

False Teachers

There are many denominations and churches, and many popular pastors and preachers. Ministries and churches all over the world are doing incredible work for the Lord; glorifying Jesus and helping people to grow in their relationship with Him. Some ministries however, although popular, are not doing God's work, and it can be challenging to know who can be trusted. Sometimes, the size of a congregation and the longevity of a church or pastor can mislead the community into thinking that this ministry must be of the Lord. Truth matters and we are told to be on alert for false teachers. What exactly is a false teacher? The Bible refers to false teachers as those who preach a different gospel or different doctrines, pursue controversy or disputes, lure people into a false sense of righteousness, people pleasers, those drawing followers toward themselves and not Jesus, and those using flattery or clever persuasion. Perhaps the most common example today of a false teacher is the minister who appeals to people's happiness instead of their holiness.

1 Timothy 6:3-5, ***"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain."***

2 Timothy 4:3-4, ***"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."***

Acts 20:28-30, ***"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; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."***

Romans 16:17-18, ***"Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."***

Colossians 2:8, ***"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."***

Galatians 1:6-10, ***"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."***

2 Peter 2:1-3, ***"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 depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping."***

1 Thessalonians 5:21, ***"But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."***

The Bible doesn't just caution about false teachers, it goes further and calls them out by name. When false teachers are known, they must be exposed. The Lord teaches His Church to be discerning and to act when there is a threat to the integrity of His Word. It takes very little to pollute the truth and mislead people. In fact, Jesus expected the religious leaders of His day (i.e. the Pharisees and Sadducees) to be leading the Israelites in the ways of righteousness, but instead, these religious leaders were false teachers. The Lord warned about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 16:6, and again in Galatians 5:9, ***"A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough."*** Leaven is the agent, like yeast, which causes dough to rise. The metaphor here is that the immoral, unrighteous, and illegitimate teaching of some, can do harm to the masses. According to Ephesians 5:11, we are to expose error. ***"Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them."***

The Bible demonstrates this reality many times, and calls out specific false teachers. Note the following examples.

3 John 1:9-10, ***"I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church."***

2 Timothy 2:16-18, ***"But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some."***

2 Timothy 4:14-15, ***"Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching."***

1 Timothy 1:19-20, ***"some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander."***

2 Timothy 1:15, ***"You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes."***

2 Timothy 4:10, ***"for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."***

The Bible sets a precedent that if we can identify false teachers, then we ought to caution others to avoid them specifically. Imagine if your friend told you that a local pastor was preaching that it was okay for dating couples to have sex as long as it was consensual, and that it's okay to shoplift if your family is struggling to buy groceries. You would immediately ask, *"What pastor is saying this?"* If your friend replied, *"Well, I don't want to name names, as that wouldn't be appropriate,"* would that be the right way to handle that information? Concealing known false teachers isn't polite or discerning, and it's actually dangerous to those who are naïve and who might listen to them. That being said, we all ought to be slow and discerning before attempting to expose a false teacher; no decision should be rash and impulsive.

When a person claims to be teaching the Word of God, the teaching should be measured against the Bible itself. This is what happened when Paul taught the people of Berea according to Acts 17:11, ***"they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."*** The Bereans were called "noble-minded" for testing Paul's teaching against the Scriptures. There are some factors to consider before deciding that someone is a false teacher and subsequently naming a false teacher publicly. In other words, we aren't to go out and exceedingly scrutinize and nitpick everything that every pastor says; hoping to catch someone in error. This is not the spirit of the Word, nor the intention of these teachings. We shouldn't sit in church with a laptop looking to fact check every sentence. Most pastors, if not all pastors, especially when young and starting out, will give an incorrect teaching

by way of a misinterpretation of a passage of Scripture. Though trying hard to understand and preach truth, mistakes like this can happen. We ought to wait to see if a pattern emerges before we get concerned. If we hear an error, hopefully a friendly conversation may be all it takes to expose and correct any error. If it's just a difference in interpreting a non-essential issue, we should be charitable and agree to disagree.

These aren't the kind of false teachers that the Bible warns of. The false teachers to avoid are the false teachers who are uncorrectable; one who scoffs at rebuke and maintains his position. In Acts 18, we see Apollos as an upstart preacher who taught in the synagogue. He was naïve about some things, but he was pulled aside and corrected by more knowledgeable believers. Acts 18:26, ***"Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."*** Apollos was correctable. False teachers are not.

Teachers of the Word are to be held to strict accountability and scrutiny. James 3:1, ***"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."*** Elders, Pastors, and teachers of the flock are to fit a certain criterion; a criterion found in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. For example, in Titus 1:0, pastors are to be the type of man whose ministry is noted by ***"holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."*** Notice the charge given to the pastor, that he is to both exhort (teach) and refute those who contradict sound doctrine. A pastor is a shepherd over a congregation, and he must be willing to exercise his role to rebuke wrong teaching. He can't shy away from this responsibility, even though it may be culturally taboo to call out another minister.

But, there's a caution about calling out an elder/pastor within the church. 1 Timothy 5:19-20, ***"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning."*** There's a template of how to engage someone that is teaching in error, and it's not about being quick and impulsive. If public rebuke doesn't bring repentance, then the church ought to avoid this minister entirely; praying for him, but no longer associating with him.

When a false teacher is to be named as such, it's best to do more than just name-drop. You explain the error, you give reasons for rejecting it, you communicate complexities; you're not just slinging mud. Calling out someone publicly applies to pastors and teachers who have public ministries with great influence who persist in teaching false doctrine with no evidence of repentance. The following are some names of false teachers, who are public figures, who have been rebuked by other ministers of the gospel, but these false teachers carry on, misleading people and growing in popularity. Evidence is provided which sheds some insight as to the error in their teaching.

Joyce Myers – Myers claims to get her teaching from direct revelation from God. She has made wild claims when teaching, such as, *"The Bible can't even find a way to explain this. Not really. That's why you have to get it by revelation. There are no words to explain what I'm telling you. I've got to just trust God that He's putting it into your spirit like He put it into mine."* Before I comment further, it's critical to know that a person can receive a direct revelation from God, but never anything that doesn't completely agree with the Bible, and never a new teaching that doesn't already exist in the Bible. We don't have any new revelation from God today, not through anyone. We have no different message than what's in the Bible. The Bible is the complete and final Word from God. Anything new, different, or partial to the Bible's truth, must be immediately dismissed. Here, Myers message essentially says, *"You can trust me, that I'm giving you the truth, even when the Bible can't provide the answers, God will give it to me by revelation."* This is NOT how the Bible is to be taught, ever. There are many other claims that Myers has made that are doctrinally wrong, such as, *"Jesus stopped being the Son of God on the cross,"* or, *"I'm no longer a sinner. I stopped sinning,"* or, *"Mankind are little gods,"* and, *"Jesus was the first human being who was born-again."* Some of those quotes come from her 1991 publishing, *"The Most Important Decision you Will Ever Make."* Myers is a false teacher that should be avoided.

Kenneth Copeland – Copeland is a prosperity gospel teacher. The prosperity gospel is a false gospel used by many false teachers. The term "prosperity gospel" has become a popular way to describe the type of false gospel that emphasizes

that if you turn to Jesus you'll become healthy, wealthy, and successful. This message is a lie and doesn't reflect any Biblical realities of life on this earth, even for obedient Christians. Making these claims gives people a false motivation to pursue Jesus and provides a false sense of spiritual security. Fitting with his prosperity gospel teachings, Copeland includes the following quotes in the introduction of his "Kenneth Copeland Bible Version." Copeland bypasses the realities of God's justice, and moves away from the consequences of sin, and only describes God as a loving giver of good things. Some lies are, *"This (Bible) is not a book of condemnation. God does not condemn."* Also, *"Don't be distracted by the arguments of men...the Bible isn't complicated...It's good news from cover to cover."*

Though being full of good news, the Bible is also full of caution, warning, and the realities of death, hell, and suffering. Copeland creates a limited view of God, focusing on God as a dispenser of prosperity, claiming, *"God is a good God and the world's greatest giver,"* and, *"This book has changed the destinies of men...taking them to throne rooms and banquet halls...and it will do the same for you."* While God is the greatest giver, God's Word doesn't promise throne rooms and banquet halls, certainly not on any earthly level, as Copeland seems to suggest. Copeland cherry picks certain verses to highlight health and prosperity, such as, "Proverbs 4:20-22, which says that God's Words are, ***"life to those who find them and health to their flesh."*** Copeland teaches that those who come to Jesus will find healing for their earthly bodies. However, bodily health is never a promise of those who trust in Jesus. Copeland proof texts many passages. Proof texting is taking a verse/passage of the Bible and misapplying it's meaning. Copeland goes on to say, *"As you put the Word first, you are separated from poverty and sickness."* This certainly isn't true at all.

Like a Joyce Myers, Kenneth Copeland speaks proudly, as though above sin and fault. He's Bible version boasts of himself saying, *"Someone once asked me, 'Don't you ever have any failures?' No, I don't because I don't play nine-inning games. We play until I win."* Ultimately, Copeland's message is a false-gospel and as a false teacher, he should be dismissed. Additionally, he's called upon people to give to his ministry for decades, and his net worth is reported to be close to \$800 million. When he's interviewed about his lifestyle, he claims his wealth is a gift from God. Through his persuasive preaching of the prosperity gospel, Copeland has attracted a large following, leading to significant donations from his supporters. These donations have played a major role in his financial achievements.

Joel Olsteen – Like a Kenneth Copeland, Olsteen has prospered by selling his books which teach the prosperity gospel. Peddling this false gospel has made this man extremely wealthy, and has attracted one of the largest congregations in the country; holding services in the Lakewood Church in Houston Texas, with a weekly attendance of 43,500.

Olsteen regularly shrinks back from clearly answering common questions about the Bible. He's either too naïve and doesn't know the answer, or he's a people pleaser and wants everyone to like what he says; either is a terrible reason for a pastor. When interviewed by Larry King, Olsteen was asked about who goes to heaven. King rightly noted that some preachers claim that a man is saved by faith and not by works, but Olsteen responded differently and said, *"Yay, I don't know. There's probably a balance between faith and works."* Further along, King asks about people who don't believe that Jesus is God, specifically Jews and Muslims. Olsteen replied, *"You know, I'm very careful about saying who would and wouldn't go to heaven. I don't know if I believe that Jews and Muslims are wrong. I believe that only God can judge a person's heart."* Olsteen continued, *"It's not my business to say who is and who isn't going to heaven."* This is a classic example of a cowardly position, said by people that want to be "friendly" to everyone, by not making truth clear and by not wanting to offend.

The goal of the Christian isn't to offend, it's to lovingly present truth, even if someone might find that truth offensive. 1 Corinthians 1:18, ***"For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*** The Apostle Peter describes Jesus as the "stone" that was rejected by some, 1 Peter 2:7-8, ***"So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.'"*** In short, many will be offended at truth.

Regarding his mega-church, Olsteen says, *"We believe on focusing on the goodness of God."* Certainly, God is good, but there's more to the message. God is also just, and hell is a reality. In another interview with Mike Wallace on the show "60 Minutes", Wallace asked Olsteen about various religions and asked, *"What about Mormons, are they true Christians?"* Olsteen answered, *"Well, in my mind they are. I'm not the one to judge the little details. So, I think they are."* This is a sad statement by Olsteen, as Mormons believe that Jesus was a created man, like you and I, and that Jesus became elevated to a godly status, and likewise we too can be elevated to a godly status. In short, Mormonism is not Biblical Christianity at all. By and large, Olsteen is not a serious student of the Bible. When asked in a Newsweek interview about dealing with suffering, Olsteen replied, *"We deal every week with someone whose child got killed, or they lost their job. I don't understand it. All you can do is let God comfort you and move on. Part of faith is not understanding."* This approach to suffering is utterly unhelpful. While it's true that one doesn't need to know all the answers to life's problems, a Christian pastor ought to certainly know how to explain the purpose behind pain and suffering, and be able to give credible and helpful Biblical counsel to those who are hurting and desperate.

Olsteen regularly plays the role of a passive man; one who always has an unreceptive approach to tough answers and regularly says, *"I don't know,"* or, *"Who am I to say,"* or, *"Just let God deal with it,"* etc. This isn't shepherding at all. Sometimes Olsteen seems to be simply making stuff up off the top of his head, like preaching the following, *"The Bible indicates that for three days, Jesus went into the very depths of hell. Right into the enemy's own territory. And He did battle with Satan face to face. Can you imagine what a show down that was? It was good vs. evil. Right vs. wrong. Holiness vs. filth. Here are the two most powerful forces in the universe have come together to do battle for the first time in history. But thank God. The Bible says, 'Satan was no match for our Champion.' This was no contest."* By the way, the Bible doesn't say any of this nonsense. Olsteen is a prosperity preacher and a false teacher, and he should be avoided.

TD Jakes – Another prominent mega-church pastor, Jakes church, "Potter's House," has an attendance of 17,000 people in Dallas Texas. His television broadcast "The Potter's House" appears on the Trinity Broadcasting Network and other networks around the world. His annual "MegaFest" event draws up to 100,000 people each year. He has written more than 30 books. It should be noted that mega-churches are not bad in and of themselves. However, popularity doesn't mean something is good. Jakes is among those previously mentioned that emphasize the false prosperity gospel. In 2017 Jakes tweeted out, *"If you obey GOD you will never be broke another day in your life."*

In a sermon titled, "And Ye Shall Have It," Jakes claims that you cannot have prosperity in the natural until you have it in the spiritual. This means that until you are spiritually prosperous, you won't experience natural/worldly prosperity. This is obviously untrue as many pagans are quite wealthy, healthy, and successful. Jakes teaching the prosperity gospel is enough to label him a false teacher. But more should be understood. Like other prosperity gospel teachers, Jakes compromises in other areas. In a 2015 interview with the Huffington Post, Jakes claimed that homosexuality was simply an *"agree to disagree issue"*. In other words, just like choosing what color to paint the office, you have your opinion and I have mine; there's no right or wrong. We see too many weak people-pleasing pastors like Jakes in the church today.

Jakes also denies God's triune nature, believing God is a single-person deity. The Bible teaches that God is one being made up of three distinct persons, who we know as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Instead of teaching the "trinity" as most Christians do, Jakes teaches modalism. Modalism says that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not refer to distinct persons in the godhead, but these titles refer to the different modes of how God presents Himself. As an example, modalism would say that in the past God manifested himself as the Father, during the incarnation of Christ God manifested himself as the Son, and subsequently God later manifested himself as the Holy Spirit. Modalism maintains that God cannot exist in more than one mode at a time. This is all Biblically false. The Bible shows the three persons of the godhead throughout the Scriptures, and clearly we see them all at once at the baptism of Jesus; the Son in the water as a man, the Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father coming from above. Jakes church holds to this belief statement, *"There is one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in three manifestations: Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* This is no minor issue. It contradicts the very nature of God. Until

Jakes affirms the reality of the triune godhead of the Bible, denies the Modalist definition of the Trinity, and rejects the prosperity gospel, he should be regarded as a false teacher.

Steven Furtick – Pastor of North Carolina’s Elevation Church, Furtick’s church averages just over 26,000 in-person attendees, and 65,000 online viewers a week. Like other prosperity gospel figures, Furtick’s preaching usually emphasizes self-empowerment and success. He’s been a guest speaker at Joel Olsteen’s church and partnered up with TD Jakes for events. He frequently speaks about "believing big" and "speaking faith," suggesting that believers can achieve their dreams by having a positive attitude. Meanwhile, the Bible teaches that believers are called to take up their cross and follow Christ, often experiencing suffering, trials, and even poverty. The Bible emphasizes that faith is about trusting God in all circumstances, not using God as a means to achieve personal success or material gain. Like other prosperity gospel preachers, Furtick has gained fame and fortune, building himself a 16,000 square foot home.

In a Facebook post that he eventually removed after receiving criticism, Furtick had posted, *“Following Jesus doesn’t change you into something else, it reveals who you’ve been all along. What would it be like to see the you that God sees.”* I’m not sure what he means by the word “following,” but when I read the Bible, after I’ve entrusted myself to Jesus, I’m made entirely new! 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”*** To suggest that God doesn’t transform those who follow Him is entirely untrue.

In a sermon where he preached about his doubts about the Bible, Furtick said, *“I don’t believe this (Bible) because I don’t doubt it. If you don’t doubt it, you’re not reading it, or you’re reading it with no intent to live it. See, my doubt is the evidence of my growth. The closer I get, the more questions I have. I struggle to believe it; that I’m forgiven, that He forgives me, not only before I accepted Him but for what I still do. Maybe He can forgive the past stuff but what about the present stuff...I have my doubts.”* These are significantly troubling statements. Saying that he struggles to believe that he’s forgiven by God, is a major problem for someone who presents himself as a pastor of God’s Word.

Understanding and accepting that God has forgiven me of my sin is a fundamental tenant of the Christian faith. This is one of the central truths that sets me free as a Christian; that I’m forgiven! It’s one thing to say, *“the more I grow, the more questions I have as I dig deeper into the Word,”* but that’s not the position Furtick takes. There’s a massive difference between questions and doubt. The more I grow, doubt should be miles behind me. Questions will always be present, but doubt should be totally removed.

In another sermon where Furtick expresses his doubts on the Bible, Furtick referenced how he rebuked another pastor who had led new believers in a prayer of forgiveness. Furtick didn’t like that the other pastor had included the statement, “without a doubt”, as he voiced his prayer. As Furtick preached on this he said, *“Here’s what the other pastor said. He prayed, ‘Lord Jesus I believe I’m a sinner in need of a Savior. I believe, without a doubt, that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the World, and today I give You my life.’ ‘See, that’s the part there he should have left out. He should have left out the phrase, ‘without a doubt’. It was all good until he got to the part where he said, ‘without a doubt.’ ‘I told him, ‘Never again, when you’re preaching at Elevation (my church), do you ever put people in a position to pray something that they can’t honestly pray. As a matter of fact, don’t put them in a position to pray something that even you can’t honestly pray. Because there’s not one of you in the room, even with tabs in your pink Bible, that you can honestly pray the ‘Sinner’s Prayer’ without a doubt.”* What a disgusting thing to suggest, that nobody can really trust and believe in Jesus without any doubt!

The *“Sinner’s Prayer”* is a common term used to indicate the prayer of a person who is ready to entrust themselves to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. According to Furtick, apparently nobody could honestly pray and believe that Jesus could really forgive them of their sin. What a shameful thing to say! One should pray that with full confidence! The Bible makes clear, crystal clear, that faith is virtuous, and that we ought not to doubt at all. For example, James 1:6, ***“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by***

the wind." Matthew 14:31, "***You of little faith, why did you doubt?***" Matthew 21:21, "***And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen.'***" Keep in mind, doubting is not the same as having questions. A question says, "help me understand," while doubting says, "I can't really trust you."

In other videos you watch Furtick make other wild claims as he preaches, "*If you know Jesus, I'm sorry to break it to you, but this church is not for you. You might have accepted Jesus as your Savior last week. If that's true then last week was the last week that Elevation Church exists for you.*" This viewpoint is obviously not a Biblical model of what the local church is about, as many New Testament books lay out the purpose of the church; for regular gathering for prayer, sharing, serving one another, teaching, etc.

Furtick teaches that Jesus was sent from heaven "*in the likeness of a sinful man.*" Jesus didn't come in the likeness of man, He was literally a man, born of a woman! Other random teachings of Furtick that display his lack of qualification are, "*Church attendance allows you to see beyond the walls of your problems. Church attendance allows you to see the real perspective in life,*" and, "*You can break the law for love. It's okay then. Jesus broke the law for love,*" and, "*When God leaves you, he doesn't really leave you. He just changes forms.*" This is similar to the modalism that TD Jakes falsely preaches. Furtick is a false teacher and should be avoided.

In conclusion, it's critical to understand that truth matters! Avoid false teachers, just as God has commanded, so that you will be careful to follow truth. Additionally, truth is easy to pollute and pervert. It only takes one twisting of reality, however small, to make a statement untrue. You might ask, "*How will I know if someone is preaching the truth?*" The answer is simply, yet profound – Commit to becoming a student of God's Word! Study the original so well that you'll recognize a false word when you hear it!