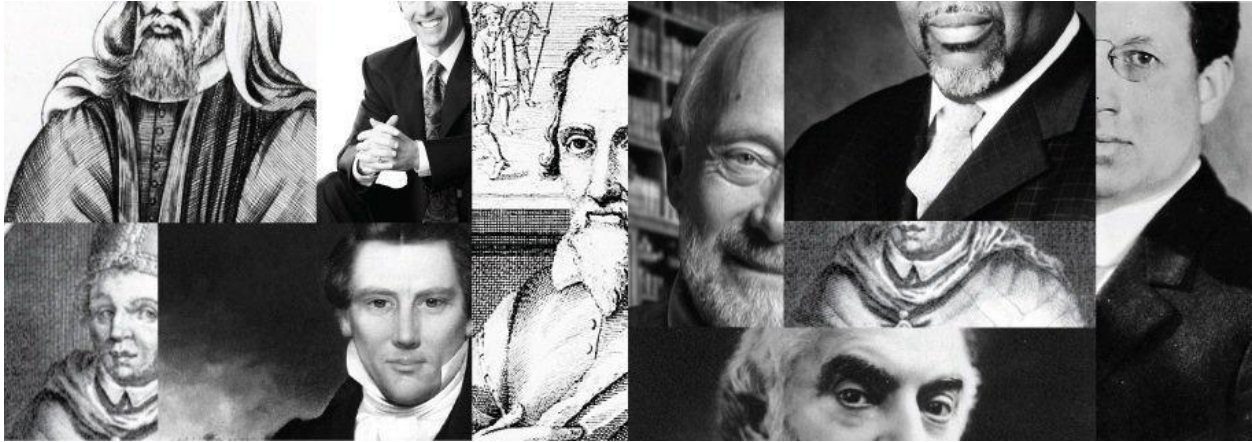


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Seven Marks of a False Teacher

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1

No one enriches hell more than false teachers. No one finds greater joy in drawing people away from truth and leading them into error. False teachers have been present in every era of human history, they have always been a plague and have always been in the business of providing counterfeit truth. While their circumstances may change, their methods remain consistent.

Here are seven marks of false teachers.

#1

False teachers are man pleasers. What they teach is meant to please the ear more than profit the heart. They tickle the ears of their followers with flattery and all the while they treat holy things with wit and carelessness rather than reverence and awe. This contrasts sharply with a true teacher of the Word who knows that he is answerable to God and who is therefore far more eager to please God than men. As Paul would say, “But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts” (1 Thes. 2:4).

#2

False teachers save their harshest criticism for God’s most faithful servants. False teachers criticize those who teach the truth, and save their sharpest criticism for those who hold most steadfastly to what is true. We see this in many places in the Bible, such as when Korah and his friends rose up against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:3) and when Paul’s ministry was threatened and undermined by those critics who said that while his

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words were strong, he himself was weak and unimportant (2 Cor. 10:10). We see it most notably in the vicious attacks of the religious authorities against Jesus. False teachers continue to rebuke and belittle God's faithful servants today. Yet, as Augustine declared, "He that willingly takes from my good name, unwillingly adds to my reward."

#3

False teachers teach their own wisdom and vision. This was certainly true in the days of Jeremiah when God would say, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds" (Jer. 14:14). And today, too, false teachers teach the foolishness of mere men instead of teaching the deeper, richer wisdom of God. Paul knew, "the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Tim. 4:3).

#4

False teachers miss what is of central importance and focus instead on the small details. Jesus diagnosed this very tendency in the false teachers of his day, warning them, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (Matt. 23:23). False teachers place great emphasis on their adherence to the smaller commands even as they ignore the greater ones. Paul warned Timothy of the one who "is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain" (1 Tim. 6:4-5).

#5

False teachers obscure their false doctrine behind eloquent speech and what appears to be impressive logic. Just as a prostitute paints and perfumes herself to appear more attractive and more alluring, the false teacher hides his blasphemies and dangerous doctrine behind powerful arguments and eloquent use of language. He offers to his listeners the spiritual equivalent of a poisonous pill coated in gold; though it may appear beautiful and valuable, it is still deadly.

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#6

False teachers are more concerned with winning others to their opinions than in helping and bettering them. This was another of Jesus' diagnoses as he considered the religious rulers of his day. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves" (Matt 23:15). False teachers are ultimately not in the business of bettering lives and saving souls, but of convincing minds and winning followers.

#7

False teachers exploit their followers. Peter would warn of this danger, saying: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ... And in their greed *they will exploit you with false words*" (2 Peter 2:1-3). The false teachers exploit those who follow them because they are greedy and desire the riches of this world. This being true, will always teach principles that indulge the flesh. False teachers are concerned with your goods, not your good; they want to serve themselves more than save the lost; they are content for Satan to have your soul as long as they can have your stuff.

*Inspired by [Shai Linne](#) and Appendix II of Thomas Brook's *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*.*

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<https://www.challies.com/articles/7-marks-of-a-false-teacher/>