

Beware of False Prophets

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus warned us to beware of false prophets. He said they would come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, meaning that they will come to us claiming to be Christians, but inwardly they are “ravenous wolves”. When Jesus characterized these pretenders as ravenous wolves, He was warning of the danger they represent and the damage they can do among the flock of those who are in truth His sheep.

When Jesus spoke about false prophets in this passage, He was not speaking about those who may falsely claim to have a word from the Lord, as in the sense of an Old Testament prophet, but He was speaking about anyone who will claim to be a Christian who is in fact not a genuine believer. In other words, they are false prophets in the sense that their “profession” to be a Christian is false, even though they may be quite convinced that they are.

Jesus continued His teaching, saying that we will recognize these false prophets by their fruits. He then puts the question to His listeners, asking them if grapes can be gathered from thorn bushes, or if figs can be gathered from thistles.

He continued by using an analogy or comparison to illustrate His teaching, as He does in all His parables, when He compared false prophets to bad trees that can bear no good fruit. He said that every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree will bear bad fruit, and He said further that “a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit” (verse 18). He then pronounced judgement

on false prophets when He said that every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Jesus concluded His teaching in this passage by saying: Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:21-23).

As Jesus ended His teaching about false prophets, He revealed that there will be "many" who will claim falsely to be Christians. They may be quite convinced that they are genuine believers. They will acknowledge Jesus as Lord (verse 21), and they will have many works to offer as evidence of the genuineness of their faith, but they are in fact unregenerate. They are deceived about the faith that they believe they possess. They are "false prophets" in the sense that their profession to be a believer is in fact false, and they will one day hear from Jesus the words: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

In interpreting and understanding the teachings of Jesus Christ, one of the fundamental principles that we should always keep in mind is that a genuine believer will *always* bear good fruit. There is no such thing as a believer who does not bear good fruit. Conversely, those who are not genuine believers are unable to bear any good fruit. This principle is illustrated here in Matthew 7:15-23, and in several other passages as well.

We saw one example of fruit bearing occurring only in the lives of believers in the parable of the sower. In this parable the "seed" of the word of God was "sown" on different types of "soil", and the soil was the metaphor that Jesus used to represent men. The only place where the seed came up and did indeed bear fruit is where it fell on the "good soil".

In other words, the only place where the seed of the word of God bore fruit is where it was received in the hearing of God's elect, who are represented by the "good soil" in the parable. These are the ones who have been given "ears to hear" (Matthew 13:9). These are the ones to whom it has been granted to know and to understand the "mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven", or the word of God as it is revealed in the Holy Bible (Matthew 13:11). These are the ones who will, through the hearing of the word of God, be brought to faith in Christ. As a result of their

genuine faith, they will indeed bear fruit, “some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matthew 13:23), and God Himself will work in their lives to bring this fruit bearing to pass, according to the principle that Jesus taught in John 12:24-26.

In another parable we considered previously, we saw that Jesus compared Himself to a vine, which gives life to the branches that abide in the Vine (John 15:1-8). The branches in this parable symbolize men. It is only because we abide in the Vine, in union with Christ, that we can and will bear fruit. We demonstrate that we are in truth Jesus’ disciples by the fact we do indeed bear fruit (John 15:8). Others who are not in union with Christ will not be able to bear fruit, and such “branches” will be gathered up and thrown into the fire (John 15:5-6).

In His teaching about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus is once again, as He does in many of His teachings, making distinctions between those who are His and those who are not. We see in this teaching and others as well that one of the defining characteristics of a genuine believer is that they will always bear good fruit. As Jesus said: “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ***So then, you will know them by their fruits.***” (Matthew 7:17-20, emphasis added).

Regardless of their claims to be believers and their pretense of righteousness, all that these “bad trees” can leave behind is the bad fruit of works done in disobedience to the word of God. Even though they may be convinced of their own salvation, these unregenerate individuals are in truth the tares among the wheat that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 13:24-30, and they can bear no good fruit.

As He concluded His teaching about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus revealed that “many” would profess to be His disciples, even though they are not. They will acknowledge Him as Lord and claim to have done righteous acts and works of service in His name (verses 21-23). However, these unregenerate individuals are in fact wolves in sheep’s clothing; they are false prophets whose profession to be a believer is false. They are bad trees that can bear only bad fruit, and in the end, Jesus will say to them: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:23).

