

False Prophets Avoid Christ Centered Preaching

What if a friend asked you for help on how to find a good church to attend? How would you respond? What criteria would you recommend?

- location?
- size of congregation?
- type of music?
- children's programs?
- teen programs?
- women's ministry?
- men's ministry?
- evangelistic preaching?
- expository preaching?

Oh, my. The list of criteria could be a long list. This provides only a glimpse of the factors one could consider in choosing where to worship with other Christians. Add to this list the prevalence of false prophets and teachers. This sad reality affects the selection process, because they abound.

Any search for a new Christian congregation must consider the possibility of a false teacher at the helm of a prospective Church. How, then, does one identify a false leader and choose a Biblical leader?

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Church, he outlined the principle criteria for choosing a pastor/leader to follow. He emphasized the importance of the centrality of Christ in preaching.

"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1.21-24)

The conditions in Corinth resemble our world's circumstances today. Corinth was a wicked city, filled with lusts for possessions, sexual promiscuity, and immorality. Our world very much mirrors the city of Corinth.

As Paul reminded his friends at Corinth of the importance and the centrality of Jesus Christ and the cross, so we in our day need to remember what we need for life and godliness, Christ and the cross. The message has not changed nor has the need changed.

The Jews wanted a sign from Christ as proof of His claims as Messiah. They wanted Jesus to perform some supernatural sign for them. Then they would believe His declarations. When Jesus refused to comply with their demands, the Jews rejected Him.

The Greeks pursued wisdom. They wanted the gospel presented in a wise and scholarly way. When Paul presented the cross of Christ, which seemed foolish to them, they rejected the gospel.

We find in our day much the same reactions to the cross and to the preaching of Jesus Christ. Many demand visible signs to convince them of the truth of the gospel. To others, it appears foolish. Our society emulates Corinth.

As an antidote to this spiritual poverty, the Apostle Paul proclaimed a Christ-centered message. He outlined the essentials of Christ-centered preaching. What does it include? What emphasis does it provide?

In this message to his friends, Paul explained three marks of Christ-centered preaching, the most important requirement in church choice. We will examine them so that we can understand this all-important emphasis. Then, we can discern and reject those false prophets and leaders who fail to provide it and locate and learn from those who preach Christ.

Three Marks Of

Christ-Centered Preaching

#1: Christ-centered preaching teaches the depravity of mankind.

False prophets and pastors fail to present the sinfulness of man. They skirt the issue. In fact, many of them will say, “If you come to our church, if you read my materials, you won’t find anything in there about sin.” They avoid it openly and proudly.

I remember a time when I heard a preacher, who during his message completely avoided several sections of his text that gave some very definitive “do not’s.” After the service, I spoke to him about his message. I said, “I have a question. How come in your message you didn’t talk about the parts where it said ‘don’t do this...avoid this and this?’”

Immediately he responded, “I only preach a positive message. I don’t talk about anything negative.” He failed to preach on sin and its presence in the lives of his congregation.

Because Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, sin has entered the nature of humanity. Every one of us has a sinful nature from the moment of conception. Sin has entered the nature of man. That cute little child or grandchild that you hold in your arms possesses a sinful nature, which

“...(is) estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” (Psalm 58.3)

Every child has a heart of rebellion and disobedience. The Scriptures say it this way:

“Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child.” (Proverbs 22.15)

We do not like to view anyone this way, especially children. However, as soon as they have the opportunity, children will divert their will and attention away from God. We are sinners not because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

That is the bent of our hearts and desires. We willfully, deliberately pursue a life away from God, because of our sinful natures. A Christ centered ministry will present that truth and point out several truthful features about us as human beings.

Our sinful natures make us totally helpless in any pursuit after God. By nature, we do not like God nor love God. We are hopelessly dead in our trespasses and sins, as the Scriptures describe us. (Ephesians 2.1-3) We cannot meet the demands of a holy God. We not only lack the ability to satisfy God, we also lack any desire to meet His commands.

A Christ centered ministry presents these truths. Paul talked about how in the wisdom of this world man did not desire after God. He pointed out and reminded his friends what he had taught them when he preached to them initially. He proclaimed to them their depravity before God.

Jesus preached this same truth in His conversation with Nicodemus. Christ said,

“He that believeth on [Christ] is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already.” (John 3.18)

In other words, as sinful men and women without Christ, we stand before God condemned, justly deserving the wrath of God upon us, because of our sinful natures. Further in that same conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said,

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” (John 3.36)

That describes how you and I stand before God without Christ, condemned. Paul reminded his friends in Corinth of how he declared their sinfulness before God. Through Paul’s teaching on the sinfulness of mankind, many came to faith in God’s provision for them in Christ.

Christ-centered preaching presents the depravity of man and points out to men and women their lostness

before God. They stand before God condemned, incapable of any good, incapable of any kind of correction, incapable of any kind of righteous living that would satisfy God. They stand condemned before God.

In our day we need a return to true Christ-centered preaching that proclaims the depravity of man.

#2: Christ-centered preaching teaches salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.

A Christ-centered ministry preaches deliverance from sin through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Many preachers, whom I would call false prophets and false teachers, do not present Jesus in true fashion. Instead, they present salvation in a variety of ways.

For example, many say that every religion has its “Jesus.” They teach that those who have the Bible, have the Jesus Who is described in it. Those in other lands and cultures have someone like Jesus that they follow. Thus, many “Jesuses” exist. It does not matter which Jesus you follow if you follow and believe one of them. In error, they call it Christ-centered preaching.

Furthermore, these same teachers and preachers completely avoid the cross. They do not talk about it or even present it. Recently, I researched a very prominent young preacher who travels around the world, preaching to crowds. Multiplied thousands come to his meetings.

The world proclaims him as one of the young, dynamic preachers of our era. He does not preach on the cross. He avoids it, except for infrequent references to it.

No salvation exists for sinners like you and me without the cross. A salvation presented to you as one that will provide for you a passageway into eternal life with God that does not include the cross will not save you. You will ultimately discover, sadly to your harm, that you still stand before God condemned.

Paul mentioned to his friends and reminded them, “The preaching of the cross calls to men and women to believe and to faith in Christ.”

Some will ask, “Why the cross? Why do we need to hear about the cross and all that blood? Besides, Jesus did not die there on the cross. He just swooned, and his followers took him down from the cross. Then, they hid him away and later said he came back to life. We don’t believe any of that.” They just flat out reject the cross.

We need a brief reminder of what Jesus fulfilled on the cross. On the cross, Christ presented Himself to God as a substitutionary sacrifice as payment in full of the penalty for sin on behalf of people like you and me. When He offered Himself on the cross, He gave His life there. Yes, He did die on the cross. He did not swoon on the cross. He died there.

When speaking of Christ, the Apostle Peter declared,

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1 Peter 2.24)

When Christ died on the cross, shedding His blood and having His body broken by the cruelty of His tormentors, God the Father looked down on His sacrifice and accepted it. Christ’s death on the cross fulfilled a payment in satisfaction to God the Father on behalf of people like you and me. (See Colossians 2.13-14.)

That explains why God accepts only those who come to Him through Christ. (See John 14.6 and 1 Timothy 2.5.) When a sinner comes to God, (s)he must come through faith alone in the Substitute Whom God provided for sinners, Jesus Christ.

I remind you that I stated that a Christ-centered ministry preaches deliverance from sin through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. I cannot contribute anything to my salvation, because of my inherited sinful nature and the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ for sinners.

Therefore, sinners receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as their substitute, alone, with nothing else added to it. Christ-centered preaching presents Jesus Christ as the satisfaction for the sin of people like you and like me. Any other preaching by false teachers and leaders will not reconcile you to God.

When we have faith in Christ, we enjoy benefits that accrue to us:

- We experience freedom from guilt.
- We enjoy freedom from the foolishness of endless self-analysis.
- We possess freedom from endless preoccupation with ourselves.

A prominent mark of false teaching today stresses maximizing your full potential, having all of your emotions and your psychology all blended correctly and having a full emotional you. False teachers do not even talk about Jesus, or God, or about what Jesus accomplished on the cross and what it will provide in our lives when we fully trust him.

Christ-centered preaching proclaims deliverance from our sinful human natures and all its hurts by faith alone in Christ alone. Paul said:

“We preach Christ crucified.” (1 Corinthians 1.23)

To those who believe it brings salvation.

#3: Christ-centered preaching teaches Christ-like living as a mark of faith in Christ.

Christ-centered preaching presents the demands and the delights of the life of Christ living in our everyday lives. We tend to view salvation as a one-time experience which provides, some day in the future, eternal life.

We act as though our salvation in Christ has no bearing upon our lives today. We go on living the way we have always lived, pursuing our own dreams and desires. We wash our hands of anything between the time when we trusted Christ and the time when we would enter eternal life. That describes a commonly held fallacy.

Christ makes demands upon those of us who trust Him and have claimed His death on the cross as payment for our sins to the satisfaction of God the Father. He taught His disciples how He expected them to live and has made demands upon all who trust Him.

For example, He said,

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16.24)

“For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5.20)

The Scriptures provide a multitude of Christ’s demands that describe the pattern of life of His followers.

Following Christ brings delights, too. Christians have barely scratched the surface to fully understand and grasp the effect that faith in Christ can have upon our lives.

Faith in Christ brings fullness of joy, freedom, peace, and security to our minds and hearts because of Jesus and what He accomplished and fulfilled on the cross.

To realize its fullness requires that we who trust Christ present ourselves daily to Jesus, asking Him to bring into our lives that which He provided for us in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father.

John wrote to his friends in his first epistle, telling them how they could have fullness of joy in Christ. (1 John 1.4) What Christ accomplished on the cross has a bearing upon every aspect of our lives:

- married or single;
- rich or poor;
- family life;
- work activities;
- friendships;
- time;
- talents; and
- treasures.

Implications

The false prophets, teachers, and leaders of today reject all three of these aspects of Christ-centered ministry. They reject the depravity of man, deliverance through faith alone in Christ alone, and the demands and delights of Christ upon our lives. The declaration of these truths helps identify a Godly leader. False prophets and teachers avoid them.

For some of you, these truths we have just examined from the Scriptures have no meaning, because you do not trust Christ. Therefore, it has no effect in your life.

Jesus said,

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11.28)

“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14.6)

“Everyone who comes to me I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6.37)

I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see your need of trusting Jesus and bring you to faith in Jesus, the only provision for sinners like you and like me. I call upon you to trust Christ now.

Those of us who have trusted in Christ need to realize what it means to have a Christ-centered ministry. False messengers and their false messages bombard us. If we follow them, they will lead us astray. Yes, we must reject their errors. We cannot play with them and somehow make them part of our lives.

We must turn from them and pursue the truth. We need to have some foundation upon which we can build and stand to help us discern between the true and the false. Christ-centered preaching provides it. We need to know the truth upon which we can rely and rest so that we can discern between the true and the false.

I pray that the Spirit of God will help you to have that foundation upon which you can rest. It will help you discern the true from the false, so that you might experience fullness of joy in Christ.

Questions For Reflection And Application

01. Define the meaning of “the depravity of man.”
02. It would be hard to find an unbeliever who believes in the depravity of man. Why do you think a professing Christian would *not* believe in the depravity of man?
03. If a Christian visiting speaker, a Christian author, or a church pastor fails to present the truth of what Scripture says about the depravity of man, is it possible for him/her to direct an unbeliever to salvation?
04. How many paths to life everlasting in heaven are available to mankind?
05. Why do you think that the cross is central to faith in Jesus Christ? Why not the birth of Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, the ascension of Christ, or some other activity of the Lord Jesus Christ.
06. When we have faith in Christ, we experience freedom from guilt. We also know freedom from endless self-analysis, and preoccupation with our selves. Are these benefits offered through the teaching of Islam, Buddhism, Scientology, Agnosticism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, or any other religious teaching? If not, why not?
07. How is what Christ accomplished on the cross affecting:
 - a) Your marital status?
 - b) Your financial status?
 - c) Your family life?
 - d) Your work?
 - e) Your time?
 - f) Your friendships?
 - g) Your talents?
 - h) Your treasures?
08. Do you sit under the teaching of a Christ-Entered pastor or teacher?
 - a) Does (s)he teach the depravity of mankind?
 - b) Does (s)he teach salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone?
 - c) Does (s)he teach that Christ-like living is a mark of true faith in Christ?

d) If you answered “no” to one of these previous three questions, should you continue to sit under his/her teaching and leadership?

09. If you are a Christian pastor or teacher who does not regularly include those three teachings, how do you justify your ministry?

Thank you, heavenly Father, for your provision for us in Jesus Christ. Thank you for what He accomplished in His life, His death on the cross, His resurrection, and in His ascension to sit at Your right hand in the glory of heaven. Thank you for your grace and for your mercy.

Father, I ask that You send your Holy Spirit to bring into our daily lives faith in Christ to the saving of our souls.

Then, secondly, to bring into our lives the fruit, the benefits, the blessings, the delights of what Christ accomplished for us. May they permeate our daily experience and all of the affairs and activities of our lives that we might enjoy that which He has provided for us.

We will give to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit praise, honor, glory, and thanks for what You accomplish in our lives. I ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ Your Son.

Amen.