

PROTECT YOURSELF

- A. Introduction: Accurate knowledge from the Bible has always been important, but it's more than ever now.
1. Jesus warned that the years leading up to His return to this world will be marked by false christs and false prophets who will deceive even believers. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
 - a. Matt 24:24—Some mistakenly say that this verse means that believers cannot possibly be deceived by these false messiahs and prophets. If that were the case, then Jesus would not have to warn us to be not deceived. The idea is that these imposters will deceive true Christians if they possibly can.
 - b. To be deceived means to believe something that is not true or to believe a lie. Prior to the Lord's return people will believe lies about Jesus. Therefore, we're taking time to look at who He is, why He came to earth, and the message He preached according to the Bible.
 - c. Christians are more vulnerable than ever to deception. Bible reading is at an all time low. And, in an appeal to the widest audience possible, many pulpits deliver only positive, feel-good messages that avoid challenges topics like holiness, and produce no hunger for the Word of God.
 1. The culture around us has abandoned objective truth for subjective feelings and experiences. More and more people base what they believe on how they feel rather than on objective facts.
 2. This type of thinking has seeped into the church. It's not unusual to hear professing Christians to make these kinds of statements: I just feel that a loving God wouldn't send anyone to hell; I had a dream and God told me that it's okay for me commit this sin because He knows how much I enjoy it—and He wants me to be happy because He loves me; etc.
 2. The apostle Paul (who was personally taught the gospel that he preached by Jesus) warned that prior to the Lord's coming people will have a form of godliness but not be godly (i.e, a false Christianity).
 - a. II Tim 3:5—(In the last days people) will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. You must stay away from such people (NLT).
 - b. The Bible is very specific about the fact that when Jesus comes again this world will be under the control of a world government, economy, and religion presided over by the ultimate false Christ, a man commonly known as the Antichrist. Rev 13:1-18; Dan 8:23-25
 1. A false Christianity that will welcome this final ruler is well under way. Much of what it professes is draped in Christian terms so it sounds right to those unfamiliar with the Bible.
 2. It is hailed as more tolerant, more inclusive and less judgment than traditional Christianity, claiming that all are welcomed by God no matter what they believe or how they live.
 - c. The only way that we can discern the genuine from the counterfeit is with accurate knowledge from the Bible. God's Word is our protection against deception. Ps 91:4
 3. My goal in this series is to hit as many highlights as possible about who Jesus is and why He came, as well as to encourage you to read the New Testament (start to finish) for yourself.
 - a. It was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus (or close associates of eyewitnesses) under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. II Tim 3:16; II Pet 1:16; John 20:30-31
 - b. We must become regular, systematic readers of the New Testament. This means reading through it start to finish, over and over, until you become familiar with it. Understanding comes with familiarity.
 4. Let's begin by briefly reviewing the key points we've made up to now about who Jesus is and why He came to earth before we add to them in this lesson.
 - a. All human beings are guilty of sin before a holy God. Our sin has separated us from God and, if this separation is not rectified, it will continue, not just in this life but throughout eternity. Isa 59:2
 1. Jesus came to earth to die for the sins of men and open the way for sinful men and women to be reconciled to God. Matt 1:21-23
 2. Col 1:21-22—And you likewise, who once were estranged from Him, and with your mind at

war with Him, when you lived in wickedness, yet now He (Jesus) has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, that He might bring you to his presence in holiness, without blemish and without reproach. (Conybeare)

- b. Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. Jesus became a man (took on a human nature in the womb of Mary) so that He could die. Heb 2:9
 - 1. While on earth Jesus did not live as God. He veiled His deity, put aside His rights and privileges as God, and lived as a man in dependence on God as His Father. Phil 2:5-8; Acts 10:38 ; John 14:9-10; etc.
 - 2. God and man came together in Jesus, demonstrating that God and man can be brought together. As the God-man (fully God and fully man), Jesus is the only One who can bring us together. I Pet 3:18; John 14:6
 - A. Because God is the Father of His humanity, He did not partake of the fallen nature from Adam. Because Jesus lived a perfect life, He had no guilt of His own. As God, His value was such that He was qualified to pay for the sins of an entire race. Heb 4:15; I Pet 1:18-19
 - B. Jesus is the only propitiation (satisfaction) for sin, making Him the only way to the Father. There is only one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus. I John 2:2; I Tim 2:5
- c. Jesus came to earth not only to die for our sin, but to reveal a previously veiled aspect of God's character and plan. God is a Father who wants a family.
 - 1. Human beings were created to become sons and daughters of God (Eph 1:4-5). However, all of us have sinned, and our sin has disqualified us from our created purpose. A holy God cannot have sinners as sons and daughters.
 - 2. Through the Cross Jesus made it possible for sinners to become sons and daughters of God. Sonship comes through faith in Christ and His sacrifice. God is Father only to those who put faith in Christ and His sacrifice. John 1:12-13; I John 5:1

- B. We pointed out last week that it is increasingly common to hear people talk about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. However, the idea that God is everyone's Father and that we are all His children and part of the same family is a false teaching. It is deception.
 - 1. This concept of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man comes from and then expresses itself in a number false ideas: It doesn't matter what we believe as long as we are sincere. Human beings are basically good. If we all work together, we can make this world a better place and bring lasting peace, prosperity, and love for all mankind to the world.
 - a. These ideas appeal to most of us because that's what we all want. We all want the world to be a better place.
 - 1. And, so the thinking goes, if we all acknowledge the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, stop judging each other and become more tolerant, we'll get along better and peace will finally come to this world.
 - 2. This statement appeared on facebook recently and multitudes of people liked it and shared it: If Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed were here today they would tell us all to love each other because we're all one family.
 - b. The problem with the concept of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all men is that it is contrary to what the Bible says. It is contrary to what Jesus Himself said about the Father and His sons. According to Jesus, God is not the Father of everyone.
 - 1. In a confrontation with the Pharisees (the religious leaders of His day), Jesus told them that they were of their Father the devil. John 8:44
 - 2. When Jesus was explaining some facts about the end of this present age to His apostles He made reference to the fact that there are children of the kingdom (sons of God) and children of

the wicked one (sons of the devil). Matt 13:38

2. We must understand that human nature was fundamentally altered when Adam, the head of the human race, sinned. Human beings, created in the image of God, became sinners by nature. Rom 5:19
 - a. This new nature expressed itself in the first generation of humans born through natural processes. Adam's firstborn son, Cain, murdered his brother, Abel, and then lied to God about it. Gen 4:1-9
 1. I John 3:12—In the context of children of God and children of the devil (v10) the apostle John (one of Jesus' closest associates) revealed that Cain was of the wicked one: Cain who [took his nature and got his motivation] from the evil one (Amp).
 2. Eph 2:3—Paul the apostle reported that through our first birth, we are by nature objects of God's wrath. The word nature (*phusis*) means by natural production, lineal descent.
 3. This nature is more or less restrained in us depending upon our upbringing and the cultural and moral influences around us. But all of us are capable of doing vile things under the right circumstances because we all have that fallen nature.
 - b. People struggle with this because most of us consider ourselves and our friends and loved ones to be good people. But the standard of how good one must be is not set by the best person we know, but by God Himself, and we all fall short. Rom 3:23—For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard (NLT).
 - c. Jesus Himself understood fallen human nature and the fact that human beings are not naturally good. Consider two statements He made.
 1. Matt 19:16-26—A wealthy young man came to Jesus and asked the Lord what he needed to do to have eternal life. There are a number of points in this incident that we aren't going to address now (Mark 10:23-24), but note one. The man called Jesus good, and Jesus responded that there is none good but God. In other words, according to Jesus, God is the standard by which goodness is measured and no one measures up.
 2. Matt 15:1-19—In another confrontation with the Pharisees Jesus said that it's not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of him, out of an evil heart.
 3. John 2:23-25—Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the Passover and, because of the miracles that people saw Him perform, many believed that He was the Messiah. But note His response: But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew what people are really like. No one needed to tell him about human nature (v24-25, NLT).
 - A. One of the themes we see throughout Jesus' teachings is that man has a heart problem that cannot be corrected by outward action. There must be an inward cleansing.
 - B. John 3:3-5—In the very next chapter of John's gospel Jesus told Nicodemus (a Pharisee) that in order for a man to enter the kingdom of God he must be born again, or literally, born from above by the Spirit of God through the Word of God (lessons for another day).
3. The false Christianity that is emerging in our day uses Bible verses to support their teachings (there's always some truth mixed in with the lie—otherwise, no sincere Christian would fall for it). But, the verses are taken out of context and misused to support preconceived ideas.
 - a. Peter (another eyewitness and close associate of Jesus) wrote an epistle to believers shortly before his death. He knew that he was soon to be executed for his faith in Christ and that these would be his last words to his brothers and sisters in Christ.
 1. Peter wrote to warn them that false teachers who pervert the gospel already were, and would continue to try to influence them. He wrote to believers to remind them of the truth as revealed in and through Jesus Christ. II Pet 2:1-3; II Pet 3:1-3
 2. Note this statement by Peter: Our beloved brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him—speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters around to mean

something quite different from what he meant, just as they do the other parts of Scripture (II Pet 3:15-16, NLT)

3. Misuse of Scripture happened in Peter and Paul's day and it is happening in our day—only it's more and it's worse. That's we need to be familiar with the entire New Testament, so that we can recognize teachings not consistent with the overall tone and themes of the New Testament. (Themes are ideas that show up over and over in the text.)
- b. Consider one example of a popular misuse of a passage about Jesus used to feed the idea that God is everyone's Father and we are all brothers because God is in each of us. Matt 25:35-40
 1. There's a lot to explain in this passage. It has to do with an administering of justice to certain groups of people in connection with the Second Coming (way more than we can discuss now).
 2. According to popular (but false) teaching, based on this verse, when we give to the poor, take in strangers, and visit the sick we're doing it to Jesus. It doesn't matter what God you believe in or how you live. What matters is that you live the gospel (or make life better for people) by caring for the poor, the weak, and the suffering.
 3. But these ideas are not consistent with the rest of the Scriptures. The gospel is not a social gospel. It's a supernatural gospel. Its aim is not to change society but to change men's hearts.
 - A. Mankind has a problem that's deeper than poverty, sickness, and injustice. We're guilty of sin before a holy God. We have failed in our moral responsibility to obey our Creator.
 - B. Jesus came to earth and died to make possible an inward cleansing and transformation by the power of God for those who acknowledge Him—a transformation that makes sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through new birth. Titus 3:5
 1. I Cor 15:1-4—Paul (an eyewitness of Jesus who was taught the gospel he preached by the Lord. Gal 1:11-12) defined the gospel thusly: Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again.
 2. Paul wrote that the resurrection is proof that justice has been satisfied and the debt we owed for our sin has been paid. We can now be reconciled to God through faith in Christ (Rom 4:25; Rom 5:1). That's good news!! That's the gospel!!
 4. Yes, good works are part of the Christian life. But they mean nothing in terms of your status before God or your eternal fate unless you have had an inward cleansing and transformation by the power of God. Good works are outward expressions of these inward changes. Eph 2:10
- C. Conclusion: We have a lot more to say next week. But consider these thoughts as we close.
 1. These are dangerous times. All of us are vulnerable to deception. The only protection we have is accurate knowledge from the Word of God.
 2. Become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. It will show you clearly that although God is every man's Creator, He is not everyone's Father. He is Father only to those who have been reconciled to Him through faith in Christ.
 3. Don't let any emotional appeals or mental reasonings and questionings (like, it's not fair that there's only one way to God, or I know atheists and people who are living immoral lifestyle that are better human beings than some Christians, etc.) undermine your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures.