

Matthew 7:15-20: Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Intro: Sinclair Ferguson: . . . Jesus leads up to the climax of the sermon, in which he presents to us the decisions and choices that his teaching demands. All the way through the sermon it has been obvious that there are only two ways to live: the way of the Lord and the way of the world (however disguised in religious dress that may be). Now, in his closing words, our Lord challenges us to make up our minds. There are certain issues that must be settled. There can be no room for negotiation or compromise. A choice has to be made. Matthew 7:13-29 sets before us choices in three different areas: the choice of the direction of our lives – will we choose the right entrance, and walk on Christ's way? **Then there is the choice of influences – to what kind of teaching and teachers will we submit?** Finally, there is the most basic choice of all – what kind of foundation have we been laying? This section of the sermon is about choices . . . In keeping with the rest of the sermon, Jesus is vigorously underlining the difference between what things may seem to be and what they are in reality. There is always a certain appeal in the broad way, in the false teacher, in the immediate success story. But we need to be warned by Jesus that the principles on which the kingdom of God is established are very different.

1. Jesus Warns Because Jesus Loves

Matthew 7:15: Beware of false prophets

a. Jesus warns: Watch out! Be alert! Get ready! Beware! I'm warning you! Something not good is coming at you & it's dangerous! Jesus loves you so much He calls people who will harm you animal names! (Brood of vipers!)

b. Why not just explain the truth? Counterfeit money illustration; Broad & Olney: speak of your own religion!

c. Warnings are loving: This is an expression of love! We warn people we love! We warn them because we love them, & we don't want bad things to happen to them – we don't want them to be hurt. We want good for them – the greatest good!

- **God, with all His heart & with all His soul, wants our greatest good: Jeremiah 32:37-41:** Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. ³⁸ And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹ I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰ I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. ⁴¹ I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

- **Paul warns: Acts 20:26-31:** I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves & to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; & from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert . . .

- **Peter warns: 2 Peter 2:1-3:** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2. The Greatest Threats To Your Spiritual Life Come Looking Really Good On The Outside

Matthew 7:15: Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

a. False prophets come in sheep's clothing: These false prophets who were threats to Jesus' disciples were not pagan idol worshippers or prostitutes or anything that was outwardly & obviously evil. They were those who claimed to be prophets of God: they were the Pharisees & others like them. They were thought of as the most righteous followers of God. They were thought of as those who kept the law and trusted and obeyed God. They taught the Scriptures. In Galatians we learned about the false prophets, the Judaizers: they taught that Jesus Christ & His death & His resurrection were essential. But they added to Christ! Christ plus! Faith plus! Grace plus!

Roman Catholics: Yes, Grace! Yes, Faith! Yes, Christ! Yes, the Bible! Yes, the glory of God! **But not those alone!**

- **2 Timothy 3:5:** having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

- **Matthew 24:24:** For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

Temptation and Sin: Proverbs 7:16-23: I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen; ¹⁷ I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. ¹⁸ Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love. ¹⁹ For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; ²⁰ he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home." ²¹ With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. ²² All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast ²³ till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.

b. Inwardly false prophets are ravenous wolves: They have selfish, evil, godless motives! They devour people!

- **Matthew 23:25-28:** Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup & the plate, but inside they are full of greed & self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup & the plate, that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones & all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy & lawlessness.

- **2 Corinthians 11:13-15:** For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

- **3 John 1:9-10:** I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. & not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, & also stops those who want to & puts them out of the church

- **Ezekiel 34:8:** the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep

3. You Will Recognize The Greatest Threats By Their Fruits

Matthew 7:16-20: You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

a. You will recognize (You have the Holy Spirit! [Christopher Yuan]) false prophets by the faithfulness of their teaching: Is it Biblical? Is it confessional? Is it right? Is it true according to God and His Word?

- **Jude 1:3:** Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

- **Galatians 1:8-9:** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Context (Last week: Narrow gate; narrow & hard path): Kent Hughes: They don't preach a narrow gate. [He may preach a lot of true things!] But the problem is with what he doesn't say. Because he doesn't say those things which would narrow the way. So he's comfortable, and that's why he's so dangerous – he is a sheep in wolves clothing . . . he does not say things that are offensive, especially to those who are without faith. There's nothing disturbing in his preaching. His message is comforting and soothing [only]!

b. You will recognize false prophets by the fruit of their teaching: Does their ministry and teaching produce disciples who are Biblical, focused on Christ and Him crucified, willing to suffer for Jesus – all Jesus' disciples!

c. You will recognize false prophets by the fruit of their lives: Do they live holy lives? Are they seeking to live out the Words of Jesus in this Sermon on the Mount? Do they fight and hate sin and turn from it?

1 Timothy 3:2-7: Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

4. False Prophets Today

God names names: 1 Timothy 1:19-20: some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

G. Jennings; BHI; JW's; Mormons; Osteen, T.D. Jakes, B. Hinn, C. Dollar, Copelands, J. Meyer, P. White

Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ? David Jones & Russell Woodbridge

a. These False Prophets Teach A Distorted View Of God: Deny the Trinity; Don't focus on Christ crucified

b. These False Prophets Teach That Human Words Can Create Like God Created: They believe human words are a force and have creative power.

You don't speak things into existence – only God does that! **God creates by His Word!**

Where do you ever see Jesus teaching us to do this?! Where do you ever see Paul do this?!

c. These False Prophets Teach An Exalted View Of Humanity: They wrongly teach we are all little gods.

d. These False Prophets Teach An Idolatrous Focus On Health And Wealth:

1) These teachers say Jesus was rich: Jesus was born in a feeding trough of a cow; Joseph and Mary had to offer the sacrifices for the poor: Luke 2:24: a pair of doves or two young pigeons

- **Luke 9:58:** Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.

- **2 Corinthians 8:9:** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

2) These teachers emphasize giving as a means to get more material blessing: Giving based on a law of compensation and make getting material riches the goal!

3) These teachers say we should not be sick: If you have enough faith, you'll never get sick: **Rom. 8:20-21, 23:** creation was subjected to futility; it will be set free from its bondage to decay; redeemed bodies

4) These teachers have a wrong view of prayer: Dollar: When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass

MacArthur: Teaching that claims we can demand things of God is spiritual justification for self-indulgence. It perverts prayer and takes the Lord's name in vain. It is unbiblical, ungodly, and is not directed by the Holy Spirit.

Myles Monroe/Benny Hinn: God could do nothing on earth without a human giving Him access/permission.

5) These teachers have a wrong view of suffering: Jesus was crucified! Jesus' disciples were killed, except one!

e. These False Prophets Teach An UnBiblical View Of Salvation

These teachers call people to have faith in a “jesus,” but it's a false jesus who is not God, and who does not save!

Kenneth Copeland: Why didn't Jesus openly proclaim himself as God during his 33 years on earth? For one single reason. He hadn't come to earth as God, he'd come as man. **(Watch American Gospel: Christ Alone)**

5. Guard Yourself From False Prophets

a. Know God’s Word well: Acts 17:11: Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

b. Pray for discernment: Philippians 1:9-10: And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ

c. Submit yourself to a faithful, Biblical local church: 2 Timothy 2:15: Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

- **1 Timothy 4:16:** Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- **Heb. 13:17:** Obey your leaders & submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy & not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

d. Beware of what you read and listen to: Avoid false teaching and false teachers!

e. Fill your mind with truth: Bible; good books & sermons; church history; systematic theology; **(Don’t be a FP!)**

Jesus came as the Good Shepherd Who also came as a sheep, a lamb: the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. He is good all the way through – there’s no ravenous wolf inside Him, but He did give Himself over to be killed by the ravenous wolves, bear God’s wrath, and rise again so that we might be saved! He is the good tree! He is the healthy tree! He is the tree of life, who died on the tree of death (that cross) so that we might eat of the **tree of life! And His fruit is the best tasting, longest lasting, most beautiful fruit the world has ever seen!**

Christ Jesus Loves So Warns Beware
Of Prophets False Who Would Declare
A Happy Message Filled With Flair
But Kills And Leaves You In Despair
Their Evil Doctrines Fruit Will Bear
That’s Poisonous, Bad, And Leaves You Bare
Christ Is The Truth Who’ll Never Err
He Only Speaks What’s True And Fair
With Him There’s None Who Can Compare
His Fruit Shines Purely Everywhere

He Died All Wrath God Would Not Spare
But Then Christ Rose To End Death There
And Showed God’s Love And Grace And Care
By Faith Alone We’re Saved From Where
God’s Wrath Burns Hot And Smokes The Air
So Come To Christ In Humble Prayer
He’ll Guide You To What’s Right And Share
His Joys With All Who Bow And Swear
To Him Allegiance Everywhere!