

Identifying False Teachers

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Date: 17 September 2014

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[0:00] How do we identify false teachers?

You know, that may be the most pressing question or problem in the 21st century church.! We're going to study an entity that has plagued the church since its beginning in the book of Acts.

It was predicted by our Lord. It was written about by every New Testament writer, every one of them. And I'm speaking of the cancer of false teachers.

And we'll get to this in a little bit, but they plagued the landscape of America. They're everywhere. They're all over television.

They're bringing in hundreds of thousands of people a year to listen to them. They are writing books and selling them by the millions.

[1:20] And they're false. So how do we discern between that which is false and that which is true?

Here is what the incarnate God, the King of the universe, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, and the one who cannot lie.

It is impossible for him to lie. And this is what he had to say on the subject in Matthew chapter 7, verses 15 and 16. Here we go.

That's the Lord Jesus Christ. God. God in human flesh. Here we have the classic warning on false prophets.

And I'm going to include in here the term false teachers. And there is interesting language here.

And we need to be careful how we go about interpreting this passage.

[2:57] I've actually seen drawings or pictures where you have a bunch of sheep and a pen. And then you've got a sheep. And you look closely and it's a wolf. And they put a sheep's skin over him.

That's not what's going on here. The Lord starts out with the word beware. So we are already put on notice.

He uses a very strong word in the Greek language. Beware. And our ears kind of go on point. There is danger lurking out there for the church.

And the danger exists in the form of something that is false. And any time you have something false, it is being compared with something that is true, which is the word of God.

So Jesus said, there's something false in here that's trying to come in. It is false teachers and false prophets that would bring an illegitimate teaching in the guise of God's word.

[4:12] In the guise of God's word. And then Jesus says this. And it's another warning. In addition to beware, he says, they are going to come in.

Boy, that's scary. They're going to come in. Jesus said that 2,000 years ago. In other words, they are going to be inside the church.

All right? If they come in, how will we know these false teachers? Now, quite honestly, I think we've gotten a little better over the last 30 or 40 years in the Southern Baptist life.

But you remember how it used to be? A guy comes in. He joins. Comes three Sundays in a row. So we put him in charge of the bus ministry. Or can you teach a class? You know. And if he's saved at all, he's been saved for four weeks.

I mean, we used to do things like that. I think we've gotten better at that. I hope we have. But the Lord says they're going to come in, so we've got to be able to identify the false teachers.

[5:21] They deceive us when they come in because they are wearing sheep's clothing. Now, that's where we get that term or that mental image of a wolf that's dressed up like a little lamb, a gentle little lamb.

But the language here is not that they are disguising themselves as sheep. Remember, these are the guys that teach and lead in certain churches and even in certain denominations.

And it says they come to us in sheep's clothing. Well, what is sheep's clothing? A better meaning there is it was the woolen garment that was characteristically worn by the shepherd.

He was out tending the sheep, tending the flock, and he wore a woolen garment for that reason.

These guys are not impersonating sheep that just blend in to the congregation.

They are impersonating shepherds. They want to lead the sheep. They want to lead the sheep.

[6:44] I'm reminded of the lady that showed up here about three or four years ago and said, God has told me that I'm supposed to preach next Sunday at your church a healing ministry.

And one of our staff guys, and rightly so, said, tell you what, took her over the window and said, that's Jane Phillips Hospital. Go clean it out and we'll think about it.

But start over there because that's where the sick people are. Well, she said, you don't understand.

So she got in her car and left. We didn't see her anymore. Here we have people that are false shepherds who want to lead the sheep astray.

And I'll tell you the first mark of a false shepherd. You can write that down there on number one if you want to. They promote the wide gate and the wide way.

They are in the business of promoting the wide gate and the wide way. And underneath that you might put Matthew 7, 13 to 14.

[7:56] Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. I read it on that one time a couple of guys that I really trust. They said that narrow, small gate is you've got to go through by yourself.

You can't drag anybody with you. You can't take your family with you. You've got to go through alone, and you can't take any baggage. Not room for that. And it's a low gate in the Greek language.

You've got to go through on your knees, humbly, bowed, down. That's the picture there. False teachers, they want people to enter through the wide gate and the broad road, which leads to hell. That is the will of their father, the devil. Mislead people. Because they've been misled. They've been misled.

[9:09] False prophets and false teachers do the bidding of Satan, and the devil is always the one who energizes the teachings of false prophets and false teachers.

The devil wants people on the wide gate and the broad way, and therefore the false prophets want the same thing that he wants. Now, after warning about false prophets, Jesus tells us what to watch for in identifying them.

Because they are so extremely deceptive and dangerous, because they're dressed in a shepherd's cloth, clothed in shepherd's woolen garment, but they're deceptive and dangerous, and they have a ravenous spiritual and moral makeup, even though they're in sheep's clothing.

The Lord would hardly have left us without means of determining who they are, because they're hard to identify. And he wants us to know who they are. And he says they're ravenous wolves.

They want to tear the flock apart. And Jesus assures us of this. You will know them by their fruit. You will know them by their fruit.

[10:39] A fruit tree may be beautiful, decorative, and offer pleasant shade in the summer, but the primary purpose is to bear fruit. And you judge the worth of a fruit tree based on what it produces and not how it looks.

The farm where I live right now, across the road when I was a kid growing up, I visited the farm a lot, there was an apple orchard. And they produced commercially, the Ebre family, I don't know if you ever knew the Ebre's, but they produced apples for consumption.

If they had an apple tree that was bad, it didn't last very long. They cut it down and they burned it. They got rid of it. The fruit tree was judged based on production.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Titus that pastors must not only preach faithfully, but they also have to be equipped to refute those who contradict.

He said that's very important. And if you want to look that up this evening sometime, that's Titus 1.9. You can put that under 1. Refute those who contradict what?

[12:00] The Word of God. The doctrines that have been taught by the Spirit of God. The idea is very simple. Pastoral ministry is not merely a building up, but also a tearing down.

As Paul would say elsewhere, it involves tearing down every speculation and lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. Those things are to be burned up, torn down, gotten rid of. If we fail, or if a church fails to do this, it is ministerial malpractice and harmful to God's people. Remember a number of years ago, I had some dear friends in a downtown church. Won't mention it. It wasn't First Baptist. I'll tell you that. And they went to Sunday school that morning and the preacher got up there and he said, well, it's a difficult lesson.

Not the preacher or the teacher. It's a difficult lesson because the lesson is on hell and in the 20th century, it was back yonder, everyone knows there's no such thing as hell. It doesn't exist.

[13:06] It never has existed. And no such thing as the devil or demons. We're in an enlightened age. Well, this couple went to the pastor and said, this guy's preaching heresy.

The Bible talks more about hell than it does about heaven. And I'll never forget the pastor's answer to him. You know, that's the beauty of our denomination. You can believe the way you believe and he can believe the way he wants to and we just love each other.

You know, it is what it is. It's malpractice. It's ministerial malpractice. Now, given this obligation, it becomes all the more imperative to be able to identify false teachers when they emerge.

Sometimes false teaching originates from within. The New Testament teaches that a more rigorous response is required when it arises within, within a church.

Faithful pastors and strong members have to learn how to identify and deal with false teachers. But how do we do that? How do we identify false teachers in the midst of a church?

[14:22] Only when a false teacher is identified can that deceiver be dealt with appropriately. And the Bible is going to mention seven characteristics and I've already given you one.

I've already given you one that commonly identify false teachers. And we've also already covered the one that says false teachers want people on the broad road that leads to hell.

Now, let me say here, not every false teacher exhibits all these characteristics at once. They can be very subtle. But often they present some combination of these traits.

So under number two, I would write down there, false teachers contradict sound doctrine.

false teachers contradict sound doctrine. Even in the first century, during the lifetime of the apostles, there was an authoritative body of truth that functioned as the norm for faith and practice.

[15:37] false teachers. Remember, remember, James ran that and even Paul submitted himself to them in Jerusalem. Jude has a name for it. He says, he called it the faith once for all delivered to the saints in Jude verse 3.

It's a faith that has already been delivered to the saints. Paul called it in 1 Timothy 1, 10 and 11, sound teaching according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

Elsewhere, it is referred to as the standard of sound words, the treasurer, the words of faith, and of sound doctrine.

And then John comes along in his second letter, verse 9, and he says, he calls it the teachings of Christ. So that's what we're talking about.

That's what we're talking about. That's what the church is to fiercely hold on to. And let me add a parenthesis here. That's why we don't really bother ourselves with the social gospel.

[16:51] I mean, a lot of churches do in this country, probably the majority of them by now. I heard a man, I heard John MacArthur one time say this. He said, you know, he said, I don't deal a lot from the pulpit with your personal problems.

He said, my only counsel to you is don't worry about them. They're going to go away and be replaced by something worse. That's life. In this life, you're going to have tribulation.

But be of good cheer. Christ has overcome the world. I mean, that was John's attitude. Now, in the first century, let's put this in context. Sound doctrine consisted of what?

The Old Testament. New Testament hadn't been written. and the apostolic word that Christ assigned to his apostles.

They were going around preaching. And that was the word of God. And it would become the word of God because eventually, they wrote it down. But in the early part, when they first got going, it hadn't been written down.

[18:06] It had not been written down. This is why when Paul went and preached to the Bereans, said, hey, you know, this is really interesting. We're going to go home and search the scriptures to see if what you're telling us is true.

I mean, we should all be Bereans. We should all be Bereans. Now, the apostolic word was eventually written down as the apostles began to pass on, to pass off the scene. for us, the standard of sound doctrine, that's the faith once for all delivered to the saints, is the scriptures. It is the Old and New Testament teachings.

And let's be honest, we primarily hang out in the New Testament because it's the blueprint for the church. And we can learn great spiritual lessons in the Old Testament and we can learn holiness in the Psalms and wisdom in the Proverbs.

There's a lot to be learned there. But we do spend a lot of time in the New Testament. We do that. False teaching, therefore, is any teaching that departs from the established norm of scripture.

[19:18] Old and New Testament. A false teacher is anyone within the church who stands against what the Bible teaches. And I'll tell you, if you bring someone in here and it's like rub, we don't have blackboards anymore, do we?

Some of you are so young you don't know what a blackboard is. I remember blackboards and every now and then some kid would take his fingernails and rake them down that blackboard.

that's what happens to me when a guy gets up and he says, well, you know, let me tell you what this verse means to me. Or, here's how I think what God means.

You know, I don't care what you think. I wonder what the Bible says. God is, God is how I visualize him to be. What is that?

Three. False teachers promote immoral living. They promote immoral living.

[20:26] Jude shows us that false teachers often sneak into the church and then he says in verse four, they turn the grace of our God into licentiousness.

They turn the grace of God. That's Jude, verse four, into licentiousness. Licentiousness is a big word that means a lack of moral restraint and it's speaking very directly to sexual misconduct, which so often the New Testament does.

It is a total suppression of the moral norms of Scripture. It is a life that excuses behavior that the Bible condemns.

that's the promotion of immoral living. Peter says that such teachers deny the Lord Jesus by following sensuality.

That's 2 Peter 2.2. A person, mark this thing down in your mental file somewhere, a person who will not be ruled by God's word will often be ruled by their own lusts.

[21:40] If they don't submit to God's word, they will be ruled by their own lusts. There is no shortage of charlatans who infiltrate the churches with their charisma only to prove themselves lecherous meddlers with the women in the flock.

that happens all the time and I'm sorry, but in the 21st century I also have to add and some of the men and we've seen some high profile ministers in the last 20 years fall that had tremendous ministries on the world standard.

I mean, bringing in a lot of money, had a lot of people. They fell because of an affair with a woman or in some cases an affair with a man. I mean, it is what it is.

And some have tried to justify their own immorality or the immorality of others, but they won't mount a frontal assault on the moral norms of scripture.

They want to hear it. We live in an enlightened age. That applied to the Jews. I've heard that said often. They redefine the Bible's terms so that they no longer witness against evil deeds.

[23:07] And probably in our day, the biggest thing with the liberal church is justification for homosexual behavior. That the Jews had to hang up on that.

God made them that way. It's not sin. It's just the way they're made. I mean, we hear this argument all the time. There was a pastor on Long Island, New York, of all places, an evangelical, and he took out a billboard with his own money, not the church's money, and he quoted, what is it, Leviticus, man shall not lie with man as with a woman.

He was the subject of an intense investigation by the authorities, law enforcement, including taking his kids out of the classroom and interrogating them without the parents' knowledge.

You know, what does your dad say to you? Does he ever pray with you? What does he say when he prays with you? Do you have Bible studies at home? Things like this. I could just picture the founding fathers rolling in the coffins at even the mere suggestion of that.

When America was just a few years old, they put four ministers on trial, I can't remember what state it was, for preaching the gospel. And James Madison heard about it.

[24:30] Really the silent author of the Constitution. We talk about Jefferson, but Madison had tremendous input. He rode on horseback like 800 miles.

Walks into the courtroom. Everybody recognized him. He walks, he didn't even wait for an imitation. He walked right up to the judge. He said, Your Honor, do I understand these men are on trial for preaching the gospel in the United States of America?

And the judge said, this case is dismissed. And he fled out of the courtroom. He fled into the night.

Those who redefine the Bible's teaching about marriage and sexuality fall into this category in an effort to justify not only their misdeeds but the misdeeds of the congregation.

False teachers deemphasize sin and judgment. You're not going to hear any sermons, I'm not going to call any names, but you're not going to hear any sermons from Joel Osteen on sin and judgment. Not going to happen. I love it when he promotes his book, Your Best Life Now. You know, the only way that happens is if you're going to hell in the next life.

[25:43] That's the way this can be your best life now. It's amazing. False teachers deemphasize sin and judgment. This is a trait that false teachers share in common with the false prophets of the Old Testament.

Jeremiah described it this way, for from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain.

Remember those three words. We're going to get back to them. Greedy for gain. Now, that was written thousands of years ago. And from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely.

And they have healed the brokenness of my people superficially. I think that's kind of a modern translation. I don't know if you use that word. Saying, peace, peace, but there is no peace.

False teachers characteristically downplay sin. He can believe the way he wants to. We all just love each other. Instead of naming the people's brokenness as sin, they simply say, nothing to see here.

[26:58] Let's move along. Let's move along. The false teachers tell sinners whom God will judge that they are not really that bad and there's no need to fear God's judgment.

Boy, they have to have a higher accountability for the Lord to tell someone that. They divorce God's love and grace from his holiness.

They tell people who should have every reason to fear God's judgment that they don't have anything to worry about. They flee from the confrontation that truth brings and they tell sinners whatever their itching ears want to hear.

You could study that tonight in 2 Timothy 4 verses 3 and 4. Number five, teachers, and we're getting back to this, I told you we would, false teachers are motivated by greed or selfish gain. That's our day. That is our day. You know, Joel Osteen's church in Houston got broken into last spring.

[28:12] They stole, they got the contents out of the safe. It sounded like an inside job to me. And they stole the contents of the safe from the Sunday offering. That Sunday's offering.

\$600,000. \$600,000. Peter says that in their greed, false teachers exploit God's people with false words.

2 Peter 2.3. Indeed, their hearts are trained in greed. 2 Peter 2.14. Paul says false teachers suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

1 Timothy 6.5. You know, we do pay our pastors and the Bible supports that.

But we don't pay our Sunday school teachers. I'm not getting paid for this. I did the message at First West one time and they handed me a check for \$100. I was never so embarrassed in my life.

[29:23] Not a paid minister. You know, I just, these guys that, the extreme charismatics that are trying to make trees walk and ducks talk, they're in it for the bucks.

Now, I didn't, I didn't get a copy or I would have shown you tonight, but I've got one. Again, I won't call his name, but Creflo Dollar. He's having this revival. These people came down, they put tens of thousands of dollars down on the stage, like the steps we have.

He was going up and down walking in it and picking up and bathing in it. It's greed. I actually heard one of those guys, Frederick Price, and he said, I've got two Royals Royces.

You don't have one because you don't have enough faith. little widow women on a fixed income bought that for him. It infuriated me.

It infuriated me. And I could give you other examples close to home like Tulsa, but I'm not going to. It's the first time I've ever restrained myself. Teachers who love money and material game will often say whatever they have to say in order to increase the bottom line.

[30:44] They are mercenaries not following the call of God. They go after the highest bidder. They will scratch whatever itch sinners want scratched.

They turn the ministry into a profit machine because they are motivated by greed. Beware of pastors who seem to have an appetite for material gain. That is a telltale mark of a false teacher. John MacArthur came into Tulsa in the mid 90s. Dr. McBride and I went down there and listened to him. Now, you've got a picture of where he's at. He's in Tulsa preaching about charismatic theology. And he said, and I quote him, you show me a man that names universities after himself and is into Royals Royces and private jets and thousand dollar suits and I will show you someone that leaks all over.

He said, you can mark it down. He leaks all over. The most telling mark in our day of a false teacher is greed. And let me tell you, these guys are all millionaires and they'll tell you about it.

[31:59] They'll tell you about it. Google or get on YouTube sometime and look up Kenneth Copeland's estate, one of his four homes. Get a picture of his new jet, which he flies himself.

Some of these other guys, it's pretty amazing. Six, moving along before I get thrown out. False teachers cause division. False teachers cause division.

False teachers will try to convince the flock that sound doctrine causes division. Many, many, many years ago we had a guy in this church, he decided to start his own.

Dr. My Bride came in and he was our pastor and he met the guy and he shook his hand. Tell me about your church, what's the doctrine that moves you? We don't have any doctrine. No, no, we don't mention doctrine.

Doctrine divides. Doctrine's divisive. We don't teach doctrine. When false teachers say doctrines divide, they're lying.

[33:04] It's a lie from the pit. It is actually the false teaching that seeks to divide and conquer God's people. And Jude gives us a stern warning about that in Jude verses 18 to 20.

Here's what he says. In the last time there will be mockers following after their own ungodly lusts. These are the ones who cause divisions.

The Holy Spirit wrote that. It can't be any clearer, right? These are the guys that cause divisions, worldly minded, devoid of the Spirit.

Now, what does that mean if you're devoid of the Spirit? You're not safe. You're not safe. At the moment of salvation, the Spirit of God takes up habitation of you, never leaves you, never forsakes you, devoid of the Spirit, but you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God.

Read Jude tonight, 27 verses. You can do it. Who causes dissension in the ranks? Not those teaching sound doctrine.

[34:18] Christ's people always unite around the truth. And I've said this many, many times. I have a lot more in common with a believing, put any word in there you want to, Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic, I don't care, than I do an unbelieving Baptist.

And I'm sure there are some. But there's a commonality, there's a union there. And you know, I've run into believers everywhere I've gone. I've been in 45 countries, 46 if you count Louisiana.

And I've been in these countries, I've seen believers in every country. You know why? I've said this before, the gospel is so powerful it will find a way to penetrate the darkest area on earth.

At VOM, we see them all the time. We run into them in mountains and woods and caves because God's word is powerful.

Christ's people unite with one another around the truth. They divide over error. False teachers are the ones who draw people away from the standard of divine truth into error.

[35:36] You know how bad that is in Southern Baptist life? We lose around 265 people a day in the United States to a cult or a false religion.

265 a day. They go into Jehovah Witness, Mormon, you name it, New Age. We lost one in this town. You know what? She left her church, what in this church, Baptist church.

You know what she left for? Line dancing. She was into line dancing. Oh yeah, I'm going to leave over that reason. Seven and last, false teachers resemble the flock.

Boy, there's the scary part. Jesus says to beware of the false prophets who come into you in sheep's clothing. Now you're going to say, well, didn't we already cover this?

Yeah, but it's important. We're going to cover it again. The false teacher never comes to a congregation with a cardboard sign around his neck saying, I'm a false teacher, beware.

[36:49] That never happens. The false teacher comes to us in the guise of Christianity. He has the form of godliness, but he denies its power, 2 Timothy 3.5.

If the false teacher looks and sounds like a Christian, then how are we to know he's a false teacher? Again, I appeal to Jesus, you will know them by their fruits.

What do they produce? In other words, what they do will often reveal far more about who they are than what they say. You know, what's their lives?

What's their lives? Now, we could say a lot more on false teachers, but these seven characteristics are the very least we might learn from. So, what can we do?

What do we need to do? Be grounded in doctrine so that you will be able to detect what is false and misleading. And may I say this, 30 minutes on Sunday morning, in Sunday school, it's good.

[38:08] 45 minutes to an hour in church is good. Coming in here for 30, 40 minutes is good, but it's not enough. Open the Bible at home.

I've got 29 of them. I need to open one every night. That's a shame that someone are doing that.

I've got 29. Be grounded in doctrine so you'll be able to detect what is false and misleading.

Number two, surround yourself and family with preaching and teaching that is biblical. Surround yourself and family with preaching and teaching that is biblical.

You know, if for any reason this church just disappeared, I don't know what would cause that, and I had to go somewhere else, right now, based on my knowledge, there's only one other church I'd go to in this town.

And I'm not going to tell you what it is, but there's a lot of churches in this town. I'm going to say this, there's false teachers in this town. I know some of them. I meet them through my work, and they're false.

[39:19] And I've heard them. I've heard more in the public, like before the city. A lot of times I hear them before the city council because they open in prayer. And it depends on which council member gets to invite which pastor that particular Monday night.

And I mean, some of them are doozies. And one of them, he started out, he said, I'm going to pray to the Christian God, but you bow your heads and you can pray to any God you want to. I started up saying, you ain't praying to the Christian God, are you crazy?

But I didn't. So be grounded in doctrines, surround yourself with preaching and teaching and follow John's admonition in 1 John 4.

1. Do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God.

Well, why did John say that? Well, he tells us. there are many false prophets in the world. And in fact, Jesus and John said there will be more in the last days than there are in the former days.

[40:37] Because Satan is pouring out his evil spirit to try to deceive many. We had a guy come to this church two years ago. and he said some disturbing things in there on a Monday night.

You guys were here. Jerry, you were here. James. He said some disturbing things. And he kind of lured James and I in to help him.

He didn't have a car. And we drove him to the lighthouse. He was staying there. So he needs to get out of town. And being the police chief, I was all for that.

And so I bought him a bus ticket. Well, that meant on Wednesday morning I had to pick him up. So I went and picked him up. I woke up about two o'clock Wednesday morning and I couldn't sleep and I got up and I was praying intently in the dark of the house there and I said, Lord, I don't know what I'm up against here.

And my spirit was very troubled. And I said, I need to know who this guy is. Because I was concerned that I was dealing perhaps with a demon.

[41:46] And to my knowledge I've never had to do that. I went and picked him up. We get in the car and he says, well, I know you've been wondering who I am.

Holy mackerel. Where are we going with this? So we're driving and he says, I'm an angel. I said, okay, are you a fallen angel?

He said, no, no, no, I'm an angel of God. I said, okay. I said, well, why am I driving you if you could?

And he said, I said, now you understand that I am commanded by scripture to test the spirits that come to me.

And I quoted that verse I just read you. He said, I understand that. I said, you know, yesterday we were together and you told me about when you were born in California, told me about your mother,

had one eye.

You told me how you lost your eye. You told me about your first wife. You told me that you're getting ready to get married and you want to have children.

[42 : 57] born. And I said, angels don't do any of that. They're not born. They're created. And God's not in the business from scripture of creating angels today.

However many were created, he created. And I said, he said, but I was with Gabriel two days ago.

He said, I was closer to Gabriel than I am to you right now. I said, well, I'm testing you.

And now you're talking about you're wanting children. You're going to procreate. Angels don't do that. I have to conclude that you are either deceived or that you're a false teacher, false prophet, demonically influenced.

I don't think you're a demon. But I think you're submitting to demons. And about that time, the bus pulled up and he said, oh, thank goodness, there's the bus. And so I got out and I got his suitcase out.

And then he says, can I hug you? And I said, yeah, you can hug me. So he reached out and I went like this and clamped down on my gun and hugged him and then they teach us to do that.

[44 : 10] And he left. Now, we haven't seen him since, but he's called a number of times wanting us to forward money. And the pastor won't talk to him. John won't talk to him.

He implied he was going to put a curse on us, but he didn't, seem cursed. Anyway, you got to test the spirits. And I'm running out of time here. Test the spirits when they come to you.

It's got to square with the word of God. If it conflicts with the word of God, don't believe them. It's false.