

Troubling Frogs, Snakes, Spiders, & Pots

Matthew 3:7c

May 19, 2024

INTRO:

What is the hardest part of [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#) for you to swallow?

In honesty & reality... for most... it's the...

Responsibility – Accountability + Clarity

PRAYER

CONTEXT:

- Gospel of Matthew: mMm
- Chapters 1, 2... Troubling contrasts...

Matthew 3:1-7

[1](#)In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, [2](#)“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” [3](#)For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

[4](#)Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. [5](#)Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, [6](#)and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

[7](#)*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “**You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?**”*

BIG IDEA: Biblical vipers
have spiritual venom & eternal victims!

T/S: (*Fools - False Prophets - False Teachers - Wolves + Vipers*)

PREVIEW:

1. Frogs & Snakes
2. Frogs & Spiders
3. Frogs & Pots

TEXT: Matthew 3:7c
“Who warned you...”

I. Frogs & *SNAKES*

ILLUSTRATION:

“Why Frogs & Snakes Never Play Together”

(A *POURQUOI* [poor-qua] of *PREJUDICE*)

A Play in 3 Acts

EXPLANATION: a teaching warning...

- *Intended warning: Sinful **PREJUDICE***
- *Better warning: Sinful **IGNORANCE***

STATS:

- 5.4 million “bitten” by snakes annually
 - 2.7 million “envenomed” each year
 - 400,000 disabled/disfigured (ie. amputate)
 - ~ 100,000 (80K to 140K) annual deaths
- Even where “anti venom” is available & distributed, it is not uncommon for 20% of the bites to become fatal...
- Byproduct victim’s genetic disposition or the venom’s speed or the victim’s slowness or a combination of all)
- **See the spiritual parallels... especially with the spiritual anti venom:**
- **1.** Anti venom exists!
 - **2.** Even where it exists & is widely distributed, countless numbers continue to die &/or become disabled & disfigured.
 - **3.** No one seems to be bothered by:
 - **A).** these staggering statistics;
 - **B).** the well documented presence of “false anti venom” peddlers opening up shop ALL OVER this snake infested world. {In many cases & areas, it is the professing &

perceived-to-be anti-venom experts & distributors who are doing the vast majority of the global “envenoming.”

- W.H.O. says that the “**envenoming**” problem and the subsequent reality of “**envenomed**” victims that results is widely, if not grossly, under-appreciated & responded to...
- **W.H.O. Quote:** **The entry into some markets of inappropriate, untested, or even fake antivenom products has also undermined confidence in antivenom therapy...**
- **Best warning:** *Sinful IRRESPONSIBILITY*

1). God & His Word:

[Deuteronomy 18:20](#)

20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”

[Ezekiel 13:9](#)

9 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.

[Jeremiah 23:16](#)

16 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.

[Luke 6:26](#)

26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

[Matthew 24:24](#)

24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

[Matthew 16:11-12](#)

11 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."

12 Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees & Sadducees.

[2 Timothy 4:3-4](#)

3 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. **4** They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

[Acts 20:28-30](#)

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. **29** I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. **30** Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

[Matthew 7:15-20](#)

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. **16** By their fruit you will recognize them

God's Word has **warned us...** **Vipers HAVE:**

- **Venom**
 - *Doubt & Deceit*
 - ***Distract & Disrespect***
 - *Dilute & Divide*
 - ***Delilah's DNA***
 - *Death & Destruction*

- **Vision** (vipers & wolves KNOW what they're doing)
- **Vermin** (other disgusting cohorts)
- **Verses** (twisted, out of context Scripture usage)
- **Vendors** (venom salesmen...)
- **Voltage** (often highly charged...)
- **Venues** (venom showrooms, stages, & stadiums)
- **Vectors** (direction, arrow, "angle")
- **Volume** (shadowy chatter, slander & character assassination)
- **Victims** (naïve sheep, misguided goats, & hopeless romantics)

God's Word has **promised us...** **Victors HAVE:**

- **God's *DEFENSIVE* anti-venom:**
 - The Gospel's **truth in love**
 - Biblical **truth in love**
 - Historical **truth in love**
 - Missional **truth in love**
 - Personal **truth in love**
-
- **God's *OFFENSIVE* anti-venom:**
 - Miraculous ***Gospel*** (mMm BE)
 - Missionary-***Mongoose!***
 - Resistant but not impervious to venom
 - Respectful of but not intimidated of vipers
 - Respectful of but not intimidated by venom
 - Natural enemy & eliminator of vipers!
 - Mongoose-***ministers of reconciliation***
 - Mongoose-***men of God*** (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

*** This gives context to why it is that cowards are listed amongst the most horrific of sinners... AND... why they will be categorically excluded from heaven! (see [Revelation 21:8](#))

APPLICATION:

- Tell the truth in love – no matter what!
- Stop pushing the “square pegs of personal ideologies” into God’s round holes of truth in love. GET REAL!
- Good intentions with bad theology = **SIN**
- Bad intentions with good theology = **SIN**
- Sound-bites are often hiding viper-strikes!

II. Frogs & *SPIDERS*

ILLUSTRATION:

The classic fable... spider asks for a ride...
Leery frog leaves shrewdness & gets bit.
Both the frog & spider drown & die.

EXPLANATION: a teaching warning...

- Sometimes God’s warnings are instinctive.
- Sometimes the stakes are life or death.
- Sometimes enemies use you & your love.
- Sometimes the lesson is: *You knew better!*

APPLICATION:

- Call a spade a spade & a spider a spider...
- Don't let innocence blind your shrewdness.
- **Realize who is willing to die for what...**
- **Never, never, NEVER let your guard down!**

III. Frogs & *POTS*

ILLUSTRATION:

The lesson is taught by putting a healthy frog in a pot of lukewarm water & then slowly heating the water until the frog dies in the soon to be boiling water.

EXPLANATION: a teaching warning...

- This is a lesson about deadly complacency.
- **Do not get too comfortable or cozy in life...**
- Not all warm water ends up being a bath...
- **Sometimes comfort kills!**
- We are all responsible for our awareness...

APPLICATION:

- Remember who you are & why you exist...
- Sitting is sin if you're made for swimming...

- All comfort & no conflict is antichrist-like.
- Get out of your pot and back in God's pond!
- Death & deadly sin are so subtle. **Wake up!**

The shape of error is always changing.

*The best protection against the darkness of error
is the light of truth. – John Piper*

REVIEW:

1. Frogs & Snakes
2. Frogs & Spiders
3. Frogs & Pots

T/S: Let's look one more time at how this all comes together in asking & answering our text's question:
Who warned YOU?

God... His Word... His Spirit... and His family did!

CLOSE:

Have you ever been walking in the woods & a branch snaps back in your face because the person in front of you did not warn you.... what if that branch were, instead, a deadly viper?

How Jesus Called Out False Teachers & Deadly Doctrine

by Tim Challies

It's a good time to be a false teacher and to espouse deadly doctrine. It seems that today's most brazen heretic will be granted a hearing and, in all likelihood, a book deal. Novelty is appealing, orthodoxy boring. It's the ones who sound the warning and issue the challenge that bear the risk—the risk of being labelled “haters.” There's more patience for those who smilingly subvert the truth than for those who boldly defend it. Conviction is a sign of arrogance, while humility is expressed in uncertainty. Love, it seems, requires us to bear patiently with any amount of error. And this kind of love, we are told, is modeled after Jesus. Jesus did not judge, Jesus welcomed all opinions, Jesus would have accepted different kinds of teachings—so long as those teachings contained love and hints of truth.

A quick scan of the gospels, however, shows that this impression is a far cry from the Jesus of the Bible. It shows that society has reimagined Jesus through the relativism of our day. When Jesus interacted with people who were seeking, wandering, or misguided, he was invariably compassionate. He answered them with patience and gentleness. But when Jesus engaged with religious hypocrites and false teachers, he responded with righteous fury and bold conviction.

Today, those who love the truth must learn how to show such bold conviction... to rebuke peddlers of error and to express concern for those caught up in their lies. Like the ancient heretics of Crete, today's false teachers “must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach” (Titus 1:11). As we do this well, we imitate Jesus Christ

Some may find it difficult to reconcile Jesus' love and his bold rebuke... but this betrays a dangerous tendency to separate God's love from his relentless demand for truth.

In Matthew 23 alone, Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites” six times. Besides that, he calls them “blind guides,” “blind fools,” “blind men,” “whitewashed tombs,” “sons of those who

murdered the prophets,” “serpents,” and “brood of vipers.” You get the point. **Jesus does not shy away from calling false teachers exactly what they are.**

Biblical vipers
have spiritual venom & eternal victims!

Friends,
PLEASE read the end times warnings from [Matthew 24 & 25](#).

People ignore today like the people ignored Noah and his boat - the Ark - the most visible warning the world had ever seen (literally) up to that point...

Think about the Hebrew grumblers... they just saw God miraculously free them from Egypt... miraculously part the Red Sea for them... AND THEN... miraculously destroy Pharaoh's army with that same Red Sea...

...and yet they ignore both, God's grace & warnings...

Think about these blessed people ignoring God's miraculous mercies & His amazing graces over & over & over again...

grumbling over food... making golden calves...

Korah & others leading rebellions...

[See the same parallel principle in the New Testament:](#)

- **Lights don't hide under bushels...**
- *Salt that loses its saltiness :-)*
- **Aroma (with no scent?)**
- *Ambassadors afraid to speak up?*
- **Army refusing God's armor?**
- *Read 1st John!*
- **Don't DISMISS God's warning(s):**
- *Think about Ezekiel 33 & the impact of NOT warning*
- **Think about Titus 1&3; Jude; Peter; Paul; JB; **Jesus!!!****
 - Matthew 3:7 **VIPERS**
 - Mathew 12:34 **VIPERS**
 - Matthew 23:33 **VIPERS**

***Satan's vipers & wolves are why we have
God's warriors & armor!***

- JDP

(cf. Ephesians 6:10ff)

Biblical vipers
have spiritual venom & eternal victims!

- **1). Don't WISH that away.**
- **2). Don't ever FORGET it.**
- **3). Don't be LUKEWARM & COMPLACENT!**

PRAYER

WORSHIP: *The King Will Come & Clean*

STUDY NOTES:

Bible Verses About False Teachers

Compiled by The BibleStudyTools Staff on 07/28/2021

Bible Verses about False Teachers and Prophets

Correct and sound doctrine is crucial to salvation and growth in spiritual maturity. It comes as no surprise that God warns us many times in Scripture to be aware of false teaching. Christians need to be able to recognize false teachers in order to know when they are being led down a path that God did not intend!

What does the Bible say about False Prophets?

God speaks harshly against false prophets, occult practices, and other means of sorcery. God describes a false prophet as one who “presumes to speak in My name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods” (Deuteronomy 18:20). In Jeremiah 14:14, God says these evildoers prophesy lies, offering “false visions, divinations, idolatries, and the delusions of their own minds.”

The following Bible verses will help you determine whether someone is teaching false doctrine and how you should handle the deceptive teacher.

[Deuteronomy 18:20](#)

20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”

[Ezekiel 13:9](#)

9 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.

[Jeremiah 14:14](#)

14 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.

[Jeremiah 23:16](#)

16 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.

[Luke 6:26](#)

26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

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[Acts 20:28-30](#)

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

[2 Peter 3:14-18](#)

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

17 Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position.

18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

[1 John 4:1-6](#)

1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

5 They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.

6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

[Matthew 7:15-20](#)

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

[2 Peter 1:12-21](#)

12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.

13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body,

14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

17 He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

19 We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things.

21 For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

[Titus 1:6-16](#)

6 An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

7 Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

8 Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

10 For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group.

11 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.

12 One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons."

13 This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith

14 and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

[2 Peter 2](#)

1 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.

2 Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

3 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.

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment;

5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;

6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless

8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

10 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;

11 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.

12 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.

13 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.

14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!

15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness.

16 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.

17 These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.

18 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.

19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.”

20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

22 Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.”

[Matthew 23:1-29](#)

1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.

3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

5 “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;

6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;

7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

8 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.

9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.

10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah.

11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

13 "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.

15 "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.

16 "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.'

17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

18 You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.'

19 You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

20 Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

21 And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.

22 And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

23 "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.

24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

25 “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.

26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

27 “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.

28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

29 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.

How Jesus Called Out False Teachers and Deadly Doctrine

MAR 13, 2017

DEADLY DOCTRINES

FALSE TEACHERS FALSE TEACHING



It's a good time to be a false teacher and to espouse deadly doctrine. It seems that today's most brazen heretic will be granted a hearing and, in all likelihood, a book deal. Novelty is appealing, orthodoxy boring. It's the ones who sound the warning and issue the challenge that bear the risk—the risk of being labelled “haters.” There's more patience for those who smilingly subvert the truth than for those who boldly defend it. Conviction is a sign of arrogance, while humility is expressed in uncertainty. Love, it seems, requires us to bear patiently

with any amount of error. And this kind of love, we are told, is modeled after Jesus. Jesus did not judge, Jesus welcomed all opinions, Jesus would have accepted different kinds of teachings—so long as those teachings contained love and hints of truth.

A quick scan of the gospels, however, shows that this impression is a far cry from the Jesus of the Bible. It shows that society has reimagined Jesus through the relativism of our day. When Jesus interacted with people who were seeking, wandering, or misguided, he was invariably compassionate. He answered them with patience and gentleness. But when Jesus engaged with religious hypocrites and false teachers, he responded with righteous fury and bold conviction.

Today, those who love the truth must learn how to show such bold conviction through the old discipline of polemics—the practice of engaging in public debate and dispute. The purpose of polemics is not to score points or flex theological muscle, but to rebuke peddlers of error and to express concern for those caught up in their lies. Like the ancient heretics of Crete, today’s false teachers “must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach” (Titus 1:11). As we do this well, we imitate Jesus Christ who was a skilled polemicist.

We see an example of Jesus’ polemics in Matthew 23, where Jesus speaks to the crowd about the scribes and Pharisees. **What unfolds in this scene is not private pleading but public censure.** Jesus publicly addresses the deadly doctrine of these religious leaders for the benefit of their victims and potential victims. He holds nothing back. He does not make time to commend them for the things they do well. He does not temper his speech to give them the benefit of the doubt. Rather, he specifies their doctrinal error and unrighteousness actions, he labels them with strong but appropriate language, he warns of the consequences of their error, and he calls his listeners to reject the false teachers and their deadly doctrine.

Jesus Calls Out Their Doctrinal Error

These religious authorities were masking error as truth. Jesus confronts their error by telling the crowd, “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger” (Matthew 23:4). In the name of God, these leaders advocate a works-based system of righteousness that ignores and denies God’s free grace. Jesus gives them an example of their false teaching: “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath’” (Matthew 23:15). They have reimagined the faith so they can maintain a religious veneer even as they blatantly break oaths. They adapt their beliefs so they can remain righteous according to the letter of the law even as they violate its spirit. Jesus identifies this as false doctrine and addresses it head-on.

When we respond to error by giving it the benefit of the doubt, we come close to committing the same error as false teachers: masking error as the truth. Like Jesus, we ought to love truth and love people enough to call out error for what it is.

Jesus Calls Out Their Unrighteous Actions

The religious authorities teach error as truth and, in consequence, act hypocritically. **As Jesus warns the crowd of the doctrinal error of these leaders, he tells also of their ungodly actions.** “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others” (Matthew 23:23). And again, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean” (Matthew 23:25-26). **Jesus lays bare the unrighteous actions of false teachers.**

Some may find it difficult to reconcile Jesus' love and his bold rebuke in this scene, but this betrays a dangerous tendency to separate God's love from his relentless demand for truth. It dishonors God when we call unrighteousness good (Isaiah 5:20). It honors him when we, like Jesus, call unrighteousness evil.

Jesus Calls Out Their True Identity

Having called out their unrighteousness, he appropriately describes and labels the false teachers. In Matthew 23 alone, Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees "hypocrites" six times. Besides that, he calls them "blind guides," "blind fools," "blind men," "whitewashed tombs," "sons of those who murdered the prophets," "serpents," and "brood of vipers." You get the point. **Jesus does not shy away from calling false teachers exactly what they are.** "Jesus meek and mild" sinlessly expresses divine wrath toward those who would speak truth in the name of error, who would teach doctrines of demons under the banner of heaven.

It is true that we must always avoid slandering someone by calling them what they are not. But it is equally true that when God is slandered by false teachers who claim to teach in his name, we must call them out for what they are.

Jesus Calls Out Their Coming Judgment

Jesus ensures his listeners know the full gravity of this deadly doctrine. He knows that adhering to such faulty teaching will have the most dire consequences, so six times he repeats the word "woe." This is a word of divine judgment, of abject misery that portends a final, miserable end. **"You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matthew 23:32).** They will not, and neither will those who submit to such odious error.

As we have explored throughout this series, **false doctrine is deadly doctrine. It leads both teachers and hearers to destruction.** It is good and loving to warn them of this destruction, so that **"they may**

come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:26).

Jesus Calls His Listeners Toward Truth

Jesus exposes the deadly doctrine and unrighteous actions of these false teachers. He appropriately describes those who espouse it, and he lays out the consequences of such error.

However, polemics is not merely confronting error, but also teaching truth. And orthodoxy is not merely knowing the truth, but also submitting to it. For these reasons, Jesus appeals to his listeners to turn away from the absurdity and inconsistency of error toward God’s truth. Contrary to the scribes and Pharisees who do all their deeds to be seen by others, Jesus tells the crowd: “The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:11-12).

If Jesus’s listeners will only apply reason and logic, they will see that this teaching cannot be true and that these actions do not promote righteousness. They will reject what is false and gladly accept what is true. They will put aside false doctrine and religious hypocrisy to instead embrace sound doctrine and godly living.

Conclusion

It’s a good time to be a false teacher and to espouse deadly doctrine. And it will continue to be unless God’s people embrace their responsibility to defend the faith and protect the vulnerable. Jesus has left us with both the mandate and the model. Jesus shows that while polemics gains few friends (after all, it was the ones he rebuked who put him to death and the ones he warned who deserted him), it honors God and saves listeners from falling into the snare of deadly doctrine.

I am indebted to Conrad Mbewe for his [outline](#) of this passage.



Ask Pastor John

Should We Call Out False Teachers or Ignore Them?

00:00

Episode 1377

Interview with

John Piper

Founder & Teacher, desiringGod.org

*Pastor John, here's a question from Caden in Boca Raton, Florida. "Hello, Pastor John! After seeing the documentary *American Gospel*, I was conflicted because I'm not sure if I am supposed to call out false teachers. [Second Peter 2:1-3](#) makes it obvious that there will be false teachers, but the text also does not say we should point them out. I have heard both sides to this argument, but I'm still not sure. I want to be careful to not 'pronounce judgment before the time' ([1 Corinthians 4:5](#)). Does this passage apply here in this situation? Are we taking a judgment that isn't ours? Or should we rest in God's ultimate knowledge? And if a prominent false teacher is to be called out, who does this — where and how?"*

Maybe it would be helpful to step back first and get the bigger picture of the New Testament response to those who live and teach in ways that lead others into error and ruin, and then zero in on [1 Corinthians 4:5](#) for some guidelines for how we should speak and write about such people.

Beware the Wolves

So let's begin with Jesus. [Matthew 7:15](#): *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."* And *the word beware means all of us should be alert, but especially shepherds, to identify not just false teaching, but false teachers, whose ways are subtle. They're clothing themselves with lamb's wool while they're wolves.*

And Paul used the same Greek word for *beware* in [Acts 20:28-29](#) when he said, *"Pay careful attention* to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. . . . I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the."

"In order to protect the flock, we should expose false teachers and minimize the spread of the gangrene."

Jesus used the same word again in [Matthew 16:6](#), but he got more specific: *"Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

Paul had the same kind of group in mind and the same kind of error in mind in **Philippians 3:2** and **3:18**: *“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.”* And then verse 18: *“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.”* Then in **Romans 16:17**, he warned, *“**Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.**”*

Avoid, Rebuke, Call Out

To avoid them, you have to know who they are. You can't avoid somebody if you don't know who they are. This idea of identifying and avoiding shows up in **1 Corinthians 5:11**; **2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14**; **2 Timothy 3:5**; **2 John 10**. In other words, Christians, and shepherds in particular, should be discerning and alert to behavior and teaching that dishonors Christ and destroys people — and not treat it in a casual or harmless way.

And then in **1 Timothy 5:19–20**, Paul went beyond just *“avoid them”* to *“rebuke them publicly.”*

So, **speaking of elders who persist in error**, he said, *“Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin”* — and that can be sin of false doctrine or sin of evil behavior, anyone who does not accept correction —

“rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear..”

And then **Paul actually named destructive false teachers:**

- **“Demas**, in love with this present world, has deserted me” **(2 Timothy 4:10)**.
- “You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are **Phygelus and Hermogenes**” **(2 Timothy 1:15)**.
- “By rejecting this [faith and a good conscience], some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are **Hymenaeus and Alexander**” **(1 Timothy 1:19–20)**.
- “Their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are **Hymenaeus and Philetus**” **(2 Timothy 2:17)**.

Paul names at least six false teachers that the church should watch out for.

So, I infer from Jesus and Paul and Luke and John that false teaching and destructive behavior are present dangers in this fallen world for the church. And **all of us — especially shepherds, pastors — should be alert and discerning to identify and, in appropriate ways, expose.** In order to protect the flock, we should expose them and minimize the spread of the gangrene (as Paul calls it).

Expose Evil

Now, in **1 Corinthians 4:5**, Paul is talking about how the Corinthians should assess Paul and Cephas and Apollos, because the people are choosing sides and boasting in their favorite teacher. He says,

I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one [Paul, Cephas, Apollos] will receive his commendation from God. (1 Corinthians 4:4-5)

“The best protection against the darkness of error is the light of truth.”

So Caden is asking whether the words “do not pronounce judgment before the time” should keep us from identifying false teachers or from naming them. **I don’t think so.** “Don’t pronounce judgment before the time” means “Don’t do what only Christ can do at that last day — on the day of judgment.” Don’t presume to know the heart like Jesus will know the heart on that day. Only Christ “will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.”

But ***for now, our job is indeed to do mouth judgment, writing judgment, behavior judgment — not a heart judgment, but mouth & writing & behavior judgment.***

When a mouth speaks unbiblical, destructive teaching, when a blog or an article or a book publishes unbiblical and destructive teaching, when a body — a human body, a physical body — behaves with unbiblical and destructive behavior, in all these cases, we are to be discerning.

And **according to Ephesians 5:11, we are to expose the error.** ***“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” “Censure them; show them to be wrong”*** is what the word *elegchō* means.

Five Factors for Calling Out False Teachers

So **the question is how and when — not if.** And here I think the Bible calls for wisdom, rather than telling us who and when and how. **The question we ask is this: How can we best — in our situation, with our gifts and our responsibilities — help the most people believe and live the most truth, and how can we protect the most people from destructive beliefs and behaviors?**

And **here are five factors perhaps to consider when deciding whether to name a false teacher publicly.**

1. The seriousness and deceitfulness of the error.
2. The size of the audience. Is it growing?
3. The duration of their ministry. Did they make one blunder or are they constantly doing it?
4. The vulnerability of the people for whom you are responsible.
5. The role you have in influencing shepherds who really need to be discerning for who the false teachers are.

When you do name a false teacher, it's best to do it in a setting where you do more than name-drop. **You explain the error, you give reasons for rejecting it, you communicate complexities, you set a tone of longing for truth and love — you're not just slinging mud.**

The last thing I would say is to let your teaching be so powerful in clarifying the greatness and the beauty and the worth of God's truth that your people will smell error before it infects their lives.

The shape of error is always changing.

You can't preach enough negative sermons to stay ahead of it. And you don't have to. The best protection against the darkness of error is the light of truth.

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GotQuestions.org

Why did John the Baptist refer to the Pharisees as a brood of vipers?

[John the Baptist](#) condemned the Pharisees and Sadducees as a “brood of vipers” in [Matthew 3:7](#). A “brood of vipers” is a “family of snakes.” Because vipers are venomous, John was essentially calling the religious leaders “deadly sons of serpents.” It’s quite a bold denunciation—and one Jesus repeated to the Pharisees in [Matthew 12:34](#).

The [Pharisees and Sadducees](#) were the religious leaders in Israel during the time of John the Baptist and Jesus. The Pharisees were the Law-keepers and promoters of tradition, and the Sadducees comprised the wealthier ruling class. Over the centuries, these well-

meaning groups had become corrupt, legalistic, and hypocritical and would eventually be responsible for crucifying the Son of God. They earned their label “brood of vipers,” a sobriquet with deeper meaning than is obvious at first glance.

The viper was seen to be an evil creature. Its venom was deadly, and it was also devious—the viper that bit Paul was hiding in the firewood ([Acts 28:3](#)). The Hebrew Scriptures, which the Pharisees knew well, associate the serpent with Satan in [Genesis 3](#). For John to call the Pharisees a “brood of vipers” implies that they bore satanic qualities. This idea is clearly stated by Jesus in [John 8:44](#), where He says the unbelieving Jews “belong to [their] father, the devil.” When John and Jesus called the Pharisees a “brood of vipers,” they were pointing out that these men were deceitful, dangerous, and wicked—deceitful in that they were hypocrites ([Matthew 23:15](#)); dangerous in that they were blind leaders of the blind ([Matthew 15:14](#)); and wicked in that their hearts were full of murder ([John 8:37](#)).

Another fascinating detail is found in Jesus’ use of the epithet “brood of vipers” to describe the Pharisees. In [Matthew 23:33](#), He says, “You brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” Farmers, then as now, often burned the stubble of their fields to get the land ready for the next planting season. As the fires neared the vipers’ dens, the snakes would slither away from the flames, but they often did not escape being consumed. Snakes fleeing the fire was a common sight, and Jesus’ words to the Pharisees would likely have called it to their minds. How could they think they would escape the fire of God’s judgment by relying on their own works, which were not at all honest or good? John’s and Jesus’ calling them a brood of vipers was meant to make them aware of their own wickedness and call them to repent.

Jesus called them a brood of vipers because like the first serpent (Ge 3:1), they had become subtle or cunning (ארומ 'arom ערום 06175) in challenging the word of God, and not only the word, but the Word-Jesus. And like Adam were naked (ארומ 'arom ערום 06174) before God.

How did Adam know he was naked ערום? Because he had become cunning ערום. (The same word.)

The Pharisees were always cleverly twisting the scriptures to catch Jesus in a trap. But he knew them. They were naked before him. They were very much like the first serpent.

The same imagery is use when Peter was called Satan. (Mt 16:23) Peter had just declared that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. So Jesus tells him about the cross, which is prophesied in scripture. Peter tempts Jesus to avoid the cross suggesting that since he is God, he does not need to die. He challenged the word of God.

What we say, especially when we are distressed or under pressure, may reveal a lot about what we are really like inside. Jesus said: "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

Both Jesus and John the Baptizer called the Pharisees and Sadducees "Offspring of vipers" because their hearts were full of evil and wickedness and the deadly spiritual harm they could inflict upon unsuspecting persons.

Since they do not hear the Lord, who wants to "charm away" as it were the mankind from Satan by His preaching, but rather slander and denigrate Him, calling Him an accomplice of Beelzebuth (Matthew 12:27), then they are like those vipers in Psalm 58:4-5:

"Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears, that will not heed the tune of the charmer, however skillful the enchanter may be."

The Pharisees had just insulted Jesus by expressing their belief that he performed miracles by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils (Mat.12:24). Jesus, knowing their thoughts, did not let them get off with such blasphemy, warning them of the danger of never being forgiven by God. He then warned of the bad fruit of a corrupt tree. Then comes the verse you quote.

What did the Pharisees, and the people who heard what Jesus said, understand about vipers? In Acts 16:16-21 there is an episode of a girl who had a spirit of divining the future following Paul and his entourage, crying out for many days, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Eventually, Paul was so troubled by this that he turned and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" and it did so immediately. The NIV footnote adds:

"A python spirit, a demonic spirit. The python was a mythical snake worshipped at Delphi and associated with the Delphic oracle. The term 'python' came to be used of the persons through whom the python spirit supposedly spoke. Since such persons spoke involuntarily, the term 'ventriloquist' was used to describe them."

This makes the connection between serpents and divination, which can depend on demonic, invisible powers communicating with a willing human agent - the diviner. The priestess at Delphi was called "The Pythoness".

This shows something of the understanding of the significance of Jesus' accusation of the Pharisees. They also knew that speaking of the serpent of Eden, who used lies and deception to bring sin into the world, was connected to Jesus saying they were of their father, the Devil, in John 8:44.

Further, John the Baptist had previously hurled this question at many of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him for water baptism:

"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Matthew 3:7 A.V.

Who knows but that some who Jesus later accused of being "a generation of vipers" had first heard the connotation from the lips of John the Baptist?

Satan the Devil. At Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 God's principal opposer, Satan, is referred to as "the original serpent," evidently because of his employing the literal serpent in Eden as his means of communication with the woman. (Ge 3:1-15) As "the original serpent," he is also the progenitor in a spiritual sense of other opposers; hence Jesus' classification of such ones as "serpents, offspring of vipers."—Mt 23:33; compare Joh 8:44; 1Jo 3:12.

As a most reprehensible part of the seed of the Serpent, the scribes and the Pharisees in first-century Judaism took the lead in persecuting and finally murdering the primary representative of the seed of the woman. Thus, the Serpent was able to "bruise him [the "seed"] in the heel." (Genesis 3:15; John 8:39-44; Acts 3:12, 15) Why is this described as only a heel wound? It is because this wounding touched him only briefly here on earth. It was not permanent because God resurrected Jesus on the third day and exalted him to spirit life.—Acts 2:32, 33; 1 Peter 3:18.

[Hermenuetics.StackExchange.org](http://www.jerusalemzoo.org.il/index.php?lang=en&act=ecommerce&cat=1950&id=13914&str=palestine)

[In Matthew 12:34 what did Jesus mean when he called the Pharisees "a brood of vipers"?](#)

Jesus uses harsh words to describe how wicked the scribes and Pharisees are. While he's calling them snakes, he's specifically using vipers as the best metaphor everyone listening will understand. Everyone knows the viper is the most dangerous and worst in terms of looks, with double-forked tongues and venomous fangs, but also in what they do. When they aggressively attack and bite to give venom, they don't let go. Their poisonous bites often lead to painful deaths. Furthermore, they multiply quickly.

<http://www.jerusalemzoo.org.il/index.php?lang=en&act=ecommerce&cat=1950&id=13914&str=palestine>

While Jesus mentioned the viper to help discipline and warn the scribes and Pharisees, he had already mentioned the scribes and Pharisees to help teach and warn his crowds. He told them to do just the opposite of the "religious leaders".

“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20)

“So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men.” (Matthew 6:2)

After Jesus becomes harsh and gets the scribes' and Pharisees' attention,

Matthew 12:34 (NASB)

“You **brood of vipers**, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”

two verses later he reminds and warns them of judgment day.

Matthew 12:36-37 (NASB)

“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the **day of judgment**. 37 For by your words you will be **justified**, and by your words you will be **condemned**.”

The scribes and Pharisees might think Jesus is insulting them, but he's actually giving them a metaphor, specifically the viper, to almost scare them. He's warning them. He's very upset, yet this is the first of two times in Matthew he warns them of what they'll face later, their day of judgment.

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John the Baptist also knew how wicked the “religious leaders” were. In some of his first words in Matthew, John called them vipers, but that was to get their attention and warn them of Jesus.

Matthew 3:7 (NASB)

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You **brood of vipers**, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Four verses later John warned them, but of Jesus (vs. judgment day).

Matthew 3:11 (NASB)

"As for me, I baptize you with **water for repentance**, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit and fire**. Later in Matthew after the crowds hear Jesus say "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees" (or "blind" ones guides, fools) seven times, he again calls them vipers and immediately mentions their final sentencing.

Matthew 23:33 (NASB)

"You serpents, you **brood of vipers**, how will you escape the **sentence of hell**?" In summary, John the Baptist called the scribes and Pharisees a "brood of vipers" as he warned them of Jesus. What Jesus meant to do when he called the scribes and Pharisees a "brood of vipers" was get their attention and warn about judgment day. At the same time he was using that metaphor to tell his people how dangerous and evil the scribes and Pharisees were (i.e. like vipers); he was warning them also. They'd better not act like either one of them.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, [there was a strong connection](#) between serpents, evil and the underworld and this connection extended [into](#) most [other](#) mesopotamian cultures as well. Because of this association, serpents developed a highly negative connotation and any association with them was thus considered offensive. This however is a pretty simplistic observation. To begin to understand just how offensive this really is, one must first understand a concept called "Ascribed Honor" and its connection to genealogies. In a [lecture before the Biblical Archaeology Society](#), Anthropologist Dr. Richard Rohrbaugh explains the importance of Ascribed Honor and its relationship to genealogies. He explains that this honor ranking runs the social system of the middle-east and that one's heritage is the most important social consideration and reputation it tantamount to one's position in the community. I have transcribed some relevant excerpts of this lecture below:
Now, The Baltic Culture Continent that you and I live in, anthropologist call a "Guilt Culture".
...the Mediterranean Culture Continent both today and in antiquity is what anthropologists call an "Honor-Shame Culture".

...

Honor is relatively simple actually to understand. Honor is your standing in the pecking order of the village, together with the public recognition of that. There is no such thing as claiming honor that the village does not recognize. To claim honor that the village does not recognize is to be uppity; brash; a braggart; a fool. Honor is public reputation in the village and everybody in the village knows exactly where you stand in the pecking order. The reason for that is there are two primary ways in which you can get your honor rating or ranking in a village. ...

The overwhelming way in which you get your honor rating is from your birth. It's what anthropologist call "ascribed honor." It's the honor that you get the day you pop out of the

womb. It's the honor that you and every member of your extended family has - male and female - everybody in your family has, has always had, and always will have. That kind of Ascribed Honor means that if you are born in a very high family, you have a high honor ranking. If you are born a low-life, you have a low honor ranking and you're probably going to have a till the day you die. So the overwhelming way in which you get your honor is from the family of your birth. Do you now understand why genealogies are so important in the Bible? Genealogies indicate in writing what a village knows orally. Namely, the family you were born in and hence the honor ranking you have.

...

Genealogies are, if you will, a kind of a map for the whole community - describing exactly where in the scheme of things you fit. Among non-literate people (which in antiquity was about ninety-six percent of the population); among non-literate people genealogies would be very short. Only upper class wealthy people have written genealogies. And you understand that the longer the genealogy, the better? Because it means you're from old money not new money. You understand?

...What I find interesting is the genealogy in Luke - It goes all the way back to "son of seth, son of Adam, son of God". That is, it traces it to the beginning. That's the longest genealogy possible. Do you understand that in honor claim is being made? In fact we know from Roman texts that people in the Roman world who did become newly rich and wanted to move up the social ladder hired genealogists to create fictive genealogies for themselves and there were a few stars in the pantheon of Roman ancestors they all wanted to be associated with. For a fee, you could get that association. Now you have the map that tells everybody where you fit in the pecking order of things and that had an enormous impact on your life.

I'm going to show you some slides in a minute of some ancient text that describe the fact that your honor ranking determine who ate with whom, who could marry whom, who spoke to whom, who listened to whom. It determined who would speak first in a conversation. It determined who would marry whom and who would do business with whom. In fact it determined most of the social patterns of your life. It's therefore critically important that everybody in the village know exactly where you stand - because it provides the road map for how you and I are going to interact with each other.

...

Jesus comes from a no-account little village. He's a village - a τέκτων (tektón) he is called in the Greek. We translate it carpenter - it could be a worker in metal, stone, or wood. I don't have time today but to show you just how low on the social scale that really is - It's very near the bottom. People like that don't get up and talk in public. So when Jesus does, It confuses everybody. In the Middle-East they expect somebody born of a great family to be great. You're born of a low family you're going to be no-account. What does not compute in their social compass is somebody born to a low-life family who turns out to be great. How do you explain that?

Well of course what Matthew and Luke do to explain it is they give us these very elaborate birth stories in which they try to tell us that God was somehow unusually involved in this birth.

Otherwise there could be no expectation that anybody would listen to Jesus. What do his opponents do in the twentieth chapter of Luke? They say, "Who gives you the authority to speak like this?" Note that they didn't say, "Did you have this authority from your birth?" They know that's not true. "Who gave you this authority?" Their assumption is somebody had to have acquired the honor from somebody who recognized it because all honor has to be publicly recognized.

...

We're not often aware of it when we read the English Bible but Jesus is extremely skilled at this kind of insult. Some of you may remember that in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, Jesus calls his opponents - It's translated in the English - "**A brood of vipers.**" That is not exactly what the Greek says. The Greek says, "*You snake-bastards*" *Now think about that in honor-shame culture. If you get your honor ranking from your family, to call some of the illegitimate son of a snake - that is the Mediterranean equivalent of a dirty mouth.*

In other words, the closest English equivalent would have been for Jesus to call the pharisees "sons of bitches", except this modern insult probably isn't as offensive as the one Jesus used.

FEBRUARY 9, 1981

John the Baptist and the Brood of Vipers

Sunday Evening Message

- Resource by
John Piper
- Scripture: [Luke 3:1-9](#) Topic: [Repentance](#)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

The Word of God Rooted in Historical Truth

I never have agreed with those people in the history of the church who rejected all fiction as worthless for Christians to read, since it's not factual but deceptive. It is true that novelists and poets and short story writers can deceive, but this is not the case with all writers of fiction. In fact the greatest novelists have their goal not to deceive but to undeceive, that is, to use the medium of a powerful story to unmask our hypocrisies and follies and drive home a great truth. Of course it's not the kind of truth you get in a court report: factual data of events that actually happened. It's moral truth, or truth about human nature.

There have been people who want to view the gospels of the New Testament that way. They say the factual data about events that actually happened are unimportant; what matters is the moral truth, the insight into human nature, the reflected ideals. That would be an appropriate view if the authors of our gospels *intended* to write that way. But you can't read [Luke 3:1](#) and [2](#) and miss the point of the author, namely, the people of these accounts were as real as your next-door neighbor, the time and place of these events are not in my imagination, but in the flow of world history. John the Baptist's

ministry has as much reality in time and space as the rulers you can read about in the history books.

It's as if someone were to say to you in 30 years, John Piper came from Bethel College to Bethlehem Baptist Church, when Jimmy Carter was president of the United States, and Al Quie was governor of Minnesota, and Donald Fraser was mayor in Minneapolis, and David Durenberger and Rudy Boschwitz were U.S. Senators from Minnesota, and Warren Magnuson was General Secretary of the Baptist General Conference, and Dick Turnwall was the Executive Minister of the Minnesota Baptist Conference. For most of you that would locate my coming to this church squarely in real remembered history. And that's what Luke was doing for Theophilus, himself probably a Roman official.

So the time and place of the beginning of John's ministry is fixed for us in relation to known historical people and places. The fifteenth year of Tiberias' reign was AD 27 or 28, and the place of John's emergence was out of the wilderness into all the region around the Jordan River.

Now what makes this event significant is what we see in the last part of verse 2, "The word of God came to John." Like all the prophets of the Old Testament, John's authority and power came not from himself but from God. [Luke 1:15](#) said he was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. And so now he comes to preach with a word from God and in the power of God's Spirit. That means that even though we live 2,000 years later, we had better listen to John's message because it is *God's* message, and there is nothing we need more than a clear word from God for our souls.

John's Baptism of Repentance

In verse 3 John's preaching is described as a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Back in chapter 1 the angel Gabriel had told Zechariah what John's ministry would be, and his words explain what Luke means by repentance in 3:3. "He will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit

and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" ([Luke 1:16](#), [17](#)). Notice the repetition of the word *turn*: he will *turn* many of the Israelites to the Lord their God. He will *turn* the hearts of the fathers and *turn* the disobedient. This is the meaning of repentance: a turning of the direction of our life and the affections of our heart, so that we become oriented on God and love the things he loves. John promises the people "forgiveness of sins" in response to their repentance, their turning to God, but he calls them to demonstrate the seriousness of their turning by accepting baptism in the Jordan.

This was a remarkable demand of John on his Jewish kinsmen. In the context in which John lived baptism had one main significance among the Jews: it was the symbolic rite that proselytes had to go through to become Jewish. This made John's baptism very offensive. It implied that unless the Jews were willing to repent, they were not really Jews and could not count on the promised blessings God had made to his chosen people. Or to put it another way, in calling *Jews* to accept a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, John was telling them that they cannot rely on their Jewishness for salvation; they have to be changed in their heart toward God.

And Luke's understanding of John's baptism is that it implied that the way was open for Gentiles to repent and be forgiven. If Jewishness does not save, then Gentilishness does not necessarily condemn: the issue is repentance toward God. The way Luke shows us that John's baptism and preaching had this significance is in the quotation he cites from Isaiah in verses 4–6. One of the ways to find out what the special point is that Luke wants to make is to compare his account with Matthew's and Mark's and see what Luke adds or omits. All three—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—quote [Isaiah 40:3](#) as a description of John's ministry: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (cf. [Matthew 3:3](#), [Mark 1:3](#)). But Luke is the only one who goes on to quote [Isaiah 40:4](#), [5](#), "Every valley shall be filled and every mountain shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Why did Luke go on to quote [Isaiah 40:4](#) and [5](#)? I think the reason was to point out that the repentance John was beginning

to preach and the salvation that Jesus will bring is for *all flesh*, not just for Israel. The mountains are lowered, the crooked ways are straightened, the rough ways are smoothed, so that *all flesh, all people*, might see and have access to salvation.

There is a really interesting confirmation that this is just what Luke is trying to get across here. The Greek word for salvation in [Luke 3:6](#) is not the more common one, but a rare one that occurs in Luke's two volumes, Luke-Acts, only three times: here, in 2:30, and in [Acts 28:28](#). Notice that the point in each place is to stress that now salvation is being made clearly available for Gentiles as well as Jews. In [Luke 2:30-31](#) Simeon says of the baby Jesus, "My eyes have seen thy *salvation* which thou hast prepared *in the presence of all peoples*, a light for revelation to the Gentiles." And in [Acts 28:28](#) Paul says to the Jews who rejected the Gospel, "Let it be known to you that this *salvation* of God *has been sent to the Gentiles*; they will listen." So Luke begins and ends his big two-volume work with this emphasis: the salvation Jesus brings is for all men, and any attempt to limit its proclamation or effect to any ethnic group or groups is wrong. So I think Luke confirms for us that John's baptism implies both that Jewishness is no guarantee of salvation *and* that non-Jewishness is no hindrance from salvation; what matters is repentance unto the forgiveness of sins.

John's Message to the Brood of Vipers

Now notice that John hasn't even spoken yet. Everything so far has been Luke's description and interpretation of John's ministry. Now he lets John speak. And what we hear is a confirmation of what we have heard already from Luke. Verse 7: "He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'" With this first sentence, John does four things. First, he very bluntly tells the whole crowd that they are in a rotten condition. You are a brood of vipers. What does that mean to Jews schooled in the Old Testament? In Genesis 3 Satan is pictured as a serpent or a viper, and God says to the serpent, "I will put enmity between . . . your seed and her seed" ([Genesis 3:15](#)). So when anybody said you were the seed or the brood of a viper, it was the same as saying you

were sons of the devil. That's exactly what Jesus said in [John 8:43](#) to another crowd, "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." So John's first word is an indictment of his listeners: you are people in Satan's grip. You are his children with his nature.

Second, John warns that there is wrath on the way. God will bring judgment upon Satan and all his allies. In verse 17 John pictures the Messiah's coming like this, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." There is wheat and there is chaff. There are sons of God and sons of the viper, and the one will be gathered into the barn of heaven and the other thrown into the fire of hell. So John warns that there is a coming wrath which makes the plight of vipers extremely precarious.

Third, John mentions that there is an escape from wrath. You can flee from it, and the vipers are fleeing in the right direction, namely, to the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When God forgives sins, it is the same as removing his wrath. There is no more condemnation for those who repent and receive forgiveness.

Finally, John hints, by his question, that the crowd's decision to come to him in search of salvation was not something they came to on their own. Someone showed them they needed to repent. I understand John's question to mean something like this: "Well of all things, the sons of the devil are fleeing the impending wrath. Who could have possibly made it plain to you that you needed to repent?" John is amazed, I think, that they have really been made aware of their need to flee God's wrath. It was no small thing for a Jew to admit he was under the wrath of God and liable to be burned like chaff in unquenchable fire. But here they were offering themselves for John's baptism. And John is amazed. If we could ask John, "What is the answer to your question: Who did warn them to flee?" what would he have said? I think he would have said, "*God* warned them." If Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father draw him," then surely it would be true earlier that no son of the viper can come to repentance unless God draw him. So

in an indirect way, John's question was giving tribute to the grace of God for impressing on these people their need of salvation.

The Children of Abraham

Now in verse 8 John tries to give these former vipers a new image of what they are. You are no longer poisonous snakes now that you are repenting, you are fruitful trees. There is fruit that comes from genuine repentance. Start bearing that fruit as a witness to others and to your own conscience that you have truly turned to God. He spells out some of what that fruit is in verses 10–14, but first he gives a warning. It's this warning in verse 8 that confirms to us Luke's earlier explanation of John's baptism, namely, that Jewishness is no guarantee of salvation, and non-Jewishness is no hindrance from salvation.

John says in verse 8, "Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'" Don't let the old serpent sow the deceptive seed in your mind: "Hey! What am I doing here in this river getting baptized like a common Gentile! Who does this guy think he is telling *sons of Abraham* that we are in the same boat with the rest of the world and under God's wrath? Why, haven't we learned from the time we were little the word of God to Abraham in [Genesis 17:7](#) and [8](#)? 'I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.' *How* can a son of Abraham, then, ever worry about being swept away like chaff by the wrath of God?" John is warning the Jews that such a line of reasoning is a great mistake. A person should never think that any merely human distinctive (like Jewishness) can obligate God to bless. The Jews are a great lesson book to all of us who tend to rely on anything for salvation other than the mercy of God.

John gives the reason why Jews shouldn't rely on their Jewishness: "For I tell you, God is able to raise up from these stones children to Abraham." This is a tremendously revealing statement. The first thing it reveals is that John and the Jews *agree* on something. They agree that there must be children of Abraham to inherit the promises, otherwise God's word would fail. They agree that God's word will never fail and that there will always be children of Abraham to inherit the promises.

The Freedom and Power of God

But the second thing John's statement reveals is a profound *disagreement* with the Jews if they start to rely on their Jewishness. They disagree about the *freedom and the power of God*. Some of the Jews think that by virtue of their physical Jewishness they've got God in a corner. He *must* bless them. He *can't* pour out wrath on them, because he always keeps his word. So it does not matter finally if they are repentant or not. They are relying not on God's mercy but on their own ethnic human distinctive. What they fail to see, and what John shows them, is that God is not as boxed in as they think. He is able *both* to keep his promises to Abraham *and* to put a stop to their boasting in their physical descent from Abraham. How? He can wipe them out in his wrath and raise up out of nothing a new people for himself who will bear the fruits of repentance and trust not themselves but in God's free mercy alone.

What these Jews had forgotten—and it's what all people forget when they try to obligate God by any of their human distinctives or human efforts—they forgot the freedom of God to have mercy on whomever he wills. They forgot the power of God who can always find a way to rebuke human self-reliance while keeping his promises. So verse 9 repeats the warning implicit in verse 7. "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Don't trust in the kind of tree you are. If there is no fruit that accords with repentance, you will be destroyed. It doesn't matter if the tree is Jewish or Gentile; what matters is repentance and its fruit.

Let me conclude by defining repentance afresh now that we have seen in a new way what the Jews were being called to *turn away from* and what they were being called to *turn to*. It should make us tremble to think that a people who had such a strong God consciousness and who believed that God would keep his promises could nevertheless be called a "brood of vipers" and be threatened with hell fire. Are there not religious people today who don't believe this much but feel secure? We must look very carefully to see what repentance is here, that we too might flee the coming wrath.

In view of what we have seen in John's warning, I would define repentance like this: Repentance is *turning away* from any and all reliance upon what I am by birth (like Jewish or Gentile) or what I have done by my own effort, and *turning to* the absolutely free mercy of God for the hope of salvation. Mercy by its very nature cannot be constrained or obligated by human distinctives or efforts. As Paul says in [Romans 9:15, 16](#), "God says 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So it depends not on man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy." But for our comfort and assurance, God has revealed that there is one thing that always receives mercy, and that is *reliance on mercy*, which is what the New Testament means by *faith*.

Repentance, therefore, is the altering of what we rely on in life, what we hope in, what we are counting on for salvation in the age to come and for help now. The repentance that leads to forgiveness of sins is turning away from what we are by birth or achieve by effort to rely wholly on mercy, God's free and sovereign grace.

There is a lifestyle that follows such repentance just as surely as cats have kittens and dogs have puppies. But we will talk about that next week from verses 10–14.

[John Piper \(@JohnPiper\)](#) is founder and teacher of [desiringGod.org](#) and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is author of [more than 50 books](#), including *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* and most recently *Foundations for Lifelong Learning: Education in Serious Joy*.

Why Did John The Baptist Say You Brood Of Vipers

Published: February 21, 2024

Written by: [Susan Kearney](#)

Discover the significance of John the Baptist's words "You brood of vipers" and explore the theological implications. Uncover the deeper meaning behind this powerful statement.

Introduction

The statement "You brood of vipers!" attributed to John the Baptist is a striking and enigmatic declaration that has captivated theologians, scholars, and spiritual seekers for centuries. This powerful phrase, recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (3:7), is often cited as an example of John's uncompromising and confrontational preaching style. It serves as a poignant reminder of the profound impact of his message and the timeless relevance of his words.

John the Baptist, a central figure in Christian tradition, is renowned for his role as the herald of Jesus Christ and his unwavering commitment to proclaiming a message of repentance and spiritual renewal. His confrontational style and unyielding call for repentance have made him a compelling and enigmatic figure in religious history.

The utterance "You brood of vipers!" is a testament to the fervency and urgency with which John the Baptist delivered his message. It encapsulates the uncompromising nature of his ministry and underscores the gravity of the spiritual transformation he sought to inspire in his audience. To truly comprehend the significance of this statement, it is essential to delve into the historical and cultural context in which it was uttered, as well as the deeper theological implications it carries.

As we embark on an exploration of John the Baptist's powerful proclamation, we will unravel the contextual backdrop against which these words were spoken, delve into the profound meaning of "brood of vipers," and contemplate the enduring relevance of John the Baptist's message in contemporary spiritual and theological discourse. Through this journey, we will gain a deeper understanding of the profound impact of John the Baptist's ministry and the timeless wisdom encapsulated in his impassioned declaration.

The Context of John the Baptist's Statement

The proclamation "You brood of vipers!" by John the Baptist was delivered within a specific historical and cultural milieu that profoundly shaped its

significance. **John the Baptist** emerged as a prominent figure in the Judean wilderness, heralding a message of repentance and spiritual renewal. His **ministry unfolded against the backdrop of a society grappling with religious, political, and social upheaval.**

During the time of John the Baptist, Judea was under Roman occupation, and the Jewish people experienced a palpable sense of oppression and disillusionment. **The religious landscape was marked by a complex tapestry of sects and movements, each vying for influence and adherents.** In this tumultuous environment, **John the Baptist's voice resonated with a sense of urgency and moral clarity.**

John's scathing rebuke of the religious leaders and the phrase "You brood of vipers!" was directed at **the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to witness his baptism. These religious authorities were perceived as hypocritical and spiritually bankrupt, despite their outward displays of piety. John's confrontational rhetoric was a direct challenge to their complacency and moral ambivalence, urging them to undergo genuine repentance and transformation.**

Furthermore, **the wilderness setting of John's ministry holds symbolic significance.** It harkens back to the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and their subsequent journey through the wilderness, evoking themes of

purification, testing, and preparation. John's call to repentance in the wilderness echoed the prophetic traditions of the Hebrew Scriptures, invoking a sense of impending divine judgment and the need for spiritual readiness.

In this context, ***John the Baptist's declaration served as a bold and unapologetic indictment of the moral and spiritual state of the religious elite. It embodied a radical call to authenticity, ethical integrity, and genuine transformation.*** By understanding the historical and cultural backdrop of John's proclamation, we gain a deeper appreciation of its profound significance and the transformative power it sought to unleash upon its audience.

The Meaning of "Brood of Vipers"

The phrase "brood of vipers" used by John the Baptist carries profound symbolic and theological significance. In the context of his **scathing rebuke** directed at the Pharisees and Sadducees, this evocative expression serves as a potent metaphor laden with rich historical and spiritual connotations.

The term "vipers" conjures imagery of venomous snakes, known for their stealth, cunning, and deadly bite. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, serpents have been emblematic of deceit, temptation, and spiritual peril

since the account of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. As such, the designation of the religious leaders as a **"brood of vipers" encapsulates a searing indictment of their moral character and spiritual authenticity.**

Furthermore, **the term "brood" denotes offspring or descendants, implying a lineage or collective identity. By employing this term, John the Baptist not only denounces the individual actions of the religious elite but also condemns the systemic corruption and spiritual decay that had taken root within their ranks.**

The phrase "brood of vipers" thus serves as a sweeping denunciation of the pervasive moral decay and spiritual hypocrisy that had infested the religious establishment of the time.

Moreover, the imagery of vipers as offspring underscores the insidious nature of spiritual corruption, highlighting its capacity to propagate and perpetuate itself across generations. This portrayal accentuates the urgent need for radical transformation and spiritual renewal, as the entrenched patterns of hypocrisy and moral compromise had become deeply ingrained within the religious leadership.

In essence, the phrase "brood of vipers" encapsulates a forceful and unambiguous condemnation of the moral and spiritual state of the religious authorities, underscoring the urgent imperative for genuine

repentance and ethical transformation. It serves as a stark reminder of the profound moral responsibility entrusted to religious leaders and the perilous consequences of spiritual complacency and moral duplicity.

By delving into the profound symbolism and theological depth of the phrase "brood of vipers," we gain a heightened awareness of the gravity of John the Baptist's message and the timeless relevance of his impassioned proclamation in challenging spiritual complacency and calling for authentic moral integrity.

The Implications of John the Baptist's Words

John the Baptist's piercing declaration, "You brood of vipers!" reverberates with profound implications that resonate across theological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. This bold proclamation carries far-reaching consequences that transcend its immediate historical context, offering timeless insights and imperatives for introspection and transformation.

First and foremost, John the Baptist's words serve as a resounding call

to authenticity and moral integrity. By denouncing the religious leaders as

a "brood of vipers," **he confronts the pervasive hypocrisy and moral decay**

within the religious establishment. This indictment challenges individuals and

institutions alike to uphold genuine ethical principles and eschew the trappings

of superficial piety and self-righteousness.

Furthermore, the designation of the religious elite as a "brood of vipers" underscores the insidious nature of spiritual corruption and the imperative for radical transformation.

It highlights the peril of allowing moral compromise and duplicity to take root within the fabric of religious leadership and communal life.

John the Baptist's words compel individuals and communities to vigilantly safeguard against the subtle encroachments of spiritual decay and to actively pursue a path of moral rectitude and spiritual authenticity.

Moreover, the implications of John the Baptist's declaration extend to the broader societal and communal dimensions. By exposing the moral bankruptcy of the religious authorities, he challenges the prevailing power structures and calls for a reorientation of values towards justice, compassion, and genuine piety. His words serve as a clarion call for societal transformation, urging a collective reckoning with the ethical and spiritual foundations that underpin communal life.

Additionally, the profound implications of John the Baptist's words reverberate across the annals of religious and ethical discourse, transcending temporal

and cultural boundaries. His uncompromising stance against spiritual complacency and moral hypocrisy serves as a timeless admonition, compelling individuals and communities of all epochs to uphold the highest ethical standards and to cultivate a spirit of genuine repentance and moral renewal.

In essence, **the implications of John the Baptist's words resound with a clarion call for ethical and spiritual authenticity, challenging individuals, institutions, and societies to confront moral decay, embrace transformative renewal, and uphold unwavering integrity. His impassioned declaration serves as an enduring testament to the enduring imperative of moral and spiritual vigilance, resonating with timeless relevance and compelling urgency.**

The Relevance of John the Baptist's Message Today

The timeless relevance of John the Baptist's message reverberates with compelling urgency in contemporary society, offering profound insights and imperatives that resonate across the spectrum of theological, ethical, and spiritual discourse. **In an era marked by moral ambiguity, societal upheaval, and spiritual disillusionment, the resounding call to authenticity and moral**

integrity articulated by John the Baptist holds poignant relevance for individuals, communities, and institutions today.

Amidst the complexities of modern life, the designation of the religious elite as a "brood of vipers" serves as a poignant reminder of the insidious nature of spiritual decay and moral compromise. It challenges contemporary religious leaders and institutions to uphold unwavering ethical principles, eschewing the trappings of superficial piety and embracing a genuine commitment to moral rectitude. Furthermore, John the Baptist's uncompromising stance against hypocrisy calls for a radical reevaluation of the ethical foundations that underpin religious leadership, urging a steadfast commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical authenticity.

Moreover, the implications of John the Baptist's message extend beyond the confines of religious spheres, permeating the fabric of societal and communal life. In an age characterized by pervasive injustices, systemic inequalities, and ethical lapses, his proclamation serves as a clarion call for societal transformation. It demands a collective reckoning with the moral imperatives of justice, compassion, and genuine piety, compelling individuals and communities to confront the prevailing power structures and advocate for a reorientation of values towards equity, empathy, and ethical responsibility.

Additionally, the enduring relevance of John the Baptist's message transcends temporal and cultural boundaries, resonating with timeless urgency and compelling relevance. His unwavering call for repentance and spiritual renewal echoes across the annals of religious and ethical discourse, challenging individuals of all epochs to uphold the highest ethical standards and cultivate a spirit of genuine moral integrity.

In a world fraught with moral relativism and ethical ambivalence, his impassioned declaration serves as an enduring testament to the imperative of moral and spiritual vigilance, offering timeless wisdom and guidance for navigating the complexities of contemporary existence.

In essence, the relevance of John the Baptist's message today lies in its capacity to inspire transformative renewal, ethical introspection, and a steadfast commitment to moral authenticity. His resounding call for ethical and spiritual vigilance resonates with compelling urgency, offering timeless imperatives for individuals, communities, and societies to embrace unwavering integrity, confront moral decay, and embark on a path of genuine moral and spiritual renewal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the resounding declaration of "You brood of vipers!" attributed to John the Baptist encapsulates a profound and timeless message that reverberates across the corridors of theological, ethical, and spiritual discourse. This powerful proclamation, delivered within a specific historical and cultural context, carries profound implications that transcend temporal and cultural boundaries, offering enduring imperatives for moral and spiritual introspection.

The contextual backdrop of John the Baptist's statement unveils a society grappling with religious, political, and social upheaval, underscoring the urgency and moral clarity of his message. His confrontational rhetoric, directed at the religious elite of his time, serves as a bold indictment of spiritual complacency and moral decay, compelling individuals and institutions to confront the pervasive hypocrisy and embrace a path of genuine repentance and ethical transformation.

The metaphorical richness of the phrase "brood of vipers" unveils a searing denunciation of the moral and spiritual state of the religious authorities, highlighting the insidious nature of spiritual corruption and the imperative for radical renewal. This potent imagery serves as a timeless admonition, challenging individuals and communities of all epochs to uphold unwavering integrity and confront moral decay with resolute determination.

Furthermore, the enduring relevance of John the Baptist's message today lies in its capacity to inspire transformative renewal, ethical introspection, and a steadfast commitment to moral authenticity. In an era marked by moral ambiguity, societal upheaval, and spiritual disillusionment, his resounding call to authenticity and moral integrity offers poignant relevance for individuals, communities, and institutions, compelling them to confront moral decay, embrace transformative renewal, and uphold unwavering ethical principles.

In essence, **the proclamation "You brood of vipers!" stands as a timeless testament to the enduring imperative of moral and spiritual vigilance, resonating with compelling urgency and offering timeless imperatives for individuals, communities, and societies to embrace unwavering integrity, confront moral decay, and embark on a path of genuine moral and spiritual renewal.**

John the Baptist's impassioned declaration continues to echo through the corridors of time, challenging humanity to uphold the highest ethical standards and cultivate a spirit of genuine moral integrity.

LEARNINGforJUSTICE.org

WHY FROGS AND SNAKES NEVER PLAY TOGETHER: A POURQUOI OF PREJUDICE; A PLAY IN 3 ACTS

"Why Frogs and Snakes Never Play Together" is a brief play written by Jeff Sapp.

AUTHOR

JEFF SAPP
GRADE LEVEL

K-2

Text Type: Literature

Topic: Bullying & Bias

Subject: Civics; Geography

Social Justice Domain: Diversity Justice

Social Justice Standard

JU12 DI6 JU13 DI9 JU11 DI8 DI7
Complexity

Early to mid 2nd

HIGHLIGHT VOCABULARY TERMS

THE PLOT

A chance meeting of a family of frogs and a family of snakes in the woods one day allows wonderful and fun new friendships to be made. Later, when the siblings tell their parents about their new friends, they are told to never play together again. Find out why in this easy-to-produce play that teaches about the serious topic of prejudice.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

FROG SIBLINGS

- Croaker
- Warts
- Tadpole
- Mother Frog
- Father Frog

SNAKE SIBLINGS

- Slithera
- Hiss
- Fang
- Mother Snake
- Father Snake
- Sun
- Moon
- Wind
- A Field of Flowers
- A Grove of Trees
- Narrator
- Pourquoi Instructor

UNDERSTUDIES

There is no need for casting to become competitive. The casting can include various understudies who can take turns playing lead roles as well as participating in the group roles of trees and flowers. Also, the Narrator role may be shared by more than one student.

COSTUMES

Keep it simple. Green T-shirts for frogs, gray T-shirts for snakes, yellow for sun, blue for moon, brown for trees, bright colors for flowers, white for wind and black for the narrator

and pourquoi instructor. To add art lessons to the production of this play, have students use poster board to make a sun face, moon face, wind face, flower and tree faces.

PROPS

Minimal. Father Frog needs a large newspaper with a heading The Daily Fly. Parent animals may be sitting watching television, playing cards or cooking. These activities may be pantomimed, without sets, or you may create simple sets to accompany the play.

SUGGESTED USES OF THE PLAY

- Back-to-School night
- Parent-Teacher night
- As a traveling show where older classes perform for younger classes in the same school
- As a traveling show where one elementary, middle or high school travels to a local elementary school
- As a traveling show to perform for community groups

OPTIONS FOR EARLY GRADES

This play works for preschool children and other young children if parents or guardians read the lines and the children pantomime. Children also may draw the characters, put them on sticks and perform the play as a puppet show.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What did the frogs and snakes do when they met each other in the forest?
- What did they learn later that night from their parents?
- What do the youngest frog and snake do at the very end of the story that brings us hope? Why does it bring us hope?

WRITE AN ALTERNATIVE ENDING

The story can have an alternative ending written by the children to express a more tolerant view.

Load questions for the students to begin rewriting the story can be:

- What would happen if the frogs and snakes continued to play together?
- What would the parents do if they met?
- What would happen if the two families got together at a park and got to know each other?

—ACT ONE—

POURQUOI INSTRUCTOR: The word “pourquoi” — pronounced por-kwa — comes from the French word for “why.” A pourquoi is different from a folktale. A folktale tells about the origin of nature, like who will be the sun or how night came. A pourquoi tells about an explanation of nature that came later, like how the camel got its hump or how the leopard got its spots. Our tale is a pourquoi and we hope you enjoy it as much as we do...

NARRATOR:

This African pourquoi tale takes place a long, long time ago in the jungle, before there were people.

(The staging should look like a tropical rainforest and have a clearing in the middle for the actors. As the play begins, we see the Frog siblings leaving their parents to go play in the forest. The Snake siblings are already stage right, basking in the warmth provided by the Sun. After saying goodbye to their parents, the Frogs happen upon the Snakes, and this is where our tale begins.)

WARTS:

Mom, Dad! We’re going into the jungle to play and look for flies for snacks. Ribbit, ribbit.

TADPOLE:

Yeah, ribbit, we’ll be back before the Sun sets.

FROG SIBLINGS TOGETHER:

See you later, bye, ribbit, ribbit, ribbit.

(Frog siblings say all of this together and hop away from their parents. Father Frog is reading a newspaper called The Daily Fly.)

MOTHER FROG:

Now you kids stay away from the elephant paths for heaven's sake. You saw what happened to that nice little frog across the pond. Oh my, ribbit! He was such a sweet tadpole, too.

(Mother Frog looks up at the ceiling and covers her face as if an elephant foot were about to crush her. Frog children exit the stage.)

—ACT TWO—

(Frog siblings come on stage, stop moving and get quiet. Snake siblings are lying on rocks, basking in the Sun who looks down upon them. The Snake siblings act as if they're snoring, but instead of snores each lets out a loud, long snake "Sssssssssssssssssssss!" After a few moments of snake snoring, the Frogs continue to the center of the stage laughing and playing. Suddenly, all six of them freeze and gasp at the same time.)

CROAKER:

Ribbit.

SLITHERA:

Ssssss.

WARTS:

Ribbit, ribbit.

HISS:

Ssssss, ssssss.

TADPOLE:

Ribbit, ribbit, ribbit.

FANG:

Ssssss, ssssss, ssssss.

CROAKER:

(Introducing himself to Slithera) Hi, I'm Croaker.

What's your name?

SLITHERA:

(Shaking Croaker's hand)

Hi, Croaker. My name is Slithera. Nice to meet you.

(All other siblings shake hands and the audience hears them say their names all at once: Croaker, Warts, Tadpole, Slithera, Hiss, Fang.)

HISS:

Hey, would you want to play some gamesssssssssss
with usssssssss?

ALL FROGS:

Sure! Yes! Absolutely! Ribbit, ribbit!

NARRATOR:

And so all day long the frog children and the snake children had the MOST fun they could have ever imagined! What wonderful games they played. First, all the frogs taught the snakes how to play leap frog and catch flies. And then all the snakes taught the frogs how to play “strike and hug” — which really was not supposed to be a game at all. The snakes learned how to hop, and the frogs learned how to slide.

The entire day was wonderful. The Wind blew a cool breeze over them. The Grove of Trees clapped their limbs in joy. And the Wildflowers in the forest giggled their pleasure at the fun play the children were all having together. They played happily together all day long until Sun went down and Moon began to rise.

(The Wind blows, the Grove of Trees claps their limbs and sways in the wind and the Flowers huddle together, point and giggle at the playful group.)

TADPOLE:

Let’s meet again tomorrow and play some more,
OK? This was more fun than gnat-flavored ice
cream and shoo-fly pie!

ALL SIBLINGS:

Yes, yes! See you tomorrow then. Thanks! Yes,
nice to meet you, too. Bye now.

—ACT THREE—

(The children run into their homes excitedly telling their parents that they met the nicest new friends today. The parents are overjoyed that they have made new friends and listen intently.)

MOTHER SNAKE:

Well, it sounds like a sssssssensssssational day in
the forest for everyone!

FATHER SNAKE:

What kinds of games did you all play together?

FANG:

Oh! We played leap frog and fly-catch and we taught them to play “strike and hug” and ...

(The snake parents gasp and look at each other in horror before interrupting Fang.)

MOTHER SNAKE:

Oh, no! My darling children, “strike and hug” is not a game! This is how we get our food, not how we play. And my goodness! We do not hop. Why, that’s just ssssssssscandalousssssss!

FATHER SNAKE:

I forbid you to play with those kind. You must stick with your own. Eating flies! Well, I never! Shamed, I tell you! We are abssssssssssolutely sssssssssssssshamed by thissssssssss!

(The snake children all hang their heads and slither away. The same thing is happening at the frog house as well.)

FATHER FROG:

Ribbit, ribbit! Snakes are our enemies. You must NEVER play with snakes. Why it’s a miracle you’re not being digested at this very second. Ribbit, ribbit!

WARTS:

But, Dad! They’re a really nice family. They even go to the same pond as us.

TADPOLE:

Ah, Mom, you can't be serious.

(Tadpole acts like he sees a fly and sticks his tongue out, grabs the fly and begins eating it).

MOTHER FROG:

You watch your tongue, young frog!

(The frog children all hang their heads and hop sadly away.)

(The Moon goes away and the Sun comes up as the children go to the forest to play again. When they see each other, the snakes hiss and go into a striking pose and the frogs jump back in fear.)

CROAKER:

We're not allowed to play with you anymore. You are our enemy.

SLITHERA:

We're not allowed to play with you anymore,
either. You are our food.

(As they sadly walk away from each other with their heads down, the two youngest children, Tadpole and Fang, turn, smile and wave at each other happily.)

(Tadpole and Fang come center stage and hold hands to recite the following poem.)

TADPOLE:

It's sad.

FANG:

It is.

TADPOLE:

It's really sad.

BOTH:

I liked you!

FANG:

So much fun we had.

(Tadpole and Fang drop hands and begin to move away from each other.)

TADPOLE:

But now we're told that we can't play.

FANG:

That from each other we must stay.

BOTH:

Away!

(The last refrain is read slower and with a great deal of sadness.)

TADPOLE:

It's sad.

FANG:

It is.

TADPOLE:

It's really sad.

BOTH:

I liked you!

FANG:

So much fun we had.

NARRATOR:

Now we know why the frog and the snake won't be found playing games together. They were taught not to be friends. But, often, you will see the snake sunning and the frog sitting quietly on a lily pad. And when you do, it is a sure thing that they are thinking of the one day of friendship they had together a long, long time ago.

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Was Jesus Polite to False Teachers?

The following is an excerpt from *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* on **Matthew 23**.

Many Christians today are greatly concerned about the rising influences of communism, humanism, secularism, and social injustice. Yet those evils, great as they are, do not together pose the threat to Christianity that false shepherds and pastors do. **Throughout the history of redemption, the greatest threat to God's truth and God's work has been false prophets and teachers, because they propose to speak in His name. That is why the Lord's most scathing**

denunciations were reserved for the false teachers of Israel, who claimed to speak and act for God but were liars.

Yet for some reason, evangelical Christianity is often hesitant to confront false teachers with the seriousness and severity that Jesus and the apostles did, and that the godly prophets before them had done. Today, more than at any time in modern history and perhaps more than at any time in the history of the church, pagan religions and cults are seriously encroaching on societies that for centuries have been nominally Christian. Even within the church, many ideas, teachings, and philosophies that are little more than thinly veiled paganism have become popular and influential. **As in ancient Israel, the further God's people move away from the foundation of His Word, the more false religion flourishes in the world and even in their own midst.**

At no time have Christians had greater need to be discerning. They need to recognize and respect true godly shepherds who feed them God's Word and build them up in the faith, and they also must recognize and denounce those who twist and undermine God's Word, who corrupt the church and who lead lost people still further away from God's truth and from salvation.

In Matthew 23:13–33 Jesus relentlessly condemned the false spiritual leaders of Israel, in particular the scribes and Pharisees, who then held the dominant power and influence in Judaism. Jesus warned about them in His first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount (see, e.g., 5:20; 7:15), and His last sermon (Matt. 23) consists almost entirely of warnings about them and to them. In this final public message, the Lord wanted to draw the people away from those false leaders and turn them to the true teaching and the godly examples of His apostles, who would become His uniquely commissioned and endowed representatives on earth during the early years of the church. He also gave the apostles themselves a final example of the confrontational stance they would soon find it necessary to take in their proclamation and defense of the gospel.

The unbelieving scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus addressed in the Temple stood alone in their sin and were condemned alone in their guilt for misappropriating and perverting God's law and for leading Israel into heresy, just as the false prophets among their forefathers had done (vv. 30–32). But they also **stood as models of all false spiritual leaders who would come after them. Therefore, what Jesus said about them and to them is of much more than historical significance. It is essential instruction for dealing with the false leaders who abound in our own day.**

In the first twelve verses of chapter 23, Jesus had declared that the scribes and Pharisees, typical of all false spiritual leaders, were without authority, without integrity, without sympathy, without spirituality, without humility, and therefore without God's approval or blessing. Now speaking to them directly, **He asserts they are under God's harshest condemnation. In verses 13–33 Jesus pronounces seven curses, or woes, on those wicked leaders.**

The scene in the Temple that day had become volatile in the extreme, in some ways more volatile than when Jesus had cast out the merchants and money-changers the day before. At that time Jesus' anger was vented against what the religious leaders were doing outwardly, and that attack had outraged them (21:16, 23). Now, however, He attacked what they were inwardly, and that infuriated them even more.

In our day of tolerance and eclecticism, the kind of confrontation Jesus had with the scribes and Pharisees seems foreign and uncharitable. A person who speaks too harshly against a false religion or unbiblical teaching or movement is considered unkind, ungracious, and judgmental. Jesus' indictments in Matthew 23, as well as in other parts of the gospels, are so inconsistent with the idea of Christian love held by

some liberal theologians and Bible scholars, for example, that they conclude He could not have spoken them. What Jesus really said, they maintain, was modified and intensified either by the gospel writers or the sources from whom they received their information.

But the nature of Jesus' condemnation of those corrupt religious leaders is perfectly consistent with the rest of Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New. Not only that, but Jesus' words in this passage fly from His lips, as someone has said, like claps of thunder and spears of lightning.

Out of His mouth on this occasion came the most fearful and dreadful statements that Jesus uttered on earth.

They do not give the least impression of being the afterthought of an overzealous writer or copyist.

Matthew 23 is one of the most serious passages in Scripture. Jesus here makes the word *hypocrite* a synonym for scribe and for Pharisee.

He calls them sons of hell, blind guides, fools, robbers, self-indulgent, whitewashed tombs, full of hypocrisy and lawlessness, serpents, vipers, and persecutors and murderers of God's people. He uttered

every syllable with absolute self-control but
with devastating intensity.

Yet Jesus was never cold or indifferent, even toward His enemies, and on this occasion **His judgment is mingled with sorrow and deep pathos.** It is not the Son's will any more than the Father's that a single person perish, because it is the gracious divine desire that everyone would come to repentance and salvation ([2 Pet. 3:9](#)).

At the end of His denunciation, Jesus extended by implication another last invitation for belief, suggesting that He would still gladly gather any unbelievers under His wings as a mother hen gathers her chicks, if only they would be willing ([Matt. 23:37](#)).