

# **False Prophets - You Will Know Them by Their Fruits**

Matthew 7:15-23

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus warned us to beware of false prophets. He said that they would come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, meaning that they will come to us claiming to be Christians, but inwardly they are “ravenous wolves”. When He characterized these pretenders as ravenous wolves, He was warning of the danger they represent and the damage they can do among the flock of those who are in truth His sheep.

When Jesus spoke of false prophets in this passage, He was speaking not only about those who may falsely claim to have a word from the Lord, as in the sense of an Old Testament prophet, but He was speaking about anyone who will claim to be a Christian who is in fact not a genuine believer. In other words, they are false prophets in the sense that their “profession” that they are a Christian is false, even though they may be quite convinced that they are.

Jesus continued His teaching, saying that we will recognize these false prophets by their fruits. He then puts the question to His listeners, asking them if grapes can be gathered from thorn bushes, or if figs can be gathered from thistles.

Jesus then used an analogy or comparison, as He does in all of His parables, when He compared false prophets to bad trees that can bear no good fruit. He said that every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree will bear bad fruit. And then

He said further that “a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit” (verse 18). He then pronounced judgement on false prophets when He said that every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Jesus concluded His teaching in this passage by saying: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

There are many passages in the Bible that can be “scary”, and this one certainly qualifies. As Jesus ended His teaching in this passage, He revealed that there will be “many” who will claim to be Christians, and who are convinced that they are indeed Christians. They will have many works to offer as evidence of the genuineness of their faith, but in fact they are unregenerate; they are deceived about the faith that they believe they possess. They are “false prophets” in the sense that their profession to be a believer is in fact false, and they will one day here from Jesus the words: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”

In interpreting and understanding the teachings of Jesus Christ, one of the fundamental principles that we should always keep in mind is that a genuine believer will *always* bear good fruit. There is no such thing as a believer who does not bear good fruit. And conversely, those who are not genuine believers are unable to bear any good fruit. This principle goes back to the lesson we learned in the Parable of the Sower.

In this parable, the seed of the word of God was sown on different types of soil, and once again the soil represented men, but the only place where the seed came up and did indeed bear fruit is where it fell on the “good ground”. In other words, the only place where the seed of the word of God bore fruit is where it was received in the hearing of God’s elect, who are represented by the “good ground” in the parable. These are the ones who have been given “ears to hear” (Matthew 13:9). These are the ones to whom it has been granted to know and to understand the “mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven”, or the word of God as it is revealed in the Holy Bible (Matthew 13:11). And these are the ones who will indeed bear fruit, “some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

In another teaching Jesus compared Himself to a vine, which gives life to the branches that abide in the Vine (John 15:1-8). It is only because we abide in the Vine, in union with Christ, that we can and will indeed bear fruit. And in fact, we demonstrate that we are in truth Jesus' disciples by the fact we do indeed bear fruit (John 15:8). Others who are not in union with Christ will not be able to bear fruit and will be gathered up and thrown into the fire.

In this teaching about a tree and its fruit in Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus is once again, as He does in many of His teachings, making distinctions between those who are His, and those who are not. We see in this teaching and others as well that one of the defining characteristics of a genuine believer is that they will always bear good fruit. As Jesus said: "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ***So then, you will know them by their fruits.***" (Matthew 7:17-20, emphasis added).

Regardless of their claims to be believers and their pretense of righteousness, all that these "bad trees" can leave behind is the bad fruit of works done in disobedience to the word of God. Even though they may be convinced of their own salvation, these unregenerate individuals are in truth the weeds among the wheat that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 13:24-30, and they can bear no good fruit.

As He ended His teaching in this passage, Jesus revealed in Matthew 7:21-23 that "many" would profess to be His disciples, even though they are not. They will acknowledge Him as Lord and claim to have done righteous acts and works of service in His name. However, these unregenerate individuals are in fact wolves in sheep's clothing; they are false prophets whose profession to be a believer is false. They are bad trees that can bear only bad fruit, and in the end, Jesus will say to them: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." (Matthew 7:23)