

**Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJV)**

**15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.**

**16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?**

**17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.**

**18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit.**

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

**20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.**

Last week I focused on the words **false** and **prophet**. We emphasized that these false teachers go out of their way to look **legit**. They are careful to **appear** orthodox. And they are best recognized, not by what they **do** preach, but by what they **do not** preach.

I found these quotes since then.

Arthur Pink says, "**False prophets are to be found in the circles of the most orthodox, and they pretend to have a fervent love for souls, yet they fatally delude multitudes concerning the way of salvation. The pulpit, platform, and pamphlet hucksters have wantonly lowered the standard of divine holiness and so adulterated the Gospel in order to make it palatable to the carnal mind."**

Arthur Pink also says, "**Any preacher who rejects God's law, who denies repentance to be a condition of salvation, who assures the giddy and godless that they are loved by God, who declares that saving faith is nothing more than an act of the will which every person has the power to perform is a false prophet and should be shunned as a deadly plague"**

Now isn't it interesting that Christ told us **not to judge** in a certain sort of way earlier, but here He is telling us **we must judge**. He tells us how to judge.

This judging requires the greatest discernment.

Here is the thing we must remember. **We must judge**. But we must judge in a way that **we, ourselves** would want to **be** judged. We must use a standard that we would welcome if someone were to apply it to **us**, just like we want it applied to **them**.

We live in a day when we are urged that **no way** of **thinking**, no way of **living**, should be criticized. After all, truth is not absolute. It is relative. That which is **your truth** may not be **my truth**. That is what our world, at large, believes.

But here is Christ telling us that **this will not do**. If we want to protect **sheep**, if we want to **protect ourselves** against wolves, we must **judge properly**.

But we must also make an application that is closer to home. We do not want **to be** one of those false shepherds.

**In 1 Timothy 4:16 (NKJV) Paul tells Timothy this command-**  
**<sup>16</sup> Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.**

In my job during the week, my boss is not paid to watch to see if I **apply** what I **preach**. She does not care if I **love people like I love myself**. She does not care **how I judge others**. She just wants me to **accomplish my job** and be **civil to my fellow employees**. I will never be fired for sin in my private life if it does not affect my work. If I were to divorce my wife and shack up with someone else, it would not be something that would be evaluated in a work report.

But the job of **Christian shepherding** is completely different. It is one of the few jobs where **what you do in your private life** is part of your evaluation. If I preach something from God's word but display a commitment not to live it, I must be removed from my position.

A shepherd's **life** must reflect his **words**. Not perfectly, but substantially. If a person is a child of God, they must reflect that family resemblance. And that is doubly true for leadership.

It will not do to **preach true** things and **live false** things. If our secret lives are lived in disregard for what truths we present, we should either get that straight or be removed from ministry.

Jesus is emphasizing that principle this morning.

The question comes down to this:

What are you **proclaiming**?

What are you **living**?

Are they **contradictory**?

What is your **message**? What is your **fruit**? Is it true or false?

The point is that true faith in Christ in a person's life is **life changing**. It allows a person to do **Holy Spirit inspired** things, **godly** things, **holy** things, **faithful** things. Where the children of the devil can only do **fleshly things**.

They can only do things motivated by **fleshly impulses and fleshly motivations**. They may actually be noble acts. But they are motivated by less than a noble spirituality.

Being a Christian is a change at the core of who you are. If a person, at their core, is not in the daily struggle of surrendering their will to Christ's will, I am not sure we are safe to call that person a Christian, no matter what prayer they have prayed and what experiences they have had. Something different motivates and empowers the life of a believer. Their life is fundamentally different at the core when they come to grips with their life in Christ. That is the assumption that Christ holds. There will be different fruit in a Christian's life because the tree has been changed.

We read about the opposite in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter.

### **2 Peter 2:19-22 (NKJV)**

**19 While they (*the false teachers*) promise them (*their listeners*) liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. (So these false teachers are also false Christians)**

**20 For if, after they (*maybe the listeners or the teachers or both*) have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.**

**21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.**

**22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "*A dog returns to his own vomit,*" and, "*a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.*"**

Even in Peter's illustration, you can clean a pig up real nice on the outside. But if you do not change the nature of the pig, it will only be temporary. If you do not change the nature of the pig, it will be impossible for the pig to keep resisting the mud. It cannot be done. It can be done for a short period of time. But not indefinitely. What we are comes out.

When it comes down to true spirituality John Calvin said "**Nothing is more difficult to counterfeit than virtue.**"

That is the rule of humanity. What we are comes out. The tree you are bears its fruit. What is **core** to you **gets displayed**.

So unless there is a powerful change initiated by God Himself, you can expect your old self will continually be the thing that rules your conduct.

There is a lot of preaching out there done by well intentioned people who do not take this supernatural miracle of regeneration into consideration. John

MacArthur has fought this kind of **easy believism** all his life. He wrote two books, *The Gospel according to Jesus* and *The Gospel according to Paul* to refute it.

I found an example of this errant teaching after searching the internet for a minute.

The author in this case was asked if this young man who at one time made a **profession of Christ** and now **hates Christ** will be **in heaven**.

This is what the author said. I left out some words.

The author said- "**Is he born again, even though he now hates Jesus? He is (born again) if he ever believed in Jesus for the free gift of everlasting life. Did he ever believe in Him for his eternal salvation? If yes, then he is born again, even though now he hates Jesus.**

*The quote continues.*

**If we must persevere in faith and good works to be saved, then no one can be sure of his eternal destiny until after he dies. We all would be doomed to go through life fearing an eternity in the lake of fire because we cannot be sure that we will persevere (1 Cor 9:27). But that is not what the Lord Jesus said. He said that if we believe in Him, then we know that we have everlasting life that can never be lost (John 11:26a). Our eternal destiny is not contingent upon our persevering in faith and good works."** Bob Wilkins

Do you see the problem? The salvation being described is so powerless that it could not change this young man's heart. The young man made a profession of faith. This preacher's theology figures that due the strength of the young man's decision now, God is strong armed into saving this young man, even though now the young man **despises Christ**.

I hope we at this church love Grace. I hope we are addicted to the very idea of it. But we can never separate **grace** from all the other **attributes** of God.

Scripture describes a **powerful life change** that cannot be mistaken. Without that life change there is no reason to believe we have been a recipient of saving grace. If that change is there, we know we have. Because we could not have made that change by flesh.

That is the point we should understand here.

Just because a person has theology saying that a person is saved by Grace, that does not mean that they **understand** biblical salvation. And if they preach a salvation by grace that does not require a **change in fruit**, they are lying to you, whether they know it or not. Jesus had nothing to do with a tree that remained a bad tree with bad fruit after He did His powerful work on it. Such a thing is impossible.

**16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?**

**17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.**

So Jesus tells us that when we are judging to determine if someone is a true shepherd or a false shepherd, a true sheep or a false sheep, this is what we should look at.

We should determine **what kind of person they are by what kind of fruit they produce.**

Keep in mind we already know that the false teachers will **look** like good trees. They will look like sincere sheep on the surface. Our seemers are likely to be very wrong on our first impression.

Let's look first at the words for bad in verse 17.

The word used for the **bad tree** means in general, of poor quality, bad, unfit for use, worthless. So this tree may look fine. It may look like it is in good health. It might have nice leaves and good bark. But at the end of the day there is no fruit. We have a cherry tree on our property. We have been there for 22 years and we have gotten 2 cherries. That is a bad tree. Really it is not the tree's fault because it puts out blossoms too early and they always freeze. But it still serves as an example of a tree that is unfit for the use of producing cherries where we live.

Now what about **bad fruit**?

The word for bad here means that there is unintermitted toil but it does not produce anything. In our instance it would produce a life where there is constant effort but no godly character produced. What it produces is not the genuine that is supposed to exist.

There are examples all through scripture of this sort of thing. There are people doing all sorts of things that look spiritual, but they are not spiritual. I think of one-

**Colossians 2:20-23 (NKJV)**

**20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations--**

**21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"**

**22 which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men?**

**23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed**

**religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.**

This is a good example of something that might look like good fruit. Look what this person that Paul speaks of is willing to do. Look what this person is willing to give up. But they have no value spiritually. They look like spiritual fruit, but they are not. They are fleshly fruit.

So a bad tree is of poor quality, bad, unfit for use, worthless and it produces something that looks like good fruit but isn't.

**16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?**

**17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.**

So how do we know if it is a good tree or bad tree?

We have all probably met non believers who live very moral lives. We might be tempted to think that this is a **good tree** producing **good fruit**. But we must get down to the reasons and motives for **why** the things are done. The core question is, "**why are you doing this moral action?**" Why are you kind to people? Why do you give up your seat on the bus? Why are you willing to jump on a grenade for your squadron? Why would you risk your life for your country? Why do you treat your spouse so lovingly?

If the answer reduces down to **anything but**, because Jesus Christ loved me first, or something similar, there is nothing spiritually good in that apparent virtue. If it is not founded in faith in Christ, it is not an eternal virtue. It is not inspired by what Christ did for us on the cross. Only those things are essentially good.

John MacArthur points out that scripture lets us know that this fruit that is bad starts with a person's life. But it goes further than that. The bad fruit will be displayed in their **Character**, in their **Creed** and in their **Converts**.

Scripture describes all three as being fruit.

We have already talked about their **character**. And last week we talked about their **creed**. And the part that is mostly the problem in their creed is not as much **that which they declare** as that which they **avoid declaring**. But we have not touched on the converts.

**2 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV) says this**

**1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on**

**themselves swift destruction.**

**<sup>2</sup> And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.**

**<sup>3</sup> By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.**

**2 Peter 2:18-20 (NKJV)**

**<sup>18</sup> For when they speak great swelling *words* of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.**

**<sup>19</sup> While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.**

**<sup>20</sup> For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.**

Do you see the bad fruit here? **False prophets** are experts at producing **false converts**. Why? Because the false prophet is motivated by fleshly motivations. So how or why would they preach something different? They know what appeals to the **themselves**, so they assume the same will have the effect on **their listeners** that they want. So that is what they appeal to.

It says **“they allure them through the lusts of the flesh”**

We spoke earlier about a gospel of grace that is misrepresented. A gospel of grace that is given to take care of **sinful actions** without converting the **sinful heart**. Isn't that the **peak** of being allured through **the lust of the flesh**.

Come to Jesus because He guaranties to save you if you will just pray this prayer and think this thought. No change is really required. After that, you can live however you like and everything is covered. In fact God is **obligated** to cover it, no matter what you do. That is what gets preached by these teachers.

I cannot imagine a more flesh inspired message.

But this is nothing like what Paul preached.

What does he say about fruit?

What does Paul say the bad fruit looks like in a non believer's life? What does the fleshly fruit look like?

Then what does Paul say comes **out of a life** that has **truly** been changed by Christ? What is the evidence of a **true conversion**? What is the fruit that the good sheep and shepherds are always striving toward?

## Galatians 5:16-26 (NKJV)

**16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.**

**17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

**18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

**19 Now the works of the flesh (Bad Fruit) are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,**

**20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,**

**21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit (Good Fruit) is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

**23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.**

**24 And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

**25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.**

**26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

So the false prophet, the false speaker for God is going to bring forth bad fruit. They will bring forth **character** that is rooted in **fleshly motivations**. They will preach false creeds that don't bring people into a **true repentant conversion** that changes them from the **inside out**. And they will bring forth **converts** that will be acting upon the same fleshly motivations as the false prophets are motivated by.

And the **true prophets**, the **true speakers for God** will have a **character** that is growing more and more in the real fruit of the spirit. Their walk will reflect their talk. Their **creeds** will be **God centered** that make much of God and that put men in the proper perspective. And their **converts** will be people who have come into a true saving relationship with Christ by submitting themselves to King Jesus and receiving true salvation at His hand.

Jesus has given us all this fuel to protect ourselves from false teachers and preachers and shepherds. There is no excuse for people with Bibles to be



misled. All we need to do is **apply** what Christ says. This discernment may take time. It certainly cannot always be done in a **single point of time**. But it can and must be done. Jesus says so.

While I think this teaching is helpful for us when we are examining the ministries of others, I think it is also vital that we ask ourselves these fruit questions.

Is my character growing to be more like Christ?

Is my creed growing to be more and more Christ exalting?

And are my converts growing to be more like Christ?

Are we, in our hearts, true, or self deceived?