

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

²¹ **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’**

²⁴ **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”**

²⁸ **When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (NIV 84)**

Theme: A Christian’s Guide for a Church Home

1. Be aware of False Prophets.
2. Set Christ and his Word as your foundation.

Some people are members of a single congregation their entire lives. Others may transfer to a sister congregation when they move. Some jump from Church to Church all the time. Others never really join a Church—they seem to be Church shopping their entire lives. There are certain things that people look for in a Church home. That list of the top five will differ quite a bit from person to person. But what does the Lord say about what is important when it comes to a

Church home? Today Jesus gives us a “Christian’s Guide for a Church Home.” First he tells us to watch out for false prophets. And then he warns us to set him and his Word as our foundation.

The two verses preceding our text are some of the most well-known verses of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. **Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.** There is only one way to eternal life. That way is Jesus Christ alone. And if there is only one way to eternal life, then there are many ways to eternal death. In fact every way that doesn’t follow Christ leads to destruction.

That led Jesus into the warning that begins our text. **Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.** The word prophet here doesn’t refer to a man who just predicts the future. No this word for prophet indicates one who proclaims—so a prophet is one who proclaims or speaks God’s Word. So we can call a false prophet a false teacher. Anyone who preaches or teaches anything contrary to God’s Word is to be considered a false teacher.

Jesus warns us to watch out for these false teachers. But it may be hard to always notice false teachers. After all, **Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.** No one is going to willingly follow the devil. So he disguises his false teachings. He uses false teachers who teach destructive heresies in the name of God. No one claims to be a false teacher. A false teacher isn’t going to warn you that what they teach is against God’s Word. No, he disguises his teaching and will claim that it comes from God or agrees with the Bible. They come as wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Some false teachers knowingly but secretly teach against God’s Word. They will disguise it well. They will come up with some elaborate explanation which allows them to teach what they do. They scratch itching ears. They say what the people want them to say. They cater to the sinful nature. They aren’t really concerned about God and his Word. They care about making a name for themselves, about padding their own wallets. Others are sincere. They honestly believe that what

they teach is the truth. Perhaps they were taught something wrong growing up or while at a seminary. They didn't do their due diligence while studying a particular point, or so on.

There are many varieties and degrees of false prophets. But they all have one thing in common. Whether they intend to or not they all deceive their hearers. In the end, their intentions or their sincerity don't really matter. The final result is that their teaching harms and destroys rather than saves and lifts up. Instead of leading them down the narrow way to the eternal gate, they lead them on the broad path to eternal destruction. It doesn't matter how nice they are, how charitable a pastor or his congregation is, or even if they do a lot of work to help our the sick and the homeless. All of that is of little value if the teachings don't correspond to God's Word.

That is why false prophets are so dangerous. They may look good on the outside but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. They may seem to hit all the right buttons and do all the right things. But their false teachings led to eternal death. That is why Jesus warns us to watch out for them. But how do we do that? **By their fruit you will recognize them.** Here in the context of false teachers their fruit doesn't refer to their outward deeds, which will often look good. No their fruit refers to their teachings. What they say is an indication of who they are. Anyone who teaches anything contrary to God's Word in any way—no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, he is a false teacher. For instance anyone who denies divine creation for evolution is a false teacher of the Word. So are those who deny the reality of miracles. The same goes for any one who doesn't believe in the Trinity or rejects Jesus as God and man at the same time. Anyone who questions the suffering and death of Jesus, or his physical resurrection of Jesus falls into the same category. We could go on and on. Anyone who adds or subtracts to God's Word in anyway is to be labeled as a false teacher. And if he's a false teacher than we have **nothing to do with them** as Paul warns Titus, or as he says in Romans 16, **keep away from them.**

Jesus warns us to watch out for false prophets. And how do we do that? It starts with knowing God's Word. It means that we know it well enough not just to know what is right. But to also recognize what is wrong. And be able to prove from Scripture that something is

wrong. In order to do this we must read the Word on our own at home. It is good to study it in Bible Class and learn from others. But don't take anyone's word for it—including mine. **Test everything**, as Paul says to the Thessalonians. Match up what someone says with what God says in his Word. Be like the Bereans. They didn't even take Paul's words for granted. **The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.** The best way to watch out for false teachers is to be proactive—get to know God's Word now so that you may recognize a false teacher when he comes to you hiding in sheep's clothing.

In the "Christian's Guide for a Church Home" the Lord tells us what to watch out for and how to do so, but what are we to cling to? Him and his Word.

To make his point Jesus came up with a simple analogy. If you build a house you would want to set the foundation on something sturdy that will not move—like a rock. If you build a foundation on sand the house will fall. It may be good for awhile, but rain will come up and the foundation will fail and the house will be destroyed. In this analogy the house is the life of a Christian and his foundation is his faith. If his foundation is on sand—something that shifts and moves, he won't be standing when the rain of this world comes. He will fall because he had a weak foundation. And when the ultimate storm comes—on the Last Day, he will fall in that judgment. But the man whose foundation is solid will last forever. He will last through the rain of this world. He will withstand the torrent on the Last Day. For his solid foundation is non other than Christ himself. He is the true foundation—the chief cornerstone. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul calls Jesus the foundation. **No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.** And if Jesus is our foundation, so his Word. For it is through his Word that we learn about everything he has done for us. And it is through his Word that we are brought to faith.

So your foundation and the foundation of your Church Home should be Christ and his Word. That is the only rock solid foundation. But

sadly, the foundation of some people's faith is the exact opposite. Their faith's foundation is what the world thinks. Or what science says. Their foundation is their own feelings and emotions. Or their own personal feelings or thoughts on a matter of doctrine. And some of the foundation of their Church home all wrong too. Their foundation—their basis of membership is to a building, a congregation, or a location. To others it's to a pastor, a synod, a denomination, or family members. Still for others the basis of their Church home is how nice or friendly the congregation is, how they make them feel. Or they belong because the congregation constantly helps out the poor and the needy.

That is not to say that some of these things aren't important. Some are—but in their own place and time. And they are not what is most important. They are not the foundation of our faith and the basis for our Church home. They all change—they shift with the sand. Buildings crumble and are rebuilt; pastors come and go; our own personal thoughts, feelings, and emotions change throughout our life; what the world thinks is right changes from generation to generation and from culture to culture; even synods and denominations change their teachings from time to time. There is only one rock solid truth—Christ and his Word. He is the foundation that doesn't shift or move.

Did you notice what Jesus said in verse 21? **Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** Scary, isn't it? At least it should be. Those who do the will of God will enter heaven. There is one major problem with this. We can't obey the Father's will. No one can. We sin against him all the time. But Christ didn't. He kept God's Law perfectly. He always obeyed the will of the Father. And he gave that obedience to us on the cross. At the same time he took away and paid for our sins. And it is through faith in him that we receive all the blessings that he won for us. It is through faith alone in his work alone that we will enter the kingdom of heaven. Because of what Christ has done for us, he is our foundation. Notice how that contrasts with false teachers. They prophesied in the name of the Lord. They even performed miracles and drove out demons in his name. And the Lord may have even given them the ability to do those things. But notice how they kept on bringing up their works—what they had done. They didn't see themselves as

helpless sinners. They didn't trust in Christ alone for eternal life. They pointed first to their own accomplishments. And so God never knew them.

Christ and his work is our foundation. Not ourselves—our gifts and abilities. And it is only through the Word that we learn about Christ. Without his Word we wouldn't know who he is or what he had done. Without his Word we would not know about the grace he gives us in baptism and communion. Without his Word we would be in the one true faith. It is truly the one thing needed.

His Word, then, is part of our rock solid foundation. For like Christ, his Word never changes. So that is what we look for in a Church home. A Church that makes Christ the foundation. The one that sits on top of the rock solid truth of his Word. One that isn't swayed by science, the thoughts of men from long ago, general opinion, or personal feelings. Just as Christ and his Word is your foundation; it should also be the foundation of your Church Home. For then it will stand strong until the end.

Maybe you're looking for a Church Home. Maybe you're not. But whether you are set or not; don't forget what is truly important. Don't belong to a building, a congregation, a synod, a denomination. The pastor's likeability, how entertaining the services are, the friendliness of the people—all those things in the end do not matter. What matters is Christ as the foundation and a complete adherence to his Word. Find a Church that emphasizes Christ and teaches his Word in It's truth and purity. And cling to what is right and true. For then you are being led to Christ—down that narrow road that leads to the gate of eternal life. Amen.