

UNIT SIX: DISCERNMENT OF GOOD & EVIL

KEY SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR UNIT SIX

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. - Hebrews 5:14

CLASS 1: DISCERNING THE SCHEMES OF THE ENEMY

1 Reading, 2 Exercises

Since the Garden of Eden, the enemy has been using every tactic he can to persuade believers off of the course of eternal life. The further we go on our spiritual journey, the more subtle the schemes of the enemy become.

CLASS 2: YEASTS OF JESUS' DAY & TODAY

1 Reading, 1 Scripture Worksheet, 1 Exercise

Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the yeasts of the false teachers in His day. In examining these yeasts, we will discover that the same false beliefs are still working to bring corruption today.

CLASS 3: DECEITFUL WORKERS & DOCTRINES OF DEMONS

1 Reading, 1 Scripture Worksheet, 1 Exercise

Approximately one third of the New Testament pertains to false teachers and how to avoid them. Let us examine the path of false teachers and their teachings so that we will not be led astray by doctrines of demons.

CLASS 4: ENDURING THROUGH THE GREAT APOSTASY

1 Reading, 1 Scripture Worksheet, 1 Prayer Guide

Before the return of Christ, many will fall away from the faith. Let us examine what Scripture actually says about the end times so that we can be prepared to endure in the truth.

KEY QUESTIONS

GROUP EXERCISES

DISCERNING THE SCHEMES OF THE ENEMY

In the story of the prodigal son, the prodigal does not stop being a son. But the heart of the prodigal rejects his own sonship to exchange it for having his own way. It is a heart that says, “give it to me **now** so that I may do my will with it” rather than, “thank you father for all you have provided for me, how can I serve you?” I’m sure the freedom and fortune felt exhilarating for the prodigal at first. But it did not take long for him to lose all he had and find himself lost, alone, wasted, and useless. We have to consider for a moment, what was it in the heart of the prodigal that caused him to think and behave this way?

Before the world was created, Lucifer was designed by God to be the chief worshipping angel. Lucifer had experienced the bliss of unrestricted access to God and His throne. But after a while, worshipping God was not enough for him. He wanted to ascend to the throne of God for himself. He set out to do it. Iniquity, greed, and arrogance was found in him. He was thrown down.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were believers – children of God. They had seen God, experienced God, fellowshiped with God, and clearly heard God’s voice. They were made in God’s image and appointed to rule the world with God. But then, Adam and Eve were faced with a choice. The serpent appealed to their desire to ascend to new heights of being like God. The devil did not say, “you will be like demons” or “you will be like me and my angels cast out of the presence of God.” No. Instead, he said, “you will be like God.” The serpent painted a picture of attaining their highest and truest objective in life which caused them to lust with ambition for greater things. At the same time, the evil one twisted and discounted God’s Word which caused Adam and Eve to doubt, and ultimately negate, the consequences of disobedience. Desire was birthed in their hearts, the pros and cons were evaluated, and self-exaltation won the day over submission to God and His commands. Adam and Eve went prodigal in hopes of attaining their own desires but instead wound up separated from God and from the source of life.

The ancient serpent is still planting seeds of doubt and selfishness in the hearts of believers. The whole world is already under the power of the evil one and it takes little effort for him to keep them bound. It is believers who require specialized attention from the forces of evil and more subtle tactics which distort God’s Word and ways to veer even the most sincere believers off their course for eternity. God allows us to retain our free will at all times. Though He longs for us to make right choices and not fall prey to deception, He allows us to set our own course and when we do, He waits for us to come to our senses and return to His wisdom and approach. We are most vulnerable when we feel most secure as those who consider ourselves to know God’s love, salvation, fellowship, and peace. We must keep vigilant guard of our heart, mind, and will so as to continually discern the various tactics of the evil one.

Four Soils (See Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-24; Luke 8:4-18.)

Jesus said about his parable of the four soils that if we cannot understand this parable, we will be challenged to understand any of His other parables. This parable outlines the basis for the faithfulness required in a believer’s heart to withstand the tactics and schemes of the enemy until we receive our ultimate eternal reward.

The seed is the Word of God. God sows seed liberally – throwing it everywhere on all kinds of soils, which represent the hearts of individuals and our ability to receive the Word of God.

The seed falls on top of the first soil. The birds of the air come to eat it before it penetrates. The heart is hard to the ways of God. On the one hand, this is a chastisement to keep our hearts soft and not quench the Holy Spirit or despise prophecies so that we do not miss out on what God desires to say to us. On the other hand, even when we do receive a word, we must be alert that the enemy's first line of attack is to try to snatch the seed out of our grasp. This usually comes through our own doubt, unbelief, or questioning, "Did God really say?" until we convince ourselves that God did not say what He said. Beware of this!

The seed which falls on the second soil is received with joy. We shout our hallelujah and amen with enthusiasm, ready to receive the blessing of God and set our course to obey Him. On our part, we may be excessively simple or naïve, not having counted the cost of following a crucified King. In the enemy's bag of tricks, he will try to kill the seed in our hearts through trials, troubles, persecution, humiliation, accusation, and any manner of tactics until ultimately, we ask ourselves, "Did God really say?" and we cannot conceive that God's path would be this challenging. Then, we abandon God's path by choosing ourselves and our own well-being.

The seed which falls on the third soil penetrates into our hearts and we start out well. The seed takes root. We are firm – or so we think. We know the voice of God and what He has said to us. But as we set out to see the Word of God fulfilled in our lives, temporal issues and priorities creep into our consciousness. Family obligations. Money. Time. Energy. Friends. Fellowship. Traditions. Reputation. Whatever it is, it causes us to settle into complacency rather than pushing further into all that God promised. The "good" and "godly" activities in our lives cause us to convince ourselves that this is sufficient service for God's Kingdom. "Did God really say?" becomes a dream we once had but not the reality of our existence. Even though we may appear to be serving God and flourishing in God's work, the enemy has succeeded in side-tracking us from God's true purpose for our lives.

But there is the fourth soil. The fourth soil perseveres through all of these challenges and tactics of the evil one. This is the heart that consistently chooses, "not my will but Yours be done," and is willing to give it all for God, even missing out on "opportunities" that seemed to be their ticket to "success" and recognition. This is the heart that receives and understands that God is worthy of all we have to give and that nothing of this world is worth departing from His ways. This heart knows that in the end, we will stand before Jesus and give account for what we have done with what He has given us.

Personally, what I have discovered about this parable is that it is not only true for our salvation in general but for every word of the Lord we receive as revelation and instruction from Him. All revelation will be tested in our hearts through our ability to live it out in our lives. All of God's instructions to us will be put to the test of whether or not we will choose to obey God or to indulge ourselves while convincing ourselves that we are doing it to serve Him. Knowing this can help us to discern the tactics of the enemy as we set ourselves to hear, receive, obey, and abide in the word of God until we see it come to pass in our lives.

Insights from the Book of Daniel

The enemy's tactics of deception have not changed much since creation. The Book of Daniel gives some insight into the methods the enemy uses to attempt to draw us off course.

*Daniel 7:25 ESV - He shall **speak words against the Most High**, and shall **wear out the saints of the Most High**, and shall think to **change the times and the law**; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.*

Speak against Most High: The serpent's first suggestion was, "Did God really say?" planting seeds of doubt. Then he launched an assault on God's character as if God was withholding something from Adam and Eve or had ordered them not to partake of something which would be beneficial for them. Even today, the enemy continuously aims to discredit God or cause us to doubt that God has given us everything we need to fulfill His purposes. The enemy accuses God of abandoning us, not speaking to us, not supplying

our needs, not having paid the full price on the cross, and speaks against God's word as being unreliable, or that God will not fulfill His promises for us. The evil one persistently accuses God night and day to attempt to push us into taking matters into our own hands, rather than trusting God and waiting on Him in obedience to His commands.

Wear out saints: The word used here means persecute or constantly harass. It is easy to think that victory in "spiritual warfare" is attained with a simple command into the spirit realm. But we must realize that the enemy is persistent. Consider how Samson had great strength on numerous occasions to resist the temptations and enticements of doing what he should not. But over time and with constant pressure, even Samson caved into the plots of his enemies. Only with clear discernment and endurance will we stand in the strength of the Lord when the enemy has worn out all of our own strength and ability to stand.

Change times: The enemy knows his time is short and so, he likes to try to play with time. One of the ways the enemy attacks us is to convince us that we are behind schedule, that we are going to miss an appointed time of God, or that "our time" for exaltation has come. One of the most dangerous questions a Christian can ask is, "when is it MY time..." for blessing, honor, victory, exaltation or anything like this.

Moreover, the enemy himself is always attempting to set up his own times. The calendar of the world has been changed on numerous occasions by pagan emperors. The times of the Biblical feasts have been replaced with pagan holiday times. Even the Jewish calendar has been distorted by rabbis away from the pure Biblical prescription. It is God alone who changes the times and the seasons. It is God alone who will lead us in His perfect timing and whose timing never fails.

Additionally, the evil one will try to lure people into predicting the times of God and setting dates for the return of Christ. All of these predictions so far have failed to come to pass. Why? Because not even Jesus knows the time of His own return. Only the Father. The end will still come at the appointed time.

Change laws: The enemy also changes laws against and away from God's standard of righteousness. Legalizing things which God deems unlawful and outlawing things which God says are righteous. Just because something is legal does not mean that it is moral, let alone righteous in God's sight. Calling good evil and evil good is a sign of great depravity.

Religious commands and traditions can also be the enemy's way of changing laws. Adding to God's laws and establishing our own code of ethics is only done under the influence of the evil one who is yet again perverting God's word and its consequences as he did back in the Garden of Eden. Traditions of men nullify the power of the word of God.

*Daniel 11:21, 23: "He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom **when its people feel secure**, and **he will seize it through intrigue**. ... After coming to an agreement with him, **he will act deceitfully**, and with only a few people he will rise to power.*

*Daniel 11:32, 36: **With flattery he will corrupt** those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. ... "The king will do as he pleases. **He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods**. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place.*

Feeling of Security: The enemy knows when we feel we have attained a level of security in any aspect of our lives. This is when he loves to strike in the area where we think we have the least vulnerability. To promote this feeling of security, the enemy's mouthpieces and counterfeit spirits will constantly be saying, "peace, peace" when there is no peace and the true servants of God are issuing warnings. Those who succumb to the false peace will be unprepared for the seemingly sudden onslaught of attack that they were not expecting. If they had listened to God they would have remained vigilant and been prepared.

Intrigue, Flatteries: The word for intrigue and flatteries in this passage means smooth promises, slipperiness, and smoothness of speech. As previously stated, the enemy does not come and say, "you will be like demons" he says, "you will be like God." He knows how to appeal to our highest sense of what is right, particularly when we are feeling secure, and thus ensnares us by our own right desires into wrong actions.

Deception: The enemy is a counterfeiter and a fraud. He promises freedom but the result is bondage. He promises exaltation but the result is humiliation. He promises peace but the result is enmity. He promises abundance but the result is abasement. He is willing to take whatever form is necessary (i.e. strong for leadership, weak for entrapment, etc.) in order to allure and entice us into his schemes.

Self-exaltation: The primary motive of the evil one is to exalt himself. It is his nature. His motive in our lives is to cause us to exalt ourselves so that we fall from the grace God has given us in Christ or step beyond the bounds of what Christ has ordained for us. His words against the Most High are not often insulting because that would be too obvious. Instead, they are distortions of God's character, God's work, and the rightful place we have as God's children, causing us to want to ascend higher than we ought. Even though Jesus taught disciples to pray, "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" it is wise for us to remember that the present heaven is the same one in which Lucifer exalted himself. This heaven will be rolled away like a scroll and a new heaven will be made which is completely pure of him.

*Daniel 12:4 ESV - But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. **Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.***

Busyness: Busyness makes us feel important. The enemy loves to distract us with busyness – especially family, church, or service busyness. It is easy to persuade ourselves that we are doing something wonderful for God when we are praying, loving, caring, and serving. But we are only doing it for God if God has actually asked us to do it. Otherwise, we are doing work which will ultimately burn in the fire and will prove to have been a distraction from the work which would have passed through the test to eternity.

Knowledge: Knowledge makes us feel powerful and superior. The enemy loves to trick us into the pursuit of knowledge or mental ascent through enticing us to believe that special knowledge will elevate us and keep us from harm. The increase of knowledge in our days is prevalent everywhere. But instead of creating deeper knowledge and awareness of truth, it is numbing the minds of those infiltrated with excess information. The short term memory is chronically overused and the Holy Spirit's voice is snuffed out, if not forgotten. "Knowledge is power" is an enemy substitute for "the Gospel is the power." This is the end-times version of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It will only open our eyes to nakedness, fear, and shame while distancing us from the knowledge of the Holy One.

Double Mindedness

A double minded person is unstable in all their ways and should expect to receive nothing from God. As such, if we give way to double-mindedness, the enemy's scheme has succeeded in full. For example, when Adam and Eve experienced the first deception of believers on earth, the serpent was successful in persuading them from single-mindedness to double-mindedness. They had no other focus except God and His commands until an alternative was made available to them. The alternative appeared more promising for faster results and so, the choice was made. Adam and Eve concluded that the fruit was appealing, attractive, was beneficial for wisdom and success, and would advance them in their pursuits on earth. The results were sealed in their hearts before they even took a bite.

Worldliness (including the love of money) and pride are the greatest temptations to double-mindedness. But these very things are acts of treason against God. You cannot serve both God and mammon. We would be wise to remember that by the standards of this world, Jesus looked like a complete and total failure. But yet, through His obedience even unto death, Jesus is uncontested as the most famous person who ever lived and by God's standards, will be known in eternity as the most successful person who ever

walked on earth. Not to mention that He is the wealthiest man in history because He owns the whole world. Riches will profit us nothing in the day of the Lord.

*James 4:4-8: You adulterous people, don't you know that **friendship with the world means enmity against God?** Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "**God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.**" **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil,** and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and **purify your hearts, you double-minded.***

*1 John 2:15-17: Do not love the world or anything in the world. **If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.** For everything in the world--**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world.** The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*

The enemy will always float the ways of the world before our faces to tempt us or allure us off of the path of obedience to God. His aim is to get us to strive to succeed by worldly standards and convince ourselves that worldly success is the mark of God's blessing. The result is that we feel blessed or cursed depending on our natural ability to measure up by the world's standards. What a lie from the pit of hell. The world, its ways, its luxuries, and its measurements of success are all passing away. Our Kingdom is not of this world.

Self-Deception

Self-deception occurs when the reality of our lives and conduct do not match what we think of ourselves. This is rooted in pride, ignorance, and lack of conviction from the Holy Spirit. Either the enemy has infiltrated our thoughts to the degree that we are not listening to the Holy Spirit anymore, or we have never fully repented from our former ways of doing things so as to extract ourselves from the influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Whatever ground we have yielded to deception must be regained in our lives through truth and repentance. Lies must be replaced and the truth must be applied to our lives. Self-awareness and honesty with ourselves and before God as we take the planks out of our own eyes is absolutely necessary to our spiritual advancement and endurance.

*James 1:22, 26: Do not merely listen to the word, and so **deceive yourselves.** Do what it says. ... Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues **deceive themselves,** and their religion is worthless.*

Those who hear the Word but do not do it are self-deceived. They may have much learning about God and much knowledge of Him but they do not actually know God or His ways. They may be able to quote many Scriptures and are usually quite good at judging other people's faults and wrongdoings but when a trial hits their own life, their faith is powerless and useless.

*1 John 1:8: If we **claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves** and the truth is not in us.*

Those who claim to be without sin are self-deceived. Anyone claiming to be without sin is lacking in conviction from the Holy Spirit. This means they are either not saved at all or are not listening to God. This can also evidence itself by people who make excuses for their sin, treat it lightly, or blame-shift by pointing the finger at someone else to escape responsibility for their own sin. The only one without sin is Jesus. Even the most perfect saint on this side of heaven is imperfect in their thoughts, actions, motives, or perceptions from time to time. If we think otherwise, we make God to be a liar but we ourselves are the ones who lie. God is not fooled.

*Galatians 3:1-3: You foolish Galatians! **Who has bewitched you?** Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you*

receive the Spirit **by the works of the law, or by believing** what you heard? Are you so foolish?
After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

Those who think they can perfect through actions of the flesh what only God can do by His Spirit are self-deceived. We can add nothing to the finished work of Christ or it was not finished when He finished it. ANY attempt to add anything to the finished work of the cross through our own efforts and striving is a lie from the pit of hell.

*Galatians 6:3-4: If anyone **thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.** Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else,*

Those who think they are something when they are not are self-deceived. None of us bring anything to the table except a body of flesh willing to serve the Lord. If we think we are standing strong enough to not be tempted by the sins and snares that other believers fall into, we will prove sorely mistaken. If we think we have attained some standing or title or position within the Body of Christ other than that of a servant, we are self-important and self-deceived.

*1 Corinthians 3:18: Do not **deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise** by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise.*

Those who consider themselves wise by the standards of this world are self-deceived. The wisest wisdom the world has to offer killed the King of Creation on a cross. If we think that we will have anything to contribute to the work of God, or ways which are superior to God's, we are self-deceived.

*1 Corinthians 6:9: Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? **Do not be deceived:** Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men.*

*1 Corinthians 15:33: **Do not be misled:** "Bad company corrupts good character."*

Those who think they can carouse with or participate with lawlessness without losing their inheritance in the Kingdom of God are self-deceived.

*2 Corinthians 11:3: But I am afraid that just as **Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning,** your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

Most sadly, self-deception still occurs among those who seem to be spiritually advanced. The Corinthians were gifted with all manner of spiritual gifts and had extensive knowledge of God and His ways. But they were prone to the teachings and promises of the false apostles who relentlessly persecuted the Apostle Paul and tried to dissuade them from Paul's teachings. When we try to be self-important spiritually, we will find ourselves self-deceived. Our King is the only One who ever was something, but He became nothing to show us the way of humility.

Counterfeits

The enemy is an excellent counterfeiter. The first word to describe the serpent is "subtle." He is exceptionally subtle and knows how to deceive even the most seasoned saint, if it is possible to deceive them. Only those who know the truth will be able to discern the difference between the counterfeit and the real thing. What makes this most challenging is that a fake is always pretty close to the real thing. The evil one does not come along and present a bottle of poison to one who can read the label. No. He finds something good and mixes poison into it so that a consumer who consumes enough will be imbibed and eventually overthrown. One percent pollution of ninety-nine percent purity is enough to begin to infiltrate the minds of the well intentioned. His objective is to gain a bit of ground in our hearts so that we become confused, unstable, or double-minded until we take hold of the polluted Word of God for our own purposes until we have aligned with a wrong spirit altogether.

Consider, for example, that when the northern and southern kingdom divided, the king of the northern kingdom was concerned that his people would go to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom to worship God in the only place where God had chosen for sacrifices to be made. So, he set up centers of worship for the people within the territory of the northern kingdom, ordained priests who did not meet God's requirements of the sons of Aaron or Levites, and appointed feasts which were in times close to the times of God's appointed feasts. To unbelievers from outside nations, the differences between the northern kingdom and southern kingdom appeared minimal. They were all "people of the God of Israel" claiming to worship Him. Their worship even looked alike in many ways. But those who knew the commands of the Lord knew the differences between the fake and the real thing. Therefore, many priests and Levites moved to the southern kingdom to keep themselves aligned with the truth. There may have been others who inwardly knew that the northern kingdom's worship was unsanctioned by God, but as a matter of personal convenience, submitted themselves to it and engaged in counterfeit worship. Soon, the whole kingdom had given way to worshipping Baal (which means lord) thinking themselves to still be the faithful people of the Most High God.

In the most convincing ways possible, the enemy counterfeits the best aspects of God to lure us into obedience to the lie rather than the truth. In Paul's day, so called "super apostles" used big boasts and swelling words to make great promises to those who were eager to hear of God's greatness, power, and willingness to bless. But these "apostles" were not proclaiming the real Jesus. They proclaimed a fabrication of their own minds backed by spiritual power supplied by a spirit other than the Holy Spirit.

*2 Corinthians 11:4 ESV - For if someone comes and proclaims **another Jesus** than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive **a different spirit** from the one you received, or if you accept **a different gospel** from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.*

Counterfeit Jesus: The counterfeit Jesus can take many and various forms but in one way or another will not resemble the Jesus of the Gospels. Undoubtedly, a counterfeit Jesus will reflect some form of the wisdom of man as we make Jesus in our image rather than knowing Him as He really is. For example, psychology Jesus, political Jesus, etc. Another Jesus we create in our own imagination is one who paid the price for us to such a degree that He no longer rebukes, chastises, or tells us to take up our cross. A very popular counterfeit Jesus comes in the form of a "lover" or "bridegroom" who is so madly in love with all people that He has lost His senses and is dripping with unrestrained passion. None of these are the Jesus of the Gospels who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Counterfeit Spirit: There is only one Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit exists to bring glory to Jesus and conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This said, there are multitudes of other spirits in the spirit realm all wanting to have a voice for the evil one. These spirits love to introduce all manner of unrighteous thoughts into our minds, particularly and all sorts of imaginations about God, Jesus, and ourselves. False spirits aim to endorse our flesh, mental ascent, worldly wisdom; to drive us to godless activities or activities God did not assign us to; to push us into religious observances or performance mentality of measuring up for God; or to give us a false peace (which we think is the peace of God) but it is designed by the spirit to keep us complacent, lukewarm, and ineffective.

Counterfeit Gospel: A gospel without a day of judgment is not the real Gospel. A gospel without sin is not the real Gospel. A gospel which claims Jesus is not God incarnate or without Jesus' death and resurrection is not the real Gospel. A gospel lacking the cross of Christ and necessitating the cross of the believer is not the real Gospel. A gospel focusing its ultimate aim on wealth in this world or a takeover of the nations before Christ's return is not the real Gospel. There are many more false gospels out there.

Counterfeit God: A god who does not require faith in His Son is not the real God. A god who accepts all people of all religions without requiring repentance and conversion to Christ is not the real God. A magnanimous loving "Father" who will desperately do anything for His children's comfort or happiness as

a result of emotional passion or easy persuasion away from truth and righteousness is not the real God. A god who is angry and whose wrath has not been appeased by Christ's atoning blood is not the real God.

Counterfeit Presence: A counterfeit spiritual presence in the atmosphere is often mistaken for being the presence of God. It can be felt by the senses of the body like in physical sensations like waves of power or feelings of wind. It is typically weighty, sweet or soothing to the emotions, and attached with feelings of peace, love, and acceptance tailored to the ideals and desires of the person experiencing it. Those who crave love and attention will be most vulnerable to the counterfeit presence because it appeases their flesh. At the same time, they are convinced in deeper measure that God loves them the way they are, without requiring repentance from sin and error. A counterfeit presence can also cause obsessions in the mind for the "feeling" of God's presence rather than a pursuit of the truth. The victims of this are unknowingly training themselves to confirm the Word of God by a physical manifestation or sensation rather than by the indwelling Spirit of the Lord issuing His "amen" to the truth spoken in love.

Counterfeit Miracles: God works miracles and still works miracles today. However, the evil one is also capable of working miracles. The antichrist will have power to work all manner of signs and wonders for the purpose of deceiving the whole world through his miraculous powers. The enemy can counterfeit visions, dreams, spiritual encounters with the Father and the Son, healings, deliverances, and baptism of the Holy Spirit. There are demonic tongues and prophecies which emanate from wrong spirits. None of these eliminate the fact that the genuine version of all of these things exist. In fact, if they were not real and from God, the enemy would not be trying to imitate them. This calls for discernment of the truth. There are also other miracles which lack any redemptive value but serve to distract and allure people away from Christ such as stigmata, apparitions, speaking to those gone to glory, gem stones, gold dust, and omniscient "prophecies" of phone numbers and non-redemptive information. These can all be very impressive to spectators, particularly those who have opened themselves up to the spiritual realm of God and its possibilities. Unfortunately, these types of things appeal to the greedy, carnal, and soulish parts of our humanity. Jesus never once worked any of these types of miracles and never once appealed to anyone's carnal greed. But the Holy Spirit only issues His "amen" to the truth of the Word of God and miracles worked by the power of God for God's purposes.

What can be confusing about counterfeit miracles is that they are often executed in the name of Jesus or in the "presence" of the "anointing" of "God." Many people may even profess their faith in Jesus because they have seen a miracle – even a counterfeit one. What we have to remember is that the evil one's house is already divided against itself and will ultimately fall. In the meantime, he cares nothing for anyone other than himself and his own exaltation as he attempts for all eternity to usurp the throne of God and maintain his dominion in the hearts of mankind. The evil one does not care who gets healed or delivered, who feels loved and appeased, or who is oppressed and tormented. His only ambition is to sidetrack all of us away from God and from the truth.

Temptations

The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness are another classic example of the schemes the enemy uses to attempt to allure us into his agenda. First, the enemy tempted Jesus to use miracle power and authority to serve the cravings of His stomach. Second, the enemy tempted Jesus to take unnecessary risk in the name of trusting in God's Word. Third, the enemy promised exaltation over the whole world in exchange for compromised worship.

Generally, the temptations were to force Jesus to prove Himself and His identity. If Jesus had caved to any of these temptations, the nature of the self-exalting evil one would have been found in Him. Instead, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the Word of God, the evil one found no place in Him.

Following Jesus' example, we must learn to discern the schemes of the evil one so that we give no place to him in our hearts and do not allow his lies to penetrate deeper into our lives.

ENEMY TACTICS

2 Corinthians 2:11 NIV – in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

DESCRIPTION

In the Garden of Eden, the serpent was described as more subtle than any other of God's creatures. Even today, this subtlety makes the evil one an expert deceiver, distracter, and destroyer if we are not aware enough to discern his schemes. Sometimes, it is an event in our lives that triggers an enemy infiltration of our thoughts. Other times, it is a persistent and gradual wearing down and decline of our faith or endurance.

Regardless of how the enemy is attacking us or attempting to divert or deceive us, Jesus conquered it at the cross. Everything we need for victory, godliness, and the fulfillment of God's plans for us was provided through the work of Jesus. We receive it as a free gift, by grace through faith in what Jesus accomplished for us. In fact, when we do identify the real root of what the enemy is attacking in our lives, we realize that what the enemy is working against us is exactly what God is working in our favor. For example, if the enemy attack is discouragement, God is working courage in us.

To put Enemy Tactics into practice is about allowing the Lord to reveal the subtle ways that the evil one is laying temptations before us or has worked his way into our thoughts so that we can renew our faith, hope, trust, and freedom in Jesus and the work He finished for us through His death and resurrection.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you sent your Son, Jesus, to destroy the works of the enemy including everything that attempts to separate me from you or discourage and distract me from your plans and purposes. Help me now to discern the tactics of the enemy in my life so that he has no place in me. In Jesus' name, Amen.



PURPOSE:

To discern the tactics of the enemy.

To remain faithful to Christ and God's purpose for us.

To live established in the truth and hope of the Gospel.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Increased discernment of the attacks of the enemy.

Renewed identity in Christ and the finished work of the cross.

Restored faith and hope.

Repentance from focus on self.

Purging of evil, pride, and discouragement.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider these enemy tactics, listed in no particular order:

- **Doubt/Unbelief:** particularly in God's goodness or grace
- **Discouragement:** looking to the size of the problem rather than the ability of God
- **Division:** turning from God's instructions or greater purpose
- **Failure:** looking at apparent failure, not trusting God for redemption and victory
- **Frustration:** losing patience, not trusting God's timing
- **Flesh:** temptation to do things in our own strength
- **Performance:** thinking God's plan can be thwarted by us
- **Condemnation:** guilty feelings over sins from past or present
- **Success:** accepting exaltation of man out of God's order
- **Shortcuts:** trying to skip stages of God's plan development
- **Wealthiness:** losing strength due to extended battles/service

PRACTICE

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight one of the enemy tactics above that is relevant to your life right now.
2. Ask the Lord to show you how the enemy has subtly infiltrated your thoughts using this tactic. Talk to Him about:
 - When did the enemy start attacking you in this way? Was there an event which triggered this or was it gradual?
 - Ask the Lord to reveal to you the real root of the issue in your present situation. (i.e. pride, fear, a past wound, etc.)
3. Ask the Lord to show you how He conquered this enemy tactic through His death and resurrection.
 - What else do Scripture and the Holy Spirit say about this?
4. Ask the Lord how He wants you to humble yourself before Him and resist the devil so that he flees from you.
 - How is He guiding you into faith and rest in Him?
 - Is there something He is asking you to do in your situation?
5. Do whatever He says.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Enemy Schemes

Genesis 3:1

Daniel 7:25

Genesis 16

2Chronicles 26:16

1 Samuel 15

Focus/Faith

Luke 4:1-13

Colossians 2:13-14

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 John 1:7

Romans 8:1

Colossians 1:9-14

John 6:15

Galatians 6:9

2 Corinthians 4:16

James 4:7

FLATTERY & INGRATIATING

Daniel 11:21, 32 KJV - And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries. ... And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall be corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.

DESCRIPTION

Flattery is a deadly toxin that can lead us into all types of wrong decisions. It will be the primary tactic of the antichrist in the last days to deceive even the most sincere servants of God if it is possible for them to be deceived. Until then, we can grow in our discernment of flattery as others function in this manner towards us. Flattery is not as simplistic as it seems. There are various techniques of ingratiating favor which can be used in tandem with each other to get our attention, puff us up, distract us from the word and work of God, or get us to do things that God never told us to do. An expert flatterer will use multiple methods in their attempts to obtain what they want from us.

A flatterer always has a selfish motive, whether they are aware of it or not. This is part of discerning flattery correctly. For example, one person compliments us because they appreciate us while another person gives the same compliment because they want something. One is sincere, the latter is ingratiating. To put Flattery & Ingratiating into practice is about asking the Lord to reveal the actions and intents of those who may be trying to flatter or deceive us for their own purposes or in ways which distract us from the truth and peace of God in Christ Jesus.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you know the hearts of all men and are never fooled by flattery. Help us to discern the techniques and motives of flattery so that we may stand firm in your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.



PURPOSE:

To discern flattery in order to not be ensnared by evil and stand firm in the truth.

To turn from flatterers and walk according to the wisdom of God.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Increased discernment of the attacks of the enemy.

Faithfulness to God and His voice and purposes.

Distinguishing flattering motives from sincerity.

Wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider these aspects and purposes of flattery & ingratiating:

Ways Flatterers Ingratiate:

- **Compliments:** Praising for who we are or what we do.
- **Conformity of thought or actions:** Behaving like us.
- **Self-praise:** Highlighting their best aspects or success.
- **Rendering favors or gifts:** Generosity or special treatment.
- **Self-deprecation:** Putting themselves down, false humility.
- **Humor:** Finding what makes you laugh and using it.
- **Neediness/Dependence:** Triggering compassion and care.
- **Name-dropping:** Feigning success through affiliation.

For the Purpose of:

- **Obtaining reward or position:** getting something from you
- **Preventing punishment:** preventing negative consequences
- **Cultivating approval or love:** being or feeling loved

PRACTICE

1. Ask the Lord to highlight to you a person who wants something from you. Consider the ways this person is seeking your favor. Write down your observations.
2. Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and discernment as you consider their actions.
 - Do their actions line up with the tactics of flattery?
 - Are they doing what they are doing freely or for the purpose of gaining something from you?
3. Now, ask the Lord to highlight someone YOU want something from. Consider the ways you are approaching this person to gain their favor. Write down your observations.
4. Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and discernment as you consider your own actions.
 - Are you being sincere or flattering?
 - If you are engaging in flattery, repent.
5. Ask the Lord to give you wisdom for how to proceed with these situations. Listen to what He says. Do what He says.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Psalms 5:9

Psalms 12:2

Psalms 36:2

Proverbs 29:5

Jude 1:16

Romans 16:18

1Thessalonians 2:5

YEASTS OF JESUS' DAY AND TODAY

In the days leading up to Jesus' day, there were various groups who were each equally awaiting the Messiah's arrival. In different ways, these groups readied themselves for the Messiah to come and establish righteous order by overthrowing Gentile oppressors and handing the Kingdom over to Israel. Each group started off with sincere motives and focus on the pursuit of God. But as their movements blossomed and Jesus arrived, none of them recognized God when He was standing right in front of them.

Literally speaking, yeast is a self-reproducing fungus which spreads aggressively throughout whatever it is added to and changes its character through fermentation and decay. Jesus said to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herod. The teachings of these groups and others permeated the hearts of men until the whole purpose was off course.

*Matthew 16:11-12: How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? **But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**" Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, **but against the teaching [doctrine] of the Pharisees and Sadducees.** (See also Luke 12:1.)*

*Mark 8:15: "Be careful," Jesus warned them. **"Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."***

In the Scriptures, yeast (which is also called leaven) is symbolic of sin, wickedness, or gain attained unjustly through wrongdoing or violence. In the New Testament, yeast also symbolizes false teachings of religion, unbelief, and worldliness which have the potential to spread through believers and draw us away from the truth of Christ.

Pharisees

The Pharisees started their movement shortly after the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity. The word which the name Pharisees comes from means "separated." Ezra had instituted religious reforms and demanded separation from pagan customs, wives, and children. Out of fear of another exile and desiring to be ready in righteousness for Messiah's arrival, the Pharisees instituted rules and regulations requiring common people to adhere to priestly standards of purity and holiness. Various rabbis interpreted the Scriptures and created "houses" or "schools" of thought, typically named after themselves. Common people would follow them by adhering to their teachings of holiness and good works. Their teachings became known as the "oral Torah" or spoken law, which they considered to be equal with the Law of God in Scripture. At times, their teachings were excessively binding including over thirty-nine different classes of work which were forbidden on the Sabbath. Other times, their interpretations were loose including easy divorce for any reason whatsoever. Their approach to Scripture was often metaphoric or combining passages that were not actually inter-related to create their own "special" knowledge or revelation of the text. Moreover, they considered that anyone who did not adhere to their teachings would be condemned and that the resurrection would be their greatest triumph as they assumed that they would be proven right about everything. In their self-righteousness, they anticipated their reward and to see their opponents cursed and trampled.

When Jesus stood before the Pharisees, they rejected Him because He did not adhere to their man-made regulations and called them out as hypocrites. (See Matthew 23.) They sought to put Him to death for denouncing their teachings and stewardship of the Kingdom of God.

The Pharisees ultimately became the foundation for what known today as rabbinic Judaism and their "oral Torah" is known as the Talmud. To this day, they do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah and have written many teachings for the purpose of deliberately disqualifying Jesus from being the Jewish King.

The yeast of the Pharisees also lives today in the hearts of believers who follow teachers or teachings rather than the pure and simple pursuit of Jesus. It can also be found in those who have given way to self-righteousness and reliance on their own holiness and good works for obtaining the grace of God. The righteous will live by faith. Victory is not to those who will or run, but those to whom God shows mercy. (See Romans 9:16.)

Sadducees

The Sadducees mostly consisted of affluent members of the priestly class. The name Sadducees is rooted in the name Zadok, who was the faithful priestly line from the days of King David. They controlled the High Priesthood and the majority of the Sanhedrin which was the ruling counsel of the Jewish people. The Sadducees did not believe in the spiritual realm or the resurrection from the dead and only accepted the first five books of the Scriptures. Without eternal hope or focus, their sights became set on the things of this world. After the exiles returned, Jerusalem remained set apart to God and refused to participate in world commerce in order to remain holy. But the Sadducees pushed to "Hellenize" Jerusalem, open it up as a crossroads, and participate in the global marketplace. They even allowed a nudist gymnasium to be built in Jerusalem and were the ones who put the marketplace in the Temple of God. Their theology blended with popular philosophies of the day and rejected the "oral Torah" of the Pharisees. As they ruled the people of Judah while under Rome's governing authority, they found it beneficial to compromise and submit to Rome's way of doing things in order to keep the peace and maintain their position of religious authority over the people.

Jesus was enflamed that God's House had been turned into a marketplace and so, the Sadducees challenged His authority. Jesus rebuked them for their lack of understanding of the Scriptures and their failure to comprehend the power and eternality of God. (See Matthew 22.) They were quite mistaken in their views and their ways.

The Sadducees lost their power and disbanded when the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. But the yeast of unbelief, compromise, and blending with the world's marketplace is still active today in the hearts of many believers who have lost sight of eternal things for the pursuit of worldly impact. God's House was never intended to be a marketplace or to take over the marketplace of this world.

Herod

Herod was the appointed "King of the Jews" in the days of Jesus but was completely worldly in all his ways, no matter how pious and religious he pretended to be. He may have built a glorious and marvelous Temple for God but inwardly he was paranoid and a murderer of those who posed any threat to him. He is also credited with being an extremely sharp businessman, a master tradesman of global commerce in his day, and a magnificent builder of palaces and cities. He was fascinated with Jewish culture and messengers of God like John the Baptist and stories of Jesus and His miracles but rejected all rebukes for holiness or submission to God's righteous standard.

As Herod established his own palaces of luxury and lawlessness, he killed God's messengers. He wanted God's miracle power for his own purposes but when Jesus would not indulge him, Herod mocked and ridiculed Jesus' kingship, dressed Him in a royal robe, and sent Him off to be executed.

Herod's life ended when he received praise as a god and did not give God glory. Arrogance is at the root of this type of yeast and its fruit is personal indulgence, luxury, and self-glorification. Needless to say, this yeast is still alive and active today. Life is not measured in the abundance of possessions. The things which are esteemed by men are worth nothing in God's Kingdom.

Zealots

The Zealots were a group of rebels who desired to use force to regain Jewish independence. They named themselves after the Scripture pertaining to the zeal of Phineas who was commended by God for killing sinners to put a stop to a plague. (See Numbers 25.) They wanted to overthrow their Roman oppressors and hated paying taxes. Their hope was for victory in this world. They eagerly awaited the Messiah's arrival to bring conflict, war, and demolition to everyone not aligned with God. They lived by the sword and felt completely justified in doing so.

The Zealot's impression of Jesus was probably centered around whether or not He was going to establish the Kingdom of God NOW on earth and reject Rome's authority. When Jesus ordered people to pay taxes to Caesar and allowed Himself to be crucified rather than killing those who opposed Him, I'm pretty sure this did not line up with the Zealot's theology.

The Zealots started the revolt against Rome in 66 AD but this was only the beginning of the unrest which ultimately led to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The Zealots came to their end on Masada in a mass suicide to avoid Roman capture, torture, or execution. With no eternal hope, they fell on their swords like King Saul. This exhibited their lack of faith in God's sovereignty and lack of hope in His deliverance.

This yeast is still active today in those who use God's word to revolt against the governing authorities in this world or claim that because self-defense is legal that it is acceptable in the sight of God. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword. We follow a crucified King.

Essenes

The Essenes were a group who were so disillusioned with the Pharisees, Sadducees, Temple system and everything else about how God's people had declined in sincere holiness and pursuit of God that they went to live in caves in the desert to prepare themselves through purity for the great war and tribulation that was to come with the Messiah's arrival. Because the Temple had become corrupt in their sight, they set up their own sacrifices and considered themselves to be the righteous remnant of God's holy people. They held themselves to strict rituals of multiple daily washings, prayer, worship, meditation on Scripture, and abstinence from all worldly pleasures, including marriage, in order to prepare themselves as the holy ones worthy of receiving the Kingdom of God from the Messiah. It is rumored that John the Baptist may have spent time with the Essenes in the years before his public ministry began.

While there is much good to be said of sincere personal devotion, it is possible to be so set apart that you miss God. It is not known whether the Essenes learned of or became followers of Jesus because even though they are noted by Josephus as being a major sect of Judaism in that day, there is no mention of them in Scripture. Perhaps they may have become so consumed with cave life and ritual that when Messiah arrived, they carried on devotedly waiting for Him.

This yeast is still active today in those who mean well but set themselves apart to the extent that they may have actually missed God's greater purpose. God so LOVED the world that He sent His Son into it to serve and to save it and to give His life for all who would believe.

False Teaching

False teaching is no different today than it has been since the beginning. Adam and his wife were made in God's image to be like God. Then, the evil one came along with a lie that if they disobeyed God's command, they would be like God. Similarly, Jesus is the King of all the kingdoms of the world. Then, the

devil came along with a lie that if Jesus disobeyed God and worshipped him instead, Jesus would receive all the kingdoms of the world. In both instances, the devil's deception promised what they already had through a false path which would subject them to the enemy and, ultimately, lead them to death. For us today, as in any day, we have to beware of the yeasts of false teachings which seek to lead us away from the simplicity of devotion to Jesus.

NEW TESTAMENT WOES

Scripture List & Worksheet

Luke 6:24-26: "But **woe** to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. **Woe** to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. **Woe** to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. **Woe** to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Matthew 23:13, 15-16, 23, 25-26, 27-29: "**Woe** to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ... "**Woe** to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are. "**Woe** to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.' ... "**Woe** to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ... "**Woe** to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.... "**Woe** to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. "**Woe** to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. (Also Luke 11:42-52.)

Matthew 26:24: The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But **woe** to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." (Also Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22.)

Matthew 11:21: "**Woe** to you, Chorazin! **Woe** to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. (Also Luke 10:13.)

Matthew 18:7: **Woe** to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but **woe** to the person through whom they come! (Also Luke 17:1.)

Jude 1:11: **Woe** to them! [False Teachers.] They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

Revelation 12:12: Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But **woe** to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

Revelation 18:9-20 NIV - "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: " **Woe! Woe** to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come! "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore-- cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every

sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves. "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: " **'Woe!** Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: " **'Woe! Woe** to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!" "Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you."

Practical Application:

How do these Scriptures reveal God's justice?
List three things God is displeased with, as revealed by these Scriptures.
1.
2.
3.
To pronounce a woe is to pronounce a curse on something. In what ways does this challenge your concepts about the heart of God to love and bless?
How is God asking you to personally respond to these Scriptures in your own life?

Beware of Yeasts

Matthew 16:5 NIV - When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. "Be careful!" Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

DESCRIPTION

In the times of Jesus, there were various groups who were all equally awaiting the Messiah's arrival. In the meantime, they had created their own concepts of what God's anointed one would be like and how He would approach teaching and ministry.

Jesus warned His disciples that these influences could negatively impact our faith in Him if we are do not keep watch and stand guard against them. He compared this to yeast spreading through a batch of dough until the whole dough was ruined.

To put Beware of Yeasts into practice is about allowing the Lord to expose these yeasts so that we can repent and return to unleavened faith in Christ alone.

YEASTS OF JESUS' DAY & TODAY

Pharisees – Religion: Believing that God's blessings or curses are earned or deserved through my behavior or obedience rather than Christ's. Placing hope in tradition of man-made regulations.

Sadducees - Unbelief: Not believing the whole counsel of God or having eternal hope. Placing hope in the things or people of this world.

Herod - Worldliness: Measuring success and influence by the world's standards. Aiming to attain the things of this world or placing hope in money as security.

Zealots – Politics: Emphasizing or focusing on the governments of this world rather than on Christ. Imposing Kingdom values on unbelieving people.

Essenes – Seculsion: Hypervigilant separation from everything in the world. Placing faith in preparation and purity.



PURPOSE:

To discern the harmful yeasts which can be damaging to pure faith.

To maintain pure faith and live established in the truth and hope of the Gospel.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Increased discernment of error.

Restored faith and hope in Christ alone.

Repentance from focus on self and this world.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you sent your Son, Jesus, to demonstrate pure faith for me. Help me now to discern the yeasts in my own life of faith so that I can repent and be set free by your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICE

1. Ask the Lord to highlight one of the yeasts that is relevant to your life right now.
2. Ask the Lord to show you why this focus is off balance or against what the cross of Christ. Talk to Him about:
 - How does this nullify the need for the cross?
 - How does this take my eyes off of eternity?
 - How does this cause me to function in my flesh?
 - How does this distract me from God's Kingdom purpose?
 - How might this cause me to miss what God is doing?
3. Ask the Lord to reveal to you how this yeast has infiltrated your life, beliefs, and activities.
4. Ask the Lord to show you how Jesus addressed this matter in the course of His ministry.
 - What does Scripture and the Holy Spirit say about this?
 - Does Scripture endorse any aspects of this approach?
 - How does Scripture prove that this approach is missing the mark?
5. Ask the Lord how He wants you to eradicate this yeast from your life and beliefs.
 - How is He guiding you into faith and trust in Him?
 - What beliefs, focus areas, or activities do you need to repent from in order to eliminate this yeast from your life?
6. Do whatever He says.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Yeasts:

Matthew 16:6

Mark 8:15

Luke 12:1

Other Verses

1 Corinthians 5:6

Matthew 3:7

Matthew 23:13-39

Mark 12:18-27

Acts 12:22-23

Matthew 22:1-5:22

Matthew 26:55

John 18:36

Luke 13:1-5

DECEITFUL WORKERS & DOCTRINES OF DEMONS

False prophets and teachers have been a challenger of God's people throughout history. The first false prophet was Satan in the Garden of Eden who told Adam's wife a lie about what she would gain for herself if she disregarded God's command. They failed the test. Later, the same serpent in a different garden, the devil relentlessly attempted to entice Jesus through false promises to worship him instead of God but Jesus did not succumb to his false promises. He passed the test. Jesus is worthy of a bride who knows the truth, discerns lies of the evil one and does not give way to false prophecies and teachings because of her love for the truth. He deserves a bride who passes the test of deceitful workers and doctrines of demons.

*1 Timothy 4:1: The Spirit clearly says that **in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.***

Unfortunately, the false spiritual practices and powers of this world can be alluring and seem to produce easier and faster results than waiting for God, repenting of sin, and enduring on the path of holiness. Blending the practices of false spirituality with the name of God is an abomination but it is not always easy to discern. For this reason, God commanded His people NOT to learn the practices of the nations and their forms of worship and spirituality and not to worship Him in the way that they worship their gods. (Read Deuteronomy 12:1-32.) He warned the people against the false spiritual practices of the nations including necromancy (talking to the dead,) divination and mediums (false prophecy, fortune-telling, psychic power,) soothsaying and smooth talk (speaking peace and blessing rather than exhortation to righteousness and warning of judgment,) witchcraft and sorcery (manipulation of the will of others, curses, spells, and spiritual power used to enact a will other than God's.) He warned in advance that even as they waited for the prophet like Moses who would speak the word of truth, other so-called prophets would come in God's name, presumptuously using His name for their own purposes. (See Deuteronomy 18:9-22.)

When Jesus was asked about signs preceding His return, He warned His disciples that many false prophets, teachers, and messiahs will come attempting to deceive God's people – even in His name.

*Matthew 24:4-5, 10-13, 23-24: Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come **in my name**, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and **will deceive many**. ... At that time **many will turn away from the faith** and will betray and hate each other, and **many false prophets will appear and deceive many people**. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ... At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. **For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.***

It may be easy to think that we will discern someone claiming to be a messiah as if they are walking around claiming to be Jesus. While there are people who do this, not many people are convinced by them. We would be wise to notice, however, that messiah means *anointed one*. There are many falsely anointed ones already on the earth functioning in false "anointings" which are not the Holy Spirit. There are those who "honor the anointing" on a person's life because they function in omniscient prophetic gifting or miracle power even though their lives are full of sin. Jesus warned us not to do this and that true

prophets would be known by their fruit. This said, a person of good morals can also be the enemy's ideal target for infiltration with a false anointing because it is a convincing package. Even outwardly upright people can have their doctrine infiltrated with heresy. The bottom line is that anyone who uses the power of the name of Jesus to work their own will or their own concept of God's will are actually working iniquity and lawlessness against God.

*Matthew 7:15-16, 21-23: **Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ... Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 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 in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*****

The purpose of discerning truth from error and true workers from deceitful ones is NOT for the purpose of accusation or denouncement. Those who give way to this temptation find themselves on the side of the accuser of the brethren. However, discernment of the truth is absolutely key in the end times so that it is not possible to deceive us, even if great signs and wonders are attached to the doctrines of demons.

On that note, when we discern a false prophet or teacher, it should only enhance our love for the truth and God's word and ways and renew our humility and awe at God's gift of discernment and keeping us from falling into error ourselves. If we are responding correctly, we will be again enflamed with devotion and entrusting ourselves to the one who is keeping us from stumbling.

False Prophets are a Test

False prophets are raised up by God. This sounds bizarre and ungodly but it is absolutely true. All things were created by God for His purposes and none can escape His sovereignty. God clearly warned Israel about false prophets and what His purpose is in sending them, and even allowing their signs, wonders, and prophetic words to come to pass. Sending false prophets is God's way of proving whether our hearts are fully aligned with Him or if selfish desire remains in us.

*Deuteronomy 13:1-5: If a **prophet, or one who foretells by dreams**, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, **and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them,"** you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. **The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.***

Again, it seems obvious enough that if a prophet comes along and does a miracle and then tells us to follow the god of some other religion, we will see through it. However, the enemy is a counterfeiter and blasphemer of God's name. The evil one will use God's name to promote teachings that abuse God's character, reject or divert people from His ways, or deny His stated conditions. We must know God not only by name but also by His truth and His ways. If we love God, we will keep His commandments and not be enticed to follow after false promises. Ezekiel furthered this revelation of God's intent to purge evil from His people to the level of their hearts. If they had set up idols in their hearts and then inquired of a prophet of God, God would answer them according to the idol in their heart. God, Himself would put the stumbling block before His own people so that they could fall into the error in their hearts and ultimately, repent and turn to Him with all their heart and soul. (Read Ezekiel 14:3-11.)

In the final days before the return of Christ, believers will be put to the ultimate test of faithfulness and love of God. God will raise up the ultimate false prophet – the man of lawlessness who sets Himself up as god but is actually the antichrist. This man will rule the whole world and be accompanied by all manner of signs and wonders as he promotes teachings which defy the ways of God and the real Christ.

*2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 ESV: The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan **with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception** for those who are perishing, **because they refused to love the truth** and so be saved. Therefore **God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.***

In the end, the test will be whether we love the truth or have pleasure in disobeying the truth. It is the Garden of Eden all over again but in magnified form as the age comes to its culmination. It is a strong delusion – not a weak one – because Jesus is worthy of a strong and faithful bride. Therefore, we must discern misuse and abuse of the name of God and the name of Jesus as blasphemy. We must discern erroneous teachings which do not align with the words of Christ and the life and ministry of Jesus and His first followers as heresy. We must keep our own hearts pure from the love of self, money, and the world so that our own idols do not become a snare to us as we enter into the time of testing.

The Fall into Falsehood

The true workers for Jesus follow the path of the crucified King who died for our sins, calls us to repentance, and tells us to put our faith in God while taking up our cross to follow Him. False workers attempt to use God for their own gain and prey on weaker believers who desire blessing rather than sacrifice.

*1 Timothy 6:3-5: **If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing.** They have an **unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words** that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who **think that godliness is a means to financial gain.***

The beginning of the end of the genuine devotion in any believer or teacher is when they begin to refuse sound doctrine and its application in their lives. This is the point at which the narrow way of following Christ and enduring in simple faithfulness seems to become boring or pointless or they become obsessed with a certain aspect of God, whether blessing, gifts, or requirements. As a result, they seek out fresh revelation or special knowledge which appeases their desires and flesh. This all continues to appear outwardly like the pursuit of God. And as they give way to self-deception, they believe that they are pursuing God. But in reality, they are pursuing a god of their own design, a Jesus who suits their preferences, and a spirit which empowers them to do things that God did not author.

*2 Timothy 4:3-4: For the time will come when **people will not put up with sound doctrine.** Instead, to **suit their own desires**, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say **what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.***

These professing believers are still rebellious at heart. They refuse to submit themselves any further to the crucifixion process of following Jesus even though outwardly they appear to be very pious and devoted to Him and claim to know Him well. They say they want disciples of Jesus but actually, their aim is followers for themselves or their doctrines. They say they love the truth but actually, they delight in "special" knowledge and human precepts which reject the truth of Christ. They claim to live in sacrificial obedience but have at some point strayed from obedience through choosing themselves rather than death to self.

Titus 1:10-11, 16: For there are many **rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception**, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by **teaching things they ought not to teach--and that for the sake of dishonest gain**. ... **They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him**. They are detestable, **disobedient** and unfit for doing anything good.

Rebellious: Not truly submitted. Disobedient. Veering off the way of truth for self-protection or exaltation. They may put on a good show of seeming obedience and submission to God but at the root their hearts are self-seeking and their obedience is based on their own thoughts, will, and desires.

Meaningless talk: Empty words with no eternal weight or rooting in Scripture. False peace. Rambling on with stories or even "testimonies" or worldly talk which has no eternal value even though it is presented in a spiritual manner as a metaphor, parable, or spiritual lesson from a natural experience.

Deception: Seduction through promises of blessing or benefit. Painting a picture of success to lure others into lust and steps of rebellion. Deception invites the unsuspecting into a quest of discovery for more of whatever they think they need in order to succeed or advance to the next level – usually knowledge, power, "anointing," money, etc. The enemy's first deceptions were, "surely, you will not die," and "you will be like God," which could be rephrased as, "it is safe to stray from the narrow way," and "it will give you what you need to be exalted."

These professing believers embark on the path of deception, not realizing that they have given way to self-deception through their own concepts of God over the actual truth of God. As they become more fully persuaded that they have discovered something of God that has been missed by others, they become the false teachers of their day. Savage wolves are not just outsiders who come in as obvious snake-oil salesmen. False teachers arise from the ranks of believers.

*Acts 20:29-31a: I know that after I leave, **savage wolves will come in among you** and will not spare the flock. Even **from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them**. So be on your guard!*

Distort the truth: Twisting Scripture out of context. Denying or diminishing essential elements of the faith. Building principles or theologies based on stacking Scriptures like a house of cards for self-serving purposes.

Draw disciples after themselves: Desiring to build ministries for recognition, money, fame, following, etc.

These people have departed from taking up their cross in order to avoid further suffering to their pride, ego, flesh, or circumstances. They adopt a new theology which releases them from the obligation of true faithfulness to our crucified King so that they can enjoy peace with worldly people rather than rejection.

*Galatians 6:12: Those who want to **impress people by means of the flesh** are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is **to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ**.*

Piety to impress people: Putting on a show of morality, goodness, and religious observance.

Compromise to avoid persecution: Watering down the Gospel, its power, or its requirements by synchronizing with worldliness, lawlessness, or legalism.

We must stand guard, both for ourselves and watch for changes and shifts in those we love to prevent them from slipping into self-deception. The saddest thing is to watch someone we love who has taken up their cross for some time but grows weary in doing so and reasons to themselves that, "if I stay on this cross any longer, it is going to damage my spiritual life and heart." Imagine if Jesus had said that. None of us would be saved. We must be willing to embrace the cross God has given us to carry for as long as He has ordained for us to carry it so that the new life we walk in is actually resurrection life and not a false spirituality which has come to the aid of our uncrucified flesh.

False Workers

False Christian teachers have existed since the early church. The apostles warned disciples about the schemes and characteristics of false workers so that they could be alert and not fall into their deceptions.

*Galatians 3:1: You foolish Galatians! **Who has bewitched you?***

Bewitch: Feigning praise to charm or lead others into error by wicked arts.

*1 Timothy 1:3-7: As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may **command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.** Such things **promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work--which is by faith.** The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. **Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk.** They want to be **teachers of the law**, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.*

Myths and genealogies: Sayings, clichés, fables. This is something said, quoted, and repeated so often that it is believed to be true or even believed to be Scripture when in reality, it is a contradiction of Scripture or a proverb of man. For example, "God helps those who help themselves." This can also include apocryphal writings, stories, or testimonies that never actually happened but which make the unsuspecting believe that they have some kind of special knowledge or insight. It can even include stories or testimonies of things that did occur but have become the basis for teaching, practice, or belief for those attempting to replicate the same results or outcome.

Promote speculation rather than faith: Special knowledge, unlocking "mysteries," etc. If our confidence is in special knowledge or we feel that special knowledge will be the key to our deliverance, our eyes have been diverted off of Christ who said that we must become like a child.

Meaningless talk: Vain discussions, debates, arguments, conjecture, opinions. Rambling "stories" that do not tie back to the truth of God or Christ. Promotion of man-made approach and dogma rather than Christ. Empty, worldly conversation.

Claim to teach Scripture/Law: Abusing Scripture without regard for the whole counsel of God. Piecing Scriptures together to mean something God did not intend. Wrenching Scripture out of context. Over-emphasizing numbers, formulas, or seeming patterns of God in Scripture as a measurement or prediction of spiritual things or current events.

*Colossians 2:16: Therefore do not let anyone judge you by **what you eat or drink**, or with regard to a **religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.***

*Colossians 2:16, 20-23: Therefore do not let anyone judge you by **what you eat or drink**, or with regard to a **religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.** ... Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: "**Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!**"? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are **based on merely human commands and teachings.** Such regulations indeed have an **appearance of wisdom**, with their **self-imposed worship**, their **false humility and their harsh treatment of the body**, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

Impose religious observances and regulations: Commanding observance to Old Covenant requirements.

Human commands and teachings: Commanding observance of human doctrines and traditions.

Appearance of wisdom: Presented as logical, good things for believers to do for godliness and blessing.

Self-imposed worship: Misdirected zeal. Self-made worship. Much of what we call “worship” today is actually more like a pep-rally for Jesus full of hype which satiates our flesh rather than honoring our King. Many “worship” songs are actually self-indulgent, soulful, lovesick emotional displays of sensuality rather than anything that will ever be sung in heavenly places. Some “worship” songs are mediumistic, chanting, or looping in endless mantras which create a sensation of a spiritual atmosphere but the spirit present is NOT the Holy Spirit.

False humility: Imitating Christ's lowliness through self-deprecation or self-abasement. Jesus never self-deprecated or feigned lowliness. He willingly took the lowest place, was born in a manger, lived an invisible life for thirty years, and then faithfully fulfilled the ministry and purpose God had given Him.

Asceticism: Harsh treatment of the body done to attain favor with God. This can be obviously seen in those who would whip themselves with spiked cords to “suffer” for Christ or “beat their flesh like Paul,” as these are more obviously wrong interpretations and applications of God's intended meaning. However, this can also occur with excessive fasting or any kind of self-imposed abstinence which God has not ordained and which we do in order to win His favor, approval, anointing, or blessing. God sees the heart.

*Colossians 2:18-19: Do not let anyone who **delights in false humility** and the **worship of angels** disqualify you. Such a person also **goes into great detail about what they have seen**; they are **puffed up** with idle **notions by their unspiritual mind**. They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*

Worship of Angels: Excessive focus on angelic beings and their assistance. Using Christ-given authority to command angels. Glorifying angels or angelic activity. Engaging in the spiritual realm or work of angels.

Goes into great detail about visions: Expresses details of visions of heaven, hell, angels, the spiritual realm, and other spiritual things. By contrast, Paul had visions and revelations which surpassed anyone in the world but refused to speak of them because he said they were too sacred for human words. Though Paul could have built his ministry by fascinating people with stories of his spiritual experiences, he instead made it his aim to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified and to boast in nothing but the cross. (See 1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 6:14.)

Puffed up: Think themselves to be special or superior because of their advanced spirituality and spiritual experiences. Look down on others who have not had the same experiences.

Notions of their flesh: Serving and comforting their beastly nature rather than Christ. Observing natural things as spiritual parables which God did not ordain.

*1 Timothy 4:2-5: Such teachings come through **hypocritical liars**, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They **forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods**, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*

Hypocrisy: Acting, putting on a show, lying through words and actions.

Forbidding marriage and foods: Dishonoring God's pattern for marriage and making the Kingdom of God into a matter of food and drink.

*2 Timothy 2:14-18: Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against **quarreling about words**; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid **godless chatter**, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their **teaching will spread like gangrene**.*

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They **say that the resurrection has already taken place**, and they **destroy the faith of some**.

Quarreling about words: Over-focus on words and their meaning as essential to "real" understanding. Straining out a gnat and swallowing the camel. Can also be in the form of "connect dots" based on the root origins of certain words in worldly matters which seems like special insight but is actually worthless.

Godless chatter: Worldly conversation and babbling. Common talk like common people, politics, etc. Honoring men, ministers, or famous people to appear important or influential. Using many words.

Miscalculate God's times and purposes: Steering away from eternal focus to temporal living.

*2Peter 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.*

Destructive heresies, denying the Lord: Perverting the Gospel and requirement of repentance and faith in Christ alone for salvation. Emphasizing aspects of piety, faith, or techniques of prayer as the "key" to obtaining blessing from God, or using Christ-given authority for self-ordained purposes.

Depraved conduct: Sensually indulgent, lustful, licentious, permissive, lawless, godless, fleshly, and carnal.

Malign the way of truth: Speak against or persecute those who stand firm in the truth of Christ and the life of holiness. Accuse the faithful of ignorance, judgmentalism, religiosity, Phariseism, and "limiting" God.

Greed and exploitation: Self-serving, love of money, using others for advancement or advantage. Using techniques for fundraising such as encouraging people to "sow" finances into their ministries in order to "reap" blessing and rewards from God. This is in sharp contrast to Jesus' instruction to imitate the birds who neither sow nor reap but trust God to supply all their needs and that through genuine seeking of the Kingdom of God, we can be assured that all our true needs for fulfilling God's plans will be supplied.

Fabricated Stories: Molded words (formed like pottery,) feigned speech, attempting to present as divine nature, wisdom, or love. Typically couched in smooth talk of the "love of God" or "love" for the hearers as the promise of blessing.

*2 Peter 2:10-14, 18-19: This is especially true of those who **follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority**. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to **heap abuse on celestial beings**; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. But these people **blaspheme in matters they do not understand**. They are like **unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct**, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. **Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight**. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With **eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed--an accursed brood!**... These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For **they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error**. They **promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity--for "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them."***

Despise authority: Disdain and refuse to submit to authorities of the world or the Church. Promote rebellion.

Heap abuse on celestial beings: Use Christ-given authority to rebuke spiritual forces in heavenly realms rather than the proclamation of the Gospel for salvation. (i.e. principalities, strongholds, forces, etc.)

Blaspheme things they do not understand: Abuse the name of Jesus in ways that Jesus did not command or demonstrate.

Instinctual: Bestial rather than spiritual. Sniffing for spiritual opportunity rather than waiting on God.

Carousing in daylight: Putting revelry on display as God's "favor," "freedom," or blessing.

Adulterous eyes: Unfaithful to Jesus and His way. Full of lust and covetousness for self-serving techniques to serve their own lusts, purposes, and agenda.

Experts in greed: Abuse God's offerings to advance their own ministries. Entice others to financial giving through manipulative promises of blessing or breakthrough. Loving money and teaching others to love it.

Boastful words: Self-exaltation, superiority, use of hype, and self-praise to present themselves as having superior connection to God or spiritual revelation or power. May also boast in the miracles, testimonies, or work of others rather than their own work or experiences, even though they may at times present the miracles as if they were their own experience. Done to titillate, fascinate, and distract from truth.

Appealing to lustful desires of flesh: Presenting a picture of the fulfillment of human and worldly desires, particularly for money, influence, opportunity, promotion, authority, spiritual gifts, spiritual power, and all other forms of self-indulgence. Also, negating the need for taking up cross to follow Jesus, crucifying flesh for sanctification, and personal sacrifice.

Seduce the unstable, new believers: Prey on those who are not firmly grounded in the truth of Christ and His ways. Allure them with promises of the abundant life rather than taking up their cross.

Promise freedom: Appealing to base side of humanity and need by promising breakthrough or restoration rather than leading people through death to self into true life in Christ.

Jude's letter to believers was also an emphatic warning to stay on the straight and narrow way of truly following Christ rather than giving way to false teachers.

*Jude 1:4, 8, 16: For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are **ungodly** people, who **pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality** and **deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord**. ... In the very same way, **on the strength of their dreams** these ungodly people **pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings**. ... These people are **grumblers and faultfinders**; they **follow their own evil desires**; they **boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage**.*

Pervert God's grace for lawlessness: Abuse "knowledge" and "freedom" in Christ for self-indulgence.

Live by dreams: Led by dreams, visions, or spiritual encounters which are not from the Lord.

Grumblers, faultfinders: Despise and persecute those who are standing in the truth of Christ.

Boast about themselves: Praise themselves and their experiences with their own speech.

Flatter others for advantage: Use techniques of flattery to seduce others to follow them.

Balaam, Cain, Korah, Jezebel

Peter, Jude, and John each referenced characters from the Old Testament as examples of the spirit that false prophets and teachers function in. These same spirits are at work in false ministries today.

*2 Peter 2:15-16: They have **left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness**. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing*

by a donkey--an animal without speech--who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

*Jude 1:11-12: Woe to them! **They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.** These people are blemishes at your love feasts, **eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves.***

Balaam: Balaam was a false prophet who used the techniques of divination to speak with God. A pagan king hired Balaam, the prophet for profit, in the fortieth year of Israel's time in the wilderness when Israel was conquering territories on the west side of the Jordan River and readying themselves to take the Promised Land. Though Balaam used false techniques, he did actually converse with God and was given words from God to speak. In fact, Balaam was one of the first people in Scripture to prophesy about the Messiah to come through revelation and a prophetic word that God had given him. However, because Balaam was not God's prophet and had been hired by a pagan king, God only allowed Balaam to bless His people. Balaam also taught Israelite women how to entice the men into sexual immorality and false worship. In contrast, the prophets God sent throughout Israel's history were used by God to rebuke His people when they were going astray, exhort them to return to and remain on the righteous path, and promise them blessing for enduring in faithfulness to God.

Some things we can garner from this: Those who charge money for ministry are not God's servants. Those who insist that prophecy is only for blessing people without warnings, rebukes, or exhortations to righteousness are not God's prophets. Just because someone has heard a true word of blessing from the Lord may not be God's servant. Sometimes, false prophets attack the most in the time imminently preceding blessing and breakthrough. As such, we must also be alert in these end times that the ministry of the spirit of Balaam will be alive and well, as the evil one tries to divert us from our eternal inheritance. The antichrist will undoubtedly hire many Balaam-type prophets who will speak true things from God even though they are not God's prophets and will entice people into lawlessness and false worship. We need not fear the words of these prophets because they will be accurate from God but we should beware not to learn their techniques or follow their teachings into heresy, error, and destruction.

Cain: Cain was the first murderer in the Bible. He offered an offering which was not by faith and then became infuriated when his brother's offering was accepted while his was not. He was unable to rule over the sin in his heart and it converted into brutality against his brother.

Things we can garner from this: Those who have departed from the path of faith in Christ, even if they outwardly appear to continue in God's service, will hate and persecute those who remain faithful.

Korah: Korah was a Levite who wanted the High Priesthood for himself. He led the leaders of Israel in rebellion against God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron. Korah had already been given a special position of service in the Tabernacle of God but it was not enough for him. He wanted more. Korah asserted his right to rule based on the fact that Moses and Aaron did not have an exclusive on being the only ones who could hear God even though God had appointed them as His mouthpieces. Korah grumbled that Moses and Aaron had not fulfilled the promise of taking Israel into the Promised Land even though God had said they would be in the wilderness for forty years. Korah wanted to lead the people back to life in Egypt even though God said not to return there. Korah appealed to the base nature of humanity in the elders of Israel to assert themselves and their own desires to get out of the wilderness while at the same time establishing a following for himself, away from God's appointed leaders.

Things we can garner from this: Those who are ambitious in ministry may seek to usurp authority or conduct a hostile takeover of other's ministries which have been established by God. Another Biblical example of this type of thing is the story of David's son Absalom who promised the people blessings while diverting their loyalty away from David to himself.

*Revelation 2:20: Nevertheless, I have this against you: **You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.***

Jezebel: Jezebel was a Phoenician princess who became queen of Israel as the wife of Ahab, King of Israel. She worshipped Baal, the pagan god of prosperity, fertility, and harvest, whose name means "lord." Jezebel led worship of Baal, promoted and supported prophets of Baal, and attempted to kill all true prophets of God. She used sensuality and manipulation to advance her husband's kingdom, authority, and dominion. In the Book of Revelation, the spirit of Jezebel enticed believers into sexual immorality and eating foods offered to idols in the name of Christian liberty. Jezebel's worship of Baal lingered on through these unsanctified pagan practices.

Things we can garner from this: Those within the body of Christ functioning in the spirit of Jezebel will endorse and promote false teachers, prosperity gospels, the love of money, messages of "peace peace," and everything else contrary to sound doctrine. They may openly reject or refute the need for sound doctrine with the appeal to spirituality, the spiritual realm, revival, and freedom from religion. At the same time, they will detest, mock, persecute, diminish, reject, and try to destroy the ministries of those carrying the word of truth and emphasizing the need for sound doctrine.

Do Not Be Alarmed

When Jesus' disciples inquired about how to handle the Pharisees, Jesus said to leave them alone because they are blind guides who will fall into a pit. (See Matthew 15:14.) When they inquired about how to handle people who were ministering in Jesus' name but were not one of their group, Jesus said not to stop them. (See Mark 9:39.) When Jesus' disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven as judgment upon those who did not receive them, He rebuked them for functioning in a wrong spirit. (See Luke 9:55.) When Jesus spoke of the end-times false prophets and tribulations, He said that they **MUST** happen before He returns. (See Luke 21:9.) When the people asked Moses what to do when a prophet's word did not come to pass, he told them the prophet must have spoken presumptuously and not to be alarmed. (See Deuteronomy 18:22.) When people were concerned about false workers preaching the Gospel for gain, Paul said he rejoiced as Christ was proclaimed. (See Philippians 1:18.)

The world will continue to increase in lawlessness and wickedness until Christ returns. The time of our exodus from this world will be similar to the days of Israel's exodus from Egypt. In those days, the wise men and sorcerers of Egypt were able to counterfeit the miracles of God just as the antichrist and his hoards will be able to work all manner of signs and wonders.

*2 Timothy 3:1-9: But mark this: **There will be terrible times in the last days.** People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-- having a form of godliness but denying its power. **Have nothing to do with such people.** They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, **always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.** Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also **these teachers oppose the truth.** (See Exodus 7:11-12, 22, 8:7, 18-19.)*

In these end-times before Christ's return, we must be alert that false spiritual practices do not penetrate our own spiritual lives and the lives of those believers we love and have influence over. We must guard our lives and our doctrine carefully so that we are able to stand by the power of the Holy Spirit to the very end. We must keep our eyes open and on the Lord. This is a call for endurance of the saints!

Comparison Table

True Apostle, Prophet, Teacher	False Apostle, Prophet, Teacher
Sacrificial living, self-denial	Greedy, working for profit, love of \$\$
Exalting Jesus to make disciples of Christ	Exalting themselves for fame and following
Commanding repentance from sin and separation from the world	Endorsing pleasure as God's blessing and promoting collaboration with the world
Releasing sinners into freedom from the law of sin and death into grace	Commanding adherence to man-made regulations, doctrines, or traditions
Not being a burden to anyone	Using others for support and service
Laying life down for other's benefit	Using others for their own benefit
Teaching the whole counsel of God and sound doctrine, rightly using the Scriptures	Teaching revelation from their own mind, twisting God's Word
Demonstrating the power of God to glorify the name of Jesus	Displaying miracles without redemptive value to gain a following for themselves
Suffering persecution, hardship, rejection by the world and organized religion	Rejecting suffering and hardship as "not the will of God," acceptance of the world
Following the pattern of Jesus	Following the pattern of this world

FALSE PROPHETS

Scripture List & Worksheet

Jeremiah 6:13-15: "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 14:14-16: Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds. Therefore this is what the LORD says about the prophets who are prophesying in my name: I did not send them, yet they are saying, 'No sword or famine will touch this land.' Those same prophets will perish by sword and famine. And the people they are prophesying to will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them, their wives, their sons and their daughters. I will pour out on them the calamity they deserve.

Jeremiah 23:9-40: Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones tremble. I am like a drunken man, like a strong man overcome by wine, because of the LORD and his holy words. The land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land lies parched and the pastures in the wilderness are withered. The prophets follow an evil course and use their power unjustly. "Both prophet and priest are godless; even in my temple I find their wickedness," declares the LORD. "Therefore their path will become slippery; they will be banished to darkness and there they will fall. I will bring disaster on them in the year they are punished," declares the LORD. "Among the prophets of Samaria I saw this repulsive thing: They prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that not one of them turns from their wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah." Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty says concerning the prophets: "I will make them eat bitter food and drink poisoned water, because from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land." This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The LORD says: You will have peace.' And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you.' But which of them has stood in the council of the LORD to see or to hear his word? Who has listened and heard his word? See, the storm of the LORD will burst out in wrath, a whirlwind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand it clearly. I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds. "Am I only a God nearby," declares the LORD, "and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD. "I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship. Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with

grain?" declares the LORD. "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" "Therefore," declares the LORD, "I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. Yes," declares the LORD, "I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, 'The LORD declares.' Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," declares the LORD. "They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least," declares the LORD. "When these people, or a prophet or a priest, ask you, 'What is the message from the LORD?' say to them, 'What message? I will forsake you,' declares the LORD." If a prophet or a priest or anyone else claims, 'This is a message from the LORD,' I will punish them and their household. This is what each of you keeps saying to your friends and other Israelites: 'What is the LORD's answer?' or 'What has the LORD spoken?' But you must not mention 'a message from the LORD' again, because each one's word becomes their own message. So you distort the words of the living God, the LORD Almighty, our God. This is what you keep saying to a prophet: 'What is the LORD's answer to you?' or 'What has the LORD spoken?' Although you claim, 'This is a message from the LORD,' this is what the LORD says: You used the words, 'This is a message from the LORD,' even though I told you that you must not claim, 'This is a message from the LORD.' Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your ancestors. I will bring on you everlasting disgrace--everlasting shame that will not be forgotten."

Ezekiel 13:1-23: The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: 'Hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! Your prophets, Israel, are like jackals among ruins. You have not gone up to the breaches in the wall to repair it for the people of Israel so that it will stand firm in the battle on the day of the LORD. Their visions are false and their divinations a lie. Even though the LORD has not sent them, they say, "The LORD declares," and expect him to fulfill their words. Have you not seen false visions and uttered lying divinations when you say, "The LORD declares," though I have not spoken?' " Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because of your false words and lying visions, I am against you, declares the Sovereign LORD. My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will not belong to the council of my people or be listed in the records of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD. " 'Because they lead my people astray, saying, "Peace," when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash, therefore tell those who cover it with whitewash that it is going to fall. Rain will come in torrents, and I will send hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth. When the wall collapses, will people not ask you, "Where is the whitewash you covered it with?" " 'Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: In my wrath I will unleash a violent wind, and in my anger hailstones and torrents of rain will fall with destructive fury. I will tear down the wall you have covered with whitewash and will level it to the ground so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you will be destroyed in it; and you will know that I am the LORD. So I will pour out my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. I will say to you, "The wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it, those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her when there was no peace, declares the Sovereign LORD." ' "Now, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own imagination. Prophesy against them and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the women who sew magic charms on all their wrists and make veils of various lengths for their heads in order to ensnare people. Will you ensnare the lives of my people but preserve your own? You have profaned me among my people for a few handfuls of barley and scraps of bread. By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have killed those who should not have died and have spared those who should not live. " 'Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against your magic charms with which you ensnare people like birds and I will tear them from your arms; I will set free the people that

you ensnare like birds. I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power. Then you will know that I am the LORD. Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief, and because you encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives, therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the LORD.' "

Micah 2:6-13: "Do not prophesy," their prophets say. "Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us." You descendants of Jacob, should it be said, "Does the LORD become impatient? Does he do such things?" "Do not my words do good to the one whose ways are upright? Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle. You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever. Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy. If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' that would be just the prophet for this people! "I will surely gather all of you, Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. The One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their King will pass through before them, the LORD at their head."

Micah 3:1-12: Then I said, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel. Should you not embrace justice, you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?" Then they will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done. This is what the LORD says: "As for the prophets who lead my people astray, they proclaim 'peace' if they have something to eat, but prepare to wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them. Therefore night will come over you, without visions, and darkness, without divination. The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them. The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God." But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin. Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they look for the LORD's support and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us." Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.

2 Corinthians 11:1-15: I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me! I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. As surely

as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Practical Application:

List three things these Scriptures reveal about false prophets.
1.
2.
3.
How have you experienced or witnessed these types of things in "prophets" today?
How is God asking you to personally respond to these Scriptures in your own life?

FALLING FROM GRACE

Galatians 5:4 NIV - You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

DESCRIPTION

Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot earn it or maintain it by what we do. But we can choose to stand by faith in Jesus' perfect record or by works with our own record of righteousness. If we choose our own record, we have fallen from grace. Falling from grace is a serious thing. We fall from grace when we depart from the undeserved favor of God's New Covenant through faith in Jesus by subjecting ourselves to the requirements of the Old Covenant or any other form of mandatory religious piety, legalism, rule-keeping, or believing that God's blessing is based on our personal performance.

Unfortunately, our flesh and Adamic nature has a strong tendency towards rules and regulations. The knowledge of good and evil has been the greatest temptation and downfall of mankind since the Garden of Eden. It is tempting to create or subscribe to systems for self-advancement and blessing rather than becoming like a child to be blessed by simple faith. However, Jesus lived the perfect life that **no one** born of Adam has ever been able to live. Then, Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sin. God raised Him on the third day. Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God. Anyone who believes this in their hearts and confesses that Jesus is Lord is declared righteous before God by faith. Nothing more. Nothing less. To put falling from grace into practice is about listening closely to our own thoughts in order to discern if we are placing our faith in Christ's righteousness or our own works or rule-following. Similarly, we can listen to the words and teachings of others to discern if their words are encouraging us in the Lord or tempting us to fall from grace.



PURPOSE:

To be established and in grace without being led astray by false teaching. To guard our hearts and minds in the purity of Christ's righteousness as a free gift.

To be strengthened in our faith and endurance in Christ.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Increased discernment of good and evil.

Greater revelation of righteousness.

Deeper knowledge of God and what Jesus accomplished for us.

Increased purity of faith.

Expanded love for Jesus.

PRAYER

Father, I believe that you sent Jesus so that I can be saved by grace through faith in Him and what He did for me. Grant me the ability to discern when I am tempted towards legalism or rules. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider what you believe about the following statements. True or False?

T/F - There is nothing I can do to make God love me more/less.

T/F - Good things happen to good people. Bad things to bad.

T/F - God blesses people when they pray, read Scripture, etc.

T/F - I can earn God's blessings through my obedience.

T/F - People get what they deserve.

PRACTICE

- This week, take note of your thoughts/motives for why you do the things you do. Ask God to reveal areas where you are trusting in your own performance, rule-keeping, etc.
 - Are you doing something or not doing something in order to be approved of by God?
 - Are you doing what you do in order to earn favor or blessing from God? To get God to give you something?
 - Take note of how these things are contrary to receiving God's blessings as free gift through faith in Jesus.

- As the Lord reveals areas for repentance, confess the ways you have fallen from grace by trying to justify yourself by what you do or do not do.
 - Receive His forgiveness by faith. Be restored afresh.
- As you listen to others speak, listen to what they emphasize as the way of blessing or right-standing with God.
 - Are they promoting steps or rules to earn God's favor?
 - If so, how does this contradict righteousness as a free gift?
 - How could this be dangerous for your faith?

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Hebrews 12:15

2 Peter 3:17

Ephesians 2:8-10

1 Corinthians 10:12

Romans 6:14

Romans 3:23-24

Romans 7:8-25

Hebrews 4:1

ENDURING THROUGH THE GREAT APOSTASY

Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker was God. In fact, all of the heroes of faith did, including Jesus. This city is the Bride, the New Jerusalem, who will come down out of heaven from God. These are the regenerated ones who have clothed themselves in white linen through their righteous deeds done by the power of the Spirit of the Lord. These are the remnant of faithful ones who have endured through testing and trials until their faith was proven genuine and worthy of inheriting the Kingdom of God. These are the holy ones of God who will dwell with Him for eternity.

In the Bible, the first person to build a city was Cain after he had been banished to wander the earth with a mark on him preventing anyone from killing him. Another renowned city builder and mighty one was Nimrod, one of the earliest pre-figures of the antichrist. Nimrod built the tower of Babel and called it the gate of God. Nimrod ruled the world as one people, with one language, and one mission – to build a fortress reaching to the heavens in order to make a name for themselves and avoid the judgment of God.

We follow a crucified King who came longing to be received by an earthly city but instead was rejected, mocked, and killed. The example our King set for us is absolute uncompromising righteousness in the face of immense opposition, religious pressure, and brutal, torturous death. But His eyes were on the eternal prize and so, He paid the price willingly. All of His twelve apostles were also martyred for their faith. It is said that some of the believers in the early church sought out martyrdom as an opportunity to testify about Christ and show their willingness to pay the ultimate price for Him.

Are we ready to follow Jesus for eternal purposes even unto death? Or will we choose ourselves for the sake of our lives on earth? Will we keep our eyes on the eternal city built by God? Or will we join with the whole world in worship of a counterfeit Christ who sets himself up on earth as God and against God? These are the question of the end times.

Jesus said to expect persecution and the possibility of martyrdom if we truly wanted to follow Him. The world hates Jesus and will hate us if we are truly like Him. In the time before His return, all nations will hate true followers of Jesus. This will cause many believers to fall away from the faith by giving way to false prophets who do not require such faithfulness to eternity.

*Matthew 24:9-14: Then **you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.** At that time **many will turn away from the faith** and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, **the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.** And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

*John 15:18-20: **If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own.** As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' **If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.***

In the times of the end, the world will unite under one world-ruler who will exalt himself above every leader and call himself god. The world will be united with one religion under one “god” and will worship the

antichrist and take the mark of the beast. Many people spend time trying to figure out what the mark of the beast will be and how to avoid taking it. We would be wiser to seek and pursue the will of God so that we may be sealed with His seal and kept for eternity by His mercy and grace.

Insights of the End

Jesus' first followers would also have been well aware of the apocalyptic writings of Daniel which foretold the end of days through dramatic visions given to Daniel while he was in Babylonian exile. The people of God longed to see God's Kingdom be established on the earth and therefore, awaited Jesus' imminent return to conquer the Gentile kingdoms for their vindication. Here are some of the passages they would have been familiar with:

*Daniel 7:21-25: As I watched, this horn was **waging war against the holy people and defeating them**, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will **speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time.***

World ruler waging war against the holy people and defeating them; oppressing the holy people who are delivered into his hands: We must let this Scripture penetrate our understanding. Our victory is eternal even at the expense of our earthly lives. If we become fixated on a "victory" theology pertaining to earthly things rather than the conquering of sin and freedom from religion, fear, and condemnation through the truth of Christ, we will be sorely disappointed when the reality of the end times hits our lives. If we do not grasp this, our faith will be vulnerable to shattering because we did not know or love the truth.

Speaking against the Most High: Blasphemy against God includes distortions of His character, Word, ways, truth, or conditions for salvation. For example, the name of God was blasphemed among the nations because of the behavior and exile of the people of Israel. The nations did not understand the worldly behavior or people with a righteous God or how such a powerful God could allow exile to happen to His people. Therefore, God's character was maligned, His righteousness was misassessed, and stories of His power became regarded like fables and fairy tales. Blasphemy is not always obvious insults or abuse.

*Daniel 8:23-26: In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. **He will become very strong, but not by his own power.** He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. **He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper,** and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and **take his stand against the Prince of princes.** Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but **seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.***

Supernatural strength and power; causing deceit to prosper: The delusion of the end times will be beyond natural comprehension. There will be a driving spiritual force behind the lies of the antichrist which causes most people to believe him and his deceptions and turn themselves over to following him out of fear of his great power. Like Nimrod the mighty hunter who dominated people with his adept warrior skills, the fierce king will command respect and demand worship by force.

Destroying the holy people: The word for destroy can mean destruction as we normally think of it but can also mean to corrupt, pervert, ruin, spoil, or decay. The holy people is us - the people of God.

Taking his stand against Jesus: This counterfeit Christ will present himself as the alternative to Jesus while most likely using Jesus' name to his own advantage to advance his own agenda.

Vision sealed for the end: Daniel was told that this vision was for the end times. Though many of the events in this prophetic vision took place in the times before Jesus' first time on earth, the Scripture expressly links it to the times of the end.

*Daniel 11:14: In those times many will rise against the king of the South. **Those who are violent among your own people will rebel** in fulfillment of the vision, but without success.*

Violent believers rise up in rebellion: Jesus said those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Those who believe that the battle can be won in political battles or through violent rebellions will be sorely mistaken. Our King is a slaughtered Lamb who kept silent rather than defend Himself. He will come as the Lion with a vengeance in the end but until then, all vengeance belongs to Him. Those who know Him follow the Lamb wherever He goes. We must learn to participate with the divine nature of the Lamb.

*Daniel 11:32-35: **With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.** Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time **they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered.** When **they fall, they will receive a little help,** and many who are not sincere will join them. **Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end,** for it will still come at the appointed time.*

Flattery to corrupt believers into violating the covenant: Smooth talk and false promises will corrupt those who have previously been committed to Jesus. The end times tribulation will force people into desperate situations where their faith is vulnerable to giving way to error. Like Esau who was so hungry that he sold his birthright for a bowl of lentils, or like Judas who sold out Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, we too will be pushed to the limit of what we can endure and tempted to sell out.

People who know their God will resist: Only through knowing God and His faithfulness and trusting Him even unto death, will we be able to resist the flatteries and persuasions of the evil ruler of the world. In fact, the times will be so severe that people who resist will appear to be moronic idiots for turning down the benefits offered through submission to the antichrist. But if we know God we will resist.

Wise will fall by the sword or be burned, captured, plundered: The wise among believers will be martyred. They will be targeted, hunted down, plundered, and put to death to silence them.

Wise will stumble to be refined, purified, made spotless: Other wise ones will stumble into error but this will serve to purify their faith and make them worthy to receive our King and be counted as His Bride.

*Daniel 12:1-4: At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. **There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered.** Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, **roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end.** Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."*

Time of distress: Jesus also clearly stated that we will not be gathered up to Him until AFTER the events of the tribulation. (See Matthew 24:29-31.) We will not be here for the time of God's wrath after the seventh trumpet sounds off and the bowls of wrath begin to be poured out. But we will remain on earth during the plagues detailed in the Book of Revelation through the opening of the seals of the scroll and the sounding of the trumpets. This is a call for the endurance of the saints.

Ultimate deliverance in resurrection: In God's timing, we will be delivered. The dead in Christ will rise first and those who remain alive will be supernaturally transformed into an imperishable body to dwell with the Lord forever.

Roll up and seal the scroll: Daniel's visions were for the end-times. In heaven, no one was found worthy to open the eternal scrolls which would usher in the judgments of God and tribulation upon the earth. Only Jesus was found worthy in perfect righteousness and obedience even unto death. The Lamb that was slain and the eternal King is the only one worthy to open the scroll.

Paul and John echo Daniel's visions, saying almost the same things of the end times ruler and his wicked acts against the holy ones of God.

*2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 9-12 ESV: Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, **unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ... The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.***

Rebellion: The Greek word apostasia meaning apostasy falling away, defection, or forsaking of the truth.

Strong delusion: It will be a strong delusion – not a weak one – a strong one. It is one thing if a counterfeit is produced by a counterfeiter; but imagine if a counterfeit was created by the producer of the genuine article. How convincing would that be! According to this Scripture, the strong delusion will be raised up by God Himself. Corruptions and distortions of the truth will be presented in marvelously convincing ways to persuade even the most well-intentioned believers into error. As in the Garden of Eden, it will not come in the form of pure evil but will be presented in the form of attaining godliness, peace, and unity.

Man of lawlessness, son of destruction: The word perdition is the same word Jesus used to describe Judas. Judas had walked closely with Jesus for three years, doing all the things that the other disciples did, working miracles in Jesus' name, and even controlling the treasury of Jesus' ministry. But Judas saw and seized an opportunity to advance the Kingdom of God on earth for his own benefit. He turned Jesus over to the religious authorities hoping that this would force Jesus into combat and the fulfillment of the Daniel prophecies pertaining to the establishment of the Kingdom. If Jesus had acted on this, rather than going to His death on the cross, Judas may very well have become the treasurer of the whole world because he had already been serving as the treasurer of Jesus' ministry. He had more than thirty pieces of silver on his mind. All of this is to say that the man of lawlessness will rebel against Jesus with the motive of ruling the global economies of the world. (This is similarly referenced in Ezekiel 28:5, 16.)

False signs and wonders and deception: The antichrist will counterfeit every miracle of God and also put on displays of spiritual power to deceive the whole world. The antichrist will even set up an image of himself in the Temple of God and cause it to speak. All who refuse to worship the image will be killed. (See Revelation 13:14-15.)

Love of the truth or pleasure in unrighteousness: This is a matter of the heart. Jesus is the truth and there is nothing deceitful or crooked in Him. Our love for the truth is a direct reflection of our love for God. Either our hearts love the truth of Jesus Christ and all it entails more than our own lives or our hearts have iniquity in them which sets itself up against God. Those who have iniquity in their hearts will be led astray into believing the lie. Jesus deserves a pure Bride.

Revelation 13:4-10: People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" **The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them.** And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. Whoever has ears, let them hear. **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed."** **This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.**

Waging war against God's holy people and conquering them: In case anyone wanted to dismiss Daniel's prophecies as having already been fulfilled, this nullifies that assertion. This is still yet to come.

Captivity & killed with sword: This echoes the words of Jeremiah in preparing the people of Judah for the Babylonian invasion that was about to come upon them. (See Jeremiah 15:2.) As followers of the Lamb, we submit ourselves to whatever God has for us, praying for and blessing those who persecute us and treat us shamefully, and hoping that even in our death, they might come to recognize Jesus as Lord.

Patient endurance: As believers fall into apostasy and martyrdom left and right, we will need great endurance to persevere in our faith in Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can supply this. This is why most apostolic prayers are centered around believers truly knowing God through Jesus Christ to be strengthened with power to endure in holiness, righteousness, and faithfulness until the end.

Prayer in the End Times

Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah is often used as a model for prayer, appealing to God on behalf of a city or nation. But we have to remember that God did ultimately judge and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Jewish tradition states that Abraham stopped negotiating with God when he reached ten righteous ones because he based his calculation on the fact that Lot, his wife, daughters, and potentially sons-in-law lived in Sodom. His prayer was looking out for the protection of his own and the city would simply benefit from it. God did honor Abraham's prayer – but probably not in the way Abraham expected. God made a way of escape for Abraham's family members, who were the righteous ones in Sodom but then, God judged the cities because their time of judgement had come.

Much later in history, God told Jeremiah NOT to pray for the people of Judah because their lack of repentance after repeated warnings had brought them to the point that intercession would make no difference. (See Jeremiah 7:16, 11:14, 14:11.) Ezekiel was also told by God that the people's actions had determined the consequences which God was forced in righteousness to pour out upon them and that even the prayers of Noah, Daniel, and Job could not save them. (See Ezekiel 14:12-23.)

No doubt, it is God's will for all people to be saved. But not all will be saved. Salvation comes only through knowledge of the truth resulting in faith in Jesus Christ which is demonstrated by repentance from sin. Abraham, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets did not pray for God not to send the disasters. They knew that they had heard God decree the disasters. God only relents disasters when people repent of their sins. (See Jeremiah 18:7-10.) Interceding against disasters that God has ordained is effectively robbing people of their opportunity to cry out to God in desperation. (See Isaiah 26:9-10.)

God does nothing on the earth without revealing it to His servants, the prophets. He is not obligated in any way to do this but He does it to continually glorify His name as the only one who knows the end from the beginning. God revealed His intentions for Sodom and Gomorrah to Abraham because Abraham was His friend and He wanted Abraham to understand the full ramifications of the set-apart life God had

called him to. Jesus calls us His friends if we do what He commands us. As His friends, He tells us everything the Father told Him so that we might not fall away in the time of testing.

All of this is to say that while I am all for prayer and intercession, I am also for prayer which is directed by God and by revelation of what God is actually doing in a situation. Praying according to what we THINK is God's will can lead us into exasperation, fatigue, and disillusionment because we have not accurately understood God's plan. These prayers appeal to our flesh and carnal notions of the love of God and what that looks like but they are not rooted in both the kindness and severity of God. The severity of God's wrath makes the salvation we have in Christ all the sweeter and all the more urgently needed to be shared with the lost world. If we spend ourselves in countless hours of intercession for nations, against plagues, or for our own rendition of God's righteousness, we will swiftly find ourselves praying against God and against the events clearly detailed as God's will in the Book of Revelation and prophetic Scriptures. Moreover, these types of prayers will make us extremely susceptible to the flatteries and persuasions of the antichrist who will present the love of God in a perverted manner to serve his own agenda of world domination. If we do not know the truth, his words will sound right to us.

This is why the apostolic prayers of the New Testament have very little to do with details of everyday life and common needs but stress the importance of truly KNOWING God through Jesus Christ and having genuine revelation of who Christ is and what He has done for us so that we will have power to stand in faithfulness against all schemes of the enemy even until the very end.

The Real Apostates

When Jesus came and people followed Him and His teachings, they were accused of apostasy against Moses. (See Acts 21:21.) In the end times, followers of the real Jesus will be accused of apostasy for standing firm in the truth without bowing down to the false religion of the antichrist.

*John 16:1-2: All this **I have told you so that you will not fall away.** They will **put you out of the synagogue**; in fact, the time is coming when **anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.***

Put you out of the synagogue: This literally means, they will excommunicate you from the assembly of the congregation. Though in the days of Jesus and even now it did and can literally mean Jewish synagogues. However, this phrase is not limited to Jewish synagogues. Church history makes this abundantly clear.

Think they are offering a service to God: Jesus was presented for the death penalty by religious leaders who accused Him as a blasphemer and excommunicated Him from the people of God. Many of the martyrs of the past seventeen hundred years died at the hands of worldly church leaders who thought they were serving God by purging evil heretics from the church. History has made plain the reality of their stories. These are the times we will endure before Christ returns to claim us as His Bride.

Apostates will be the majority in the end times. MANY will fall away from the faith. These are not unbelievers. You cannot fall away from something you were never in. The love of MOST will grow cold. Selflessness and charity will perish from the lives of those who are not empowered by the agape love of God. Those who fall away will do so to follow what suits their own temporal needs and desires. It will be totally understandable from a worldly perspective but totally abominable from eternity's viewpoint.

The antichrist will build and unite a world for himself, attempting to ascend to the heights of heaven's authority. His prophets will be saying, "peace peace," "bless bless," and "victory victory" as they try to take over the world "for God."

Jesus died for the truth to bring not peace but a sword and to receive the world from God as His reward with all authority for all eternity. His prophets will be warning people of the day of judgment to come and salvation in Him alone.

The question remains: In the end, which side will you be on?

REVELATION CHURCHES

Worksheet

Churches of Revelation	Commendation	Rebuke	Action Steps
Ephesus 2:1-7	Good works & endurance. Vigilance against false teachers. Not grown weary.	Abandoned first love.	Remember from where you have fallen. Repent and do the works as at first.
Smyrna 2:8-11	Enduring persecution, slander. Rich in faith.		Do not fear trials. Stand firm even unto death.
Pergamum 2:12-17	Holding to Christ's name and faith even to martyrdom.	Tolerating false prophets causing people to stumble.	Repent.
Thyatira 2:18-29	Increasing in love, faith, service, and endurance.	Tolerating false prophets and not repenting.	Repent. Hold fast to the truth to the end.
Sardis 3:1-6	A few loyal people who have not soiled their garments.	Works incomplete.	Repent and remember what you received. Wake up.
Philadelphia 3:7-13	Patiently enduring. Keeping God's word. Not denying God's name.		Hold fast.
Laodicea 3:14-22		Spiritually poor, blind, bankrupt, naked, lukewarm.	Be zealous and repent.

Practical Application:

Which of the Commendations do you sense the Holy Spirit is applying to your walk and life with Christ?
Which of the Rebukes do you sense the Holy Spirit is applying to your walk and life with Christ?
What action steps is God giving you to apply in your own life? (Whether listed or not.)

APOSTOLIC PRAYERS

Growing in Knowing God

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL (COLOSSIANS 1:9-14)

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

SPIRIT OF WISDOM & REVELATION (EPHESIANS 1:16-23)

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

FULLNESS OF GOD & HIS LOVE (EPHESIANS 3:14-21)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

ABOUNDING LOVE WITH DISCERNMENT (PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11)

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

WALKING WORTHY OF GOD (2 THESSALONIANS 1:11-12)

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

EFFECTUAL KINGDOM WORK (PHILEMON 1:6)

I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

GOD'S WILL & KINGDOM (MATTHEW 6:9-13)

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.



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UNIT SIX – KEY QUESTIONS

Discernment of Good & Evil

Use this worksheet to test your grasp of the material and exercises of Unit Six.

What is the difference between the knowledge of good and evil and discernment of good and evil? (in your own words)	
What is the enemy's primary objective of deception?	How do good intentions become polluted with error?
How does false teaching appeal to soulish desires?	What is the common characteristic of false teachers?
What is God's purposes in allowing false teachers?	How will believers endure through the great apostasy?
What is one thing you learned that you did not know before?	What questions do you still have about this subject?

UNIT SIX: GROUP EXERCISES

Option One:

1. Based on the various exercises in this Unit have each person in the group share something they have learned about discerning the schemes of the enemy and how to discern good from evil.
2. Discuss what impact this will have on your perspective of teachers, prophets, and ministries today.

AND/OR

Option Two

1. Use the Apostolic Prayer Guide and select one prayer to pray for your group.
2. Have each member of the group select one of the prayers on the Apostolic Prayer Guide as a prayer for themselves. Pair up and commit to praying that prayer for your partner for one week. Check back with one another to discuss what God does!