

THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

Part LCIII

“Beware of False Prophets”

Part 2

I. Introduction

We are in the “home stretch” of our year-long, verse by verse studies in the Sermon on the Mount; the only place in the Bible where Jesus gives us a detailed description of what we call “the normal Christian life.”

The basic teaching of the Sermon is over; but it’s interesting to see that Jesus will finish His message with a series of very serious warnings that begin this one...

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”

Matthew 7:15

A. One of Many Warnings

1. Actually, this is just one of the many warnings God gives His people in the New Testament.

2. St. Peter warns us to be sober and vigilant, because the devil is like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us; but St. Paul tells us he appears to us as if he is an “Angel of light”.

3. The devil is a deceiver and he has a counterfeit for every good thing God gives us.

a. The New Testament warns us that there are false gospels, false Apostles, false teachers, false Christs; and here it speaks of false prophets.

B. So What's a Believer To Do?

1. We do not need to live in fear! But we do need to walk out our Christian life with an ability to judge the true from the false.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:1 NIV

2. Every true believer has the Holy Spirit within to give us the ability to “test every spirit”; this refers to one of the least taught gifts of the Holy Spirit which is “discernment! (1 Corinthians 12:10)

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

Or "distinguishing the spirits"). A spiritual gift that enables Christians to judge from what spirits the utterances they heard proceeded, whether from the Holy Spirit, human, or demonic spirits, thus preserving the church from misleading influences

New Unger's Bible Dictionary

3. Not every believer has the “gift of discernment”; but every believer has discernment because John told all believers to test every spirit. And is speaking to all His people right here! Everyone who has the Holy Spirit can “Beware of false prophets”...even when they are hard to recognize!

“Discernment is not simply telling the difference between right and wrong; rather it is the difference between right and almost right.”

C.H. Spurgeon

4. Jesus then goes on give us the surest way to judge...

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.

Matthew 7:15-16 NIV

5. This wolf looks like a sheep; things look right; sound Ok...

"You cannot always distinguish them by their bark and leaves, or by the spreading of their branches, but *by their fruits ye shall know them.* The fruit is according to the tree."

Matthew Henry

a. In a very real sense...

II. By Their Fruits You Shall Know Them

A. We Are Spiritual "Fruit Inspectors"

1. The USDA has "fruit inspectors"; those who examine the harvest to make sure there is no insect, disease or corruption in the fruit that would endanger the whole crop. Spiritually speaking, Jesus is commissioning us as "fruit inspectors" of those who present themselves as speaking for God.

2. Jesus makes it simple. He tells us that we can judge the nature of the tree, good or bad, according to the kind of fruit it produces.

Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and **a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**

Matthew 7:17-20 NIV

3. They tell us "you can't judge a book by the cover"; but Jesus says "you can judge the prophet by his fruit."

a. He may look like a sheep; but it is what he produces always tells the tale.

“The first principle is that there is an indissoluble link between belief and life—the nature will out. That which a man is ultimately in the depths is always going to reveal and manifest itself, and it does so in belief and life. As a man thinks, so eventually he is. As a man thinks, so he does.”

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“...what is in the center of the heart is certain to proclaim itself. It will proclaim itself in its beliefs, in its teaching and doctrine. It will proclaim itself also in its life.”

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

4. By their “fruit” we shall know them; but the Lord is obviously not referring to apples and oranges! Fruit is a metaphor Jesus uses that can have several meanings.

B. What “Fruit” Does He Mean?

1. Fruit can refer to the “fruit of the Holy Spirit” that is observable in their lives.

a. No matter how sweet his sermons or how great his gifting, do we see the fruit of the spirit in his life? Is there Love, joy, patience, peace, and self-control?

2. Fruit can refer to the effects the false prophet’s teaching has upon the man himself. The great John Wesley asks...

First, ask what are the fruits of their doctrine as to themselves? Are they holy and blameless in all things? What effect has their teaching had upon their own hearts? Does it appear by the general tenor of their conversation that their tempers are holy, and heavenly? Is that mind in them which was in Christ Jesus? Are they meek, lowly, patient, lovers of God and man, and zealous of good works?

John Wesley

a. The great Puritan Bible commentator Matthew Henry reminds us that we don't have to have some special supernatural gift for this...

"We know them by the fruits of their persons, their words and actions, and the course of their conversation. If you would know whether they be right or not, observe how they live; their works will testify for them or against them.

Matthew Henry

3. Most important of all: Fruit can refer to the effects that the teaching has upon those who follow it.

a. In other words, you can judge the teacher by the quality of the disciples who follow what he teaches.

"What are the fruits of their doctrine as to those that hear them; Have these the mind that was in Christ? And do they walk as he also walked? And was it by hearing these men that they began so to do?"

John Wesley

- The disciple always becomes like his master; anytime you see people growing in the Lord by learning from their leader, you know the tree is good. But Wesley continues...

"On the other hand, if their hearers who were unrighteous before remain unrighteous still, or, at least, void of any righteousness which "exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," — they are false prophets- they are not sent of God."

John Wesley

b. Notice it is not how *many* followers he has; it is what *kind* of followers he has.

-Church history shows that false prophets can have huge followings; often because, as we said last week, of what they leave *out* of their messages...

“What is wrong with their teaching? There is no ‘strait gate’ or ‘narrow way’ in it. As far as it goes it is all right, but it does not include this. The falseness of their teaching is to be detected by what it does not say rather than by what it does say.”

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

To conceal the truth is as damnable as to proclaim an utter heresy; and the effect of such teaching is that of a ‘ravaging wolf’.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

-Dr. Jones was speaking to the Church of England in the 1950’s and 60’s; but we see it right now in our own day...

“The false prophet offers an easy salvation, and an easy type of life always.”

But heaven help us if we try to correct it!

We do not like this kind of teaching against false prophets today. We are living in days when people say that, as long as a man claims to be a Christian at all, we should regard him as a brother and go on together.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

-So you end up with very popular churches filled with folks who don’t want to hear Jesus’ teaching about the strait gate, the narrow way, and the danger of false prophets. As Paul wrote to Timothy...

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 NIV

-Evangelist Paul Washer believes the popularity of false prophets in America today is God's judgment upon a backslidden church...

“False prophets are the judgment of God upon a wicked and defiled people, who although they have a knowledge of God, do not want Him. And so God sends them the teachers that they desire.”

Paul Washer

4. To sum it up: Beware of false prophets; they look like sheep; but you can know them by their “fruit”. The fruit can refer to:

- The “fruit of the Spirit” in the character of the person
- The affect the person's teaching has had upon his own life
- The affect the teaching has had upon those who are taught

III. Some Closing Thoughts

A. Review

1. Jesus began this chapter with some warnings about how careful we must be in matters of judging.

- We are to “judge not” in the sense of condemning
- We must always remember we will be judged by how we judge others

2. **Jesus' command to “beware of false prophets is a most serious subject!iscerning false prophets is a serious matter.** We have to be very careful.

a. The New Testament tells us that there are false prophets who are motivated by greed.

b. But I believe there are others are just simply deceived.

c. Sometimes only God can know which is which.

3. Whatever we do, we must maintain a Christ-like spirit.

“We must not despise these people. Indeed, Dr. Alexander MacLaren is right when he says that they are unconscious hypocrites.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

4. The scribes and Pharisees were the false prophets of Jesus’ day; but even they had some good points...

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

Matthew 23:1-3 NIV

Jesus warns them again and again, to beware of these false prophets. And yet he does not forbid them to hear even these.

John Wesley

- a. Obey them whenever they teach what is right.
- b. But never be a hypocrite like them!

Nay, he, in effect, commands them so to do, in those words: "All therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do:" For unless they heard them, they could not know, much less observe, whatsoever they bade them do. Here, then, our Lord himself gives a plain direction, both to his Apostles and the whole multitude, in some circumstances, to hear even false prophets, known and acknowledged so to be.

John Wesley

B. A Final Word From Martin Luther

“All, therefore, which I can say, is this: in any particular case, wait upon God by humble and earnest prayer, and then act according to the best light you have: Act according to what you are persuaded, upon the whole, will be most for your spiritual advantage.

“Take great care that you do not judge rashly; that you do not lightly think any to be false prophets: And when you have full proof, see that no anger or contempt have any place in your heart.”

“After this, in the presence and in the fear of God, determine for yourself. I can only say,

**“If by experience you find that the hearing them hurts your soul, then hear them not; then quietly refrain, and hear those that profit you. If, on the other hand, you find it does not hurt your soul, you then may hear them still. Only
"take heed how you hear:"**

Martin Luther

5. Altar Call and Prayer