

In Danger Among False Brethren

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul recounts many of the tribulations, hardships, and dangers that he encountered as he was involved in preaching the Gospel. And among these we read: “I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, *dangers among false brethren*”. (2 Corinthians 11:26, emphasis added.)

When Paul mentions being in danger among false brethren, he is referring to being in danger from those who will claim to be Christians but are not. Jesus spoke of these individuals in Matthew 7:15-23 as “false prophets” because their profession that they are a Christian is false. He said that they would come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, proclaiming to be believers, when in fact they are not. He characterized these individuals as “ravenous wolves” among His sheep because of the damage they can inflict. Jesus said that we could recognize these false believers by their fruits. He characterized them as bad trees that could bear no good fruit, which would be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 7:17-20, Also consider John 15:1-8.).

Jesus spoke of these false brethren again in the Parable of the Sower, where He characterized them as “rocky places”, who received the “seed” of the word of God in their hearing “with joy”, symbolizing an apparent conversion. But they ultimately “withered away” and bore no fruit. The main lesson of this parable is that the only place where the seed of the word of God will bear fruit is where it falls upon the “good soil”, or in the hearing of God’s elect, who have been given ears to hear and to understand the words of the Gospel message (Matthew 13:8-9, 23).

Jesus again referred to these professing but unregenerate individuals as tares among the wheat in Matthew 13:24-30. When the wheat, symbolizing genuine believers, appeared and bore grain, the tares, symbolizing unbelievers, also appeared, but they bore no useful harvest of grain. And in fact, the tares of the field are not able to produce grain.

The writer of Hebrews characterized these professing but unregenerate individuals as “ground” that drinks in the “rain” of the word of God that often falls upon it. But they bear no useful harvest, only thorns and thistles, which in the end will be burned (Hebrews 6:8). By contrast, he characterized genuine believers as “ground” which drinks in the “rain” of the word of God, and they do indeed bear a useful harvest of good fruit (Hebrews 6:7).

Jesus characterized these false brethren again in the Parable of the Wedding Feast as a man who accepted the invitation to come to the wedding feast that the king had prepared for his son. This man was there among others who had been invited to the feast. However, unlike the other guests at the feast, the king found that this man was not attired in “wedding clothes”. The wedding clothes in this parable symbolize the righteousness of Christ, without which no man will enter the kingdom of Heaven. The king therefore ordered that that this man be tied up and thrown out into the darkness, where there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

Jesus then ended the parable saying: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). Even though many are called outwardly when they receive the seed of the Gospel message in their hearing, only God’s elect will, in God’s time, be effectually called to faith in Christ (John 6:44, 65, Acts 9:1-6, Romans 8:29-30, Hebrews 9:15, 1 Peter 1:1-2), and only these will be able to bear fruit to the glory of God, showing themselves to be in truth, Jesus’ disciples (John 15:8).

The point to be made is that not everyone who professes to be a Christian, and who may be found associating with others who are genuine believers, is in fact one of God’s own people. Some of these individuals, despite their profession of faith in Christ, are in fact unregenerate. They may be convinced that they are genuine believers, and they may have many works to offer as evidence of their faith. But in the end, Jesus will tell them that He never knew them, and He will command them to depart from Him (Matthew 7:21-23).

In another passage, Jesus warned us about trusting any unbeliever saying: “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, *or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*” (Matthew 7:6, emphasis added). The language here is graphic and emphasizes again the great harm that unbelievers can inflict.

The threat is more subtle, but still very real, when it involves one who will claim to be a Christian but is not. And again, Jesus said that we would recognize these “wolves in sheep’s clothing”, these false brethren, by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-16). However, many of these professing but unregenerate individuals can be very deceptive. With this in mind, we should always very *prayerfully* consider any relationship where we might become unequally yoked together with an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14-17), because the outcome can be quite harmful.

With the admonitions of Matthew 7:6 and Matthew 7:15-22 in mind, we can understand why Paul would recognize these false brethren as a danger to himself and to other believers. And when we consider Judas Iscariot and his betrayal of Jesus, the danger becomes even more clear.

As we consider these admonitions from the Scriptures and the potential deceptiveness of these false brethren, we might ask ourselves how we can protect ourselves from being “unequally yoked” with a professing but unregenerate individual. Certainly, in any relationship that we are considering, especially a marriage relationship, we should prayerfully consider the individual in question, asking God to show us whether their fruits are indeed good or bad.

One of the most important indicators of a genuine faith in Christ is an individual’s connection to the word of God (John 1:1, 14, 6:48-58). Do they “feed” on the word of God regularly? Is the Bible the “bread of life” to them, or is it just an attractive leather bound book that they take to church with them like everyone else? In the final analysis, are their lives fundamentally characterized by obedience to God’s word (John 14:15, 21, 15:10), or do they adhere to the principles of God’s word only as long as they are getting what they want?

Make no mistake, these professing but unregenerate individuals will discard the principles of the word of God when they see some other course of action as being more expedient or profitable for them, and as something that will get them more of what they want out of life. They will have their rationalizations and justifications to offer to anyone who might question them, and they may be thoroughly convinced that their sinful actions are indeed the right thing to do. In

summary, the Scriptures warn us about the dangers that false brethren can pose to genuine believers, because as they pursue a course of action motivated by their own sinful self-interests, they can cause great harm in the lives of believers who may be associated with them.