Different On Purpose: Discern the Disguise Matthew 7:15-20

Passage

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

Not Everything That Sounds Spiritual Is From God

Assertion

- Jesus says: "Beware…" That means discernment is not optional; it's commanded.

Possible Objection

- But shouldn't Christians be trusting? Isn't being skeptical kind of unloving or judgmental?

- 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.

Application

- Run every spiritual voice through Scripture before we receive it.
- Why It Matters: If we believe everything we hear, we will eventually believe something that leads us away from Jesus.

Deception Often Wears a Convincing Disguise

Assertion

- "who come to you in sheep's clothing…" False prophets don't announce themselves. They blend in. They sound right. They look right. They even use the right language.

Possible Objection

- But how can something that sounds so good actually be wrong?

- 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.

Application

- Slow down our trust; don't give influence quickly.
- Why It Matters: If we judge truth by appearances rather than Scripture, we can mistake spiritual-sounding deception for biblical truth.

The Test Is the Fruit, Not the Appearance

Assertion

- Jesus says: "You will recognize them by their fruits."

Possible Objection
- But what if someone is successful? What if their ministry is growing? Doesn't that mean God is blessing it?

- James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Application
- Evaluate spiritual influence by long-term fruit, not short-term impact.
- Why It Matters: If we measure spiritual credibility by charisma, popularity, or success, we may end up following someone whose influence is pulling people away from Christ.

<u>Bad Roots Always Produce Bad Results</u>

Assertion
- Jesus makes it plain: A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Possible Objection
- But what if someone does some good things? Doesn't that count?

- Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Application
- Examine the theological "root system," not just the visible results.
- Why It Matters: What we truly believe will eventually shape how we live, because we cannot consistently produce godly fruit from an ungodly foundation.

<u>Discernment Has Eternal Consequences</u>

Assertion
- Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. That is strong language, because the stakes are high.

Possible Objection
- Isn't that a little extreme? Why such serious consequences?

- 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.

Application
- Take responsibility for what we allow to shape us, and those we influence.
- Why It Matters: False teaching is not merely an intellectual problem; it can lead people away from the truth of the gospel and put their spiritual lives in danger.

Conclusion
- Because the goal isn't just to avoid deception…It's to become someone who is so rooted in Christ that our life consistently produces good, lasting fruit.