

Matthew 7:15-20

Fruit Inspection

Introduction

Discerning weakness and failure is natural to all humans.

- The problem comes when we see other people's faults and not our own.
- We tend to define "sin" through the lens of our culture.
- There is also a tendency to overlook the sins of those we put on a pedestal.

Context

- Jesus was expected to be part of the religious establishment as a prophet of Israel's God.
- Jesus and his message were at odds with the establishment.
- The people listening to Jesus were confused. Who has the truth?
- This is the issue that Jesus addresses in the next few verses.

Text

Matthew 7

"¹³ Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.

¹⁵ Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn {bushes,} nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So then, you will know them by their fruits."

What does this text imply? (four options)

1. All who are true to the faith will live holy lives. **Salvation = holy living.**
2. People who are "relatively good" are of God and those who are "relatively bad" are not. A **changed life** is a mark of true faith.
3. Jesus is addressing the specific issue of **false prophets**.
 - A prophet is someone who claims to bring revelation from God.
 - Pastors and Teachers are not always in that role.
 - We know that true prophets were not perfect but neither were they polluted.
4. Jesus is addressing the issue of **his own authenticity**.
 - The disciples were confused as to how to understand Jesus.
 - The absolute nature of the fruit, illustrated by the two trees, suggest purity of fruit, which is only seen in Jesus. "a good tree cannot produce bad fruit."
 - We are not to judge one another. "Judge not lest you be judged." Matt.7:1

General observations

1. There will be false prophets among God's people.
2. God's people are responsible to identify them.
3. Three characteristics of a false prophet:
 - a. They are **aggressive**. "come to you"
 - b. They are **deceptive**. "in sheep's clothing,"
 - c. They are **destructive**. "but inwardly are ravenous wolves"
 - d. They are **destroyed**. "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Related texts and insights

1. The test of a true prophet is seen in their understanding of the nature of Christ. **1 John 4** "1 Beloved, 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. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;"
2. Fruitfulness is related to a person's dependence upon Christ. **John 15** "1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every {branch} that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither {can} you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and {so} prove to be My disciples."
3. False prophets are often impressive but we are to look past their cover and judge them on their content. **Gal.1** "6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed."
4. False prophets are usually self serving and shameless. **Jer.8** "10 Everyone is greedy for gain; from the prophet even to the priest everyone practices deceit. 11 And they heal the brokenness of the daughters of My people superficially, Saying, "Peace, peace." But there is no peace. . . . 12 . . . They certainly were not ashamed, and they did not know how to blush;"; **2 Peter 2** "1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping." . . . "17 These men

are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸ For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. ²⁰ If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²² Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”

5. The unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit is associated with how a prophet responds to Jesus. **Matt.12:33-34** “³³ Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fill the heart.”

Lessons

1. **When is “inspecting fruit” necessary?**
 - Not every believer should be scrutinized. Matt.7:1
 - Those who claim to speak for God should be watched.
 - Jesus Christ invites people to examine his life and teaching.
2. **Why is “inspecting fruit” important?**
 - False prophets are always among us.
 - We are responsible for discerning them.
 - False prophets are greedy wolves who will abuse the sheep.
3. **How does one inspect the fruit of spiritual authorities in the church?**
 - Examine the content of the prophet’s teaching.
 1. Does he respect the full revelation of Scripture? Or does he “cheery pick” only texts that fit his pet passion or emphasis?
 2. Is he subject to the authority of the greater Christian community?
 3. Is he respectful of legitimate disagreements from other spiritual authorities? Is he a “lone ranger” with doctrines that are unique only to him?
 - Look at the character of the person.
 1. Does the person display sound judgment that reflects mature wisdom?
 2. Does the person’s behavior represent a disciplined life of virtue?
 3. Does the person respond to success and failure with humility, grace, and honesty?
 4. Does the person know himself, accept himself, and forget himself?
 - Look at the effect of the person’s ministry.
 1. Are people drawn to Christ?
 2. Are people drawn to wisdom and maturity?

3. Are people manipulated, controlled, or marginalized?
 4. Are people encouraged to depend on Christ and not on the leader?
 5. Are people respected and treated graciously even when they disagree with the leader?
4. Some additional considerations:
- It may take time for a prophet's true colors to be exposed.
 - Mixed fruit makes identification difficult.
 - Community involvement is vital.