

# The Gospel of Matthew

**Title:** A Tree and it's Fruit

**Text:** Matthew 7:15-20

**Sermon Aim, Proposition:** Identifying the real fruit of a true Christian.

**Introduction:** We are given in vs. 15-20 the way to identify false teachers. This comes after our text in vs. 13-14 where Jesus commands to enter the narrow gate. Jesus warns us of those who will mislead us. They point the “way” to heaven, but it doesn’t lead to heaven, because it’s the broad and easy way. The broad way is decorated with attractive scenery, populated with relevant people, but it’s a way to destruction. In our text today we see the warning of Jesus to beware of such people.

## I. **BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS (VS 15A)**

- I.1. The verb “beware” means “*take heed, to give attention too.*” False prophets are here now, on TV, the internet and any other means available. A false prophet is one who “*acting the part of a divinely inspired prophet, but utters falsehoods under a divinely inspired prophet.*” A false teacher uses familiar words, biblical phrases to utter personal misleading statements. The phrase false prophet comes from the root word “*liar, deceitful.*” These false teachers say things that are pleasing to those whom they are speaking. Matthew 24:11 “**Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.**” Matthew 24:24 “**For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.**” 2 Peter 2:1 “**But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies.**”
- I.2. God warned Israel of such false teachers in Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Here is the warning Paul gave in the book of Acts 20:28-30 “**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.**” The areas where most false teachings arise are within the church. Someone uses a verse out of context to teach a doctrine that’s not biblical. They often gain ground by some “book” they have read that has “enlightened” them, but not Scriptures. Stop looking for experiences to hear from God, read His word.
- I.3. False teachers have always been present. 2 John 7 “**For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.**” Romans 16:17-18 “**Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.**” 1 Timothy 4:1 “**But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.**” False teachers claim to speak on behalf of God. In Jeremiah 5:30 we see the reality of this, “**An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?**” People love to hear what makes them feel good, feel close to God,

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encouraged. A true teacher/pastor speaks the truth, doesn't coddle the sheep, but leads and warns the sheep of danger.

- 1.4. We must be warned of false teachers. Ephesians 5:6 “**Let no one deceive you with empty words.**” Colossians 2:8 “**See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.**” Too many churches/Christians have fallen into the trap of false teachers that teach self achieving good works and status. They practice eisegesis “*is the process of interpreting text in such a way as to introduce one's own presuppositions, agendas or biases.*” But exegesis “*critical explanation or interpretation of a text.*” In other words, what the text says not what you want it to say. But a false teachers twists Scripture to fit an agenda, idea. Much like satan did in the garden, “**You shall NOT surely die.**”

## 2. WHAT A FALSE PROPHET DOES (VS. 15B)

- 2.1. The false prophets come dressed as sheep. Metaphorically sheep are true followers of Christ, but sheep get lost, get near trouble and danger. This is why we have a true shepherd. David understood this when he said in Psalms 23 “**The Lord is my Shepherd**”, this is why we are under the great care of the true Shepherd, cf. John 10:1-5. There will be fake shepherds who are calling the sheep. But the true follower will not go because they not recognize their voice.
- 2.2. These false teachers may look like sheep, but inwardly they are wolves. The word ravenous is an adjective that describes the heart of the wolf. The root word is “*to snatch away, seize or carry off.*” Jesus used this illustration because it was quite common in the day. Wolves are blood thirsty animals. They look for the weak sheep, the one who is off from the flock. His only goal is to destroy and kill.
- 2.3. Many today in the church find offense at the shepherds who warn of false teachers (wolves) near the flock. Many are listening to charismatic, self righteous, therapeutic teachers who make them feel good about themselves. Too many Christians are being influenced by celebrity preaches and teachers who tell you how good you are, you can be, and how to live your best life now. They peddle self help messages, sprinkled with a verse here and there.
- 2.4. I must warn you of these false teachers. I must tell you not to get your fulfillment from a \$1,000 shoe wearing celebrity preacher with smoke and lights behind him, peddling spiritual snake oil to cure all your ills. The goal of the wolf is kill, not injure. The goal of the wolf is destroy the flock, scatter the sheep. They speak with eloquent words, they are gifted speakers, and look, act and even quote a bible verse. But be warned. They are around us. They lurk on the internet, podcasts and in the book store. But you can know one, you can identify one, Jesus says so.

## 3. HOW A FALSE PROPHETS IS IDENTIFIED (VS. 16)

- 3.1. Jesus is clear as how to identify a false teacher, by their fruits. And using current cultural context of fruits on trees, Jesus metaphorically describes fruits as one's “*work or deeds.*” Jesus doesn't give us any doubt, He says “**You will know them.**” This is not saying that a true teacher is ever wrong on a subject, but here the implication is a life of deception. The words “**you will**

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**know**” is future middle indicative, meaning “*to know thoroughly, accurately and recognize.*” In other words, there will be no doubt. It will be clear who they are.

- 3.2. A tree is judged by what it produces not how it looks. This is an important step to understand. A wolf in sheep’s clothing appears to be a sheep, and making a judgment based upon how one looks it’s not possible to separate truth and error. But the key factor is what is it producing.

## 4. HOW TO DETERMINE THE FRUIT’S EFFECTIVENESS (VS. 16B-18)

- 4.1. Obviously the rhetorical question Jesus posed in vs. 16 tells the story. The “so” in vs. 17 comes from the root form “*in this way, thus*” and implying you will know a tree by the fruit it bears, not the glossy, nice leaves it may have. It’s true nature will be what it produces.
- 4.2. Here’s a point we must address. Is it possible for a true Christian to be taken in by a false teacher? If a person is weak in prayer, lack in study time, and careless with the Word of God, yes that’s a real possibility. They can be misled and deceived. This is why it’s important to carefully examine what fruit is coming off that tree. Hebrews 5:11-14 warns of not being careful to inspect the words of teachers, “**Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.**” This is paramount in knowing who is false and who is not. You have to be discerning, and how is that accomplished? By investing in the Word of God, not tweets, catch phrases or clever speaking. But read the Word of God.
- 4.3. There is no good tree that bears bad fruit. And no bad tree that bears good fruit. A bad tree can produce a colorful, well formed and attractive fruit, but it may be bitter and poisonous. A good tree’s fruit can be inspected as well. Judging prophets isn’t as easy as fruit trees, but we have the Scriptures that guide us to look at the fruits of people who say they are speaking on God’s behalf.

## 5. CERTAIN TRAITS TO EXAMINE<sup>1</sup>

- 5.1. Their character. Loyalties, standards, attitude, motives, all will play a part in determining a false teacher. Remember in Matthew 3:8 John was addressing the Pharisees, “**Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance.**” It was how the Pharisees lived that was entirely different to their claim to be true followers of God. In Luke 3 this account is given in some more detail, following this statement the crowds asked him “**then what shall we do?**” (Luke 3:11,13). His response, “**The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise**”<sup>2</sup>, “**Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.**”<sup>3</sup> The point being help your

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<sup>1</sup> The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, pp. 468-470

<sup>2</sup> Luke 3:11, NASB95

<sup>3</sup> Luke 3:13, NASB95

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brother and don't collect (steal) more than is required. This type of behavior is a sign of true repentance.

- 5.2. Good fruit has its traits too. No Christian is saved by good works, but are saved to good works. Ephesians 2:10 **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."** So a good tree will bear good fruit or works in our context today. Colossians 1:10 **"so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."**
- 5.3. Another area to know a false teacher is by their creed/doctrine. The character of those who are bad trees, but may produce some colorful fruit, you will find is bitter and poisonous. And the evidence is in the fruit. For example, a popular pastor says we should *"unhinge ourselves from the OT"*, and *"when science and the Bible collide, we should always side with the science."* These aren't arbitrary secondary disagreements, these are foundational truths that have been altered by a false teacher. No good tree would ever say we don't need the OT. Kenneth Copeland says *"Today, as believers, we have that same God-like ability to speak those things which be not as though they were."* Creflo Dollar says Jesus isn't God, *"Jesus didn't come as God, He came as a man, and He did not come perfect... How many of you know the Bible says God never sleeps nor slumbers? And yet in the Book of Mark we see Jesus asleep in the back of the boat."* I have one suggestion for Creflo... context. Yet another popular teachers says, *"God is energy and we just need to release it."*<sup>4</sup>
- 5.4. Not only are false ideas taught, but even more subtle, important truths are omitted. In Matthew 12:34-35 Jesus unveils how words reveal character, **"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil."** Isaiah 8:20 **"If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."**<sup>5</sup> Arthur Pink says, *"False prophets are to be found in the circles of the most orthodox, and they pretend to have the most love for souls, yet they fatally delude souls concerning salvation. The pulpit, the platform, the pamphlet hucksters have wantonly lowered the standard of divine holiness and so adulterated the Gospel in order to make it fit the carnal mind."*

## 6. The Of False Teachings (Vs. 19-20)

- 6.1. A great warning about those who follow false teachings and rejects the truth is in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 **"and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness."** John 15:2 **"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."** Jesus concludes **"so then you will know them by their fruits."**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://godwords.org/the-false-teaching-of-steven-furtick/> (accessed 5.29.22)

<sup>5</sup> NKJV