



## World Christian Fellowship

[www.wcflondon.com](http://www.wcflondon.com)  
[wcflondon@gmail.com](mailto:wcflondon@gmail.com)

### Fruit Checking! Matthew 7:15-20

**Matthew 7:15-20**, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup>You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup>Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

#### How do you recognize false teachers?

**Matthew 7:13-14**, Christ called his listeners to decide which path they would follow.

Would they follow the broad path that leads to destruction or the narrow path that leads to life?

He challenges them not just listen to the Sermon on the Mount and marvel. They must decide whether to follow his words and enter the kingdom of heaven or not.

**Matthew 7:15-20**, Jesus describes why many will not enter the narrow road. They will not enter because of false prophets.

False prophets will usher them off the narrow road onto the broad path of destruction.

Jesus's calls all listening to beware of them.

**Matthew 5:20**, *"If your righteousness does not surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven"*

The prominent religious leaders of Israel were on the broad path leading to destruction, and they were ushering others that way as well.

False teachers will not only come from recognized cults but often they will come from the prominent religious establishment.

It is easy to end up on the broad path if we don't have a discerning heart.

## 1. False teachers will come

**V 15**, *“Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves.*

Jesus describes them as wolves in sheep’s clothing.

He wasn’t saying that the wolves were pretending to be sheep; Shepherds typically wore woollen clothing which came from the sheep they cared for.

False prophets pretend to be shepherds who care for the flock, but really are wolves that destroy the flock. They feast on unstable and immature believers—those not trained in and obedient to Scripture.

**Ephesian 4:14**, *that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*

**2 Timothy 3:6**, *For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts,*

In fact, sometimes false prophets mimicked the clothes of true prophets.

In the Old Testament, prophets were known by their simple, uncomfortable clothing, which symbolized their forsaking the comforts of the world for the cause of God.

Like Elijah, they often wore animal clothes.

Therefore, false prophets would wear similar clothes to deceive others.

**Zechariah 13:4**, *“Therefore, on that day each prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies and will no longer wear the hairy garment of a prophet to deceive the people.”*

They were wolves in shepherds’ clothing seeking to deceive others. No doubt, many of them even deceived themselves about their true intentions.

False teachers and prophets often come in popular evangelical clothing. They went to prestigious seminaries, use orthodox lingo, and even appear godly. They often know Scripture well, for even the devil quoted Scripture when tempting Christ (**Matthew 4**).

However, their outward persona does not match their inward one!

They are ferocious wolves who will hurt the flock.

**John 10**, Jesus used a similar shepherding metaphor.

- Good shepherd,
- Hireling, and
- Wolf.

When the wolf comes, the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep—he protects them at all cost.

When the wolf comes, the hireling runs away because he is only there for pay.

Likewise, in churches there are good shepherds who aim to care for the sheep. They feed them the truth of God’s Word and aim to protect them by doing this.

Hirelings are professional clergymen who see ministry primarily from a career standpoint. They bounce from church to church seeking higher pay and better weather. They are in ministry only for the benefits. Therefore, they neglect the sheep and don’t really teach the Word of God. Ultimately endangering the flock. Wolves destroy the flock by teaching error.

Also, they tend to manipulate the flock for gain.

**1 Timothy 6:3-5**, *If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, <sup>4</sup>he is*

*proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, <sup>5</sup>useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*

**Jeremiah 23:16**, *Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, Not from the mouth of the Lord.*

Christ taught that in the last days false prophets would increase in number and lead many believers away from God.

**Matthew 24:11**, *Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.*

The last days began at Christ's death and will continue until his second coming.

False prophets have come and will continue to increase. There is a new Christian cult that begins essentially every day, and people are continually lured from the narrow way to the broad way by them. In fact, most New Testament epistles were written to combat false teachers that were tearing the church apart.

**Acts 20:29-31**, *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.<sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.<sup>31</sup> Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*

Paul warned of these false teachers, and they eventually came. Even from the original elders of that congregation, men rose and divided the flock.

Paul challenged Timothy to warn the false teachers and to faithfully preach the Word in spite of them.

### **1 Timothy 1:3, 4:1-16.**

False teachers will come. They will arise from among us, and if we are not careful, we may be led astray by them, or even worse, become one of them, even as the Ephesian elders did.

In God's sovereignty, these attacks on the church have been used by God to make the church focus on and clearly define truth.

Their attacks raised a need to define what books were in the Canon, as many false books began to circulate. Their attacks

provoked a need to clearly define the doctrines of Scripture such as: the Trinity, inspiration of the Word of God, the inerrancy of Scripture, etc.

In the same way, being confronted by error has made many individual believers study God's Word in a deeper manner, which kept them from being swept away into lies.

To recognize false teachers, we must recognize they are coming. They are already among us.

If we don't recognize this reality, we will be unprepared and possibly led astray.

## **2. Know their Fruit.**

"Like root like fruit," said the old proverb. The Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and everybody else views trees and fruit in this same way. A tree is judged by its fruit. If you want to know what the prophet is like, look at what he produces.

Look at what he produces.

You will recognize them by their fruit.

**Matthew 7:16-20**, *You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?*<sup>17</sup> Even

*so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Therefore by their fruits you will know them.*

Good trees make good fruit, bad trees make bad fruit.

Because false prophets put on the clothes of a true shepherd, they are hard to detect.

However, Jesus says their fruit will ultimately manifest.

A tree always produces fruit in line with its character.

An apple tree produces apples not grapes. In the same way, a minister's fruit will eventually manifest.

It may not be clear initially.

It may require a lengthy and intimate inspection, but eventually the fruit will manifest!

That will establish whether the person is a true teacher or false.

Paul says something similar when warning Timothy about not ordaining people hastily.

**1 Timothy 5:22-25**, *Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. <sup>23</sup>No longer*

*drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. <sup>24</sup>Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. <sup>25</sup>Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.*

Paul essentially calls for a diligent inspection of someone being considered for eldership. Otherwise, the wrong person be chosen, and we share in his sins.

For some, their inadequacy for ministry is clear. They have the wrong temperament, unorthodox doctrine, a disorderly family life, etc.

For others it's not so apparent. Their lack of fitness appears slowly.

Similarly, with some their good works are obvious. Everyone would declare, "This person should be an elder!"

Yet with others, their suitability for ministry only becomes clear later in the inspection process. Either way, their fruit will eventually become apparent.

False prophets their fruit will become apparent. Therefore, we must not hastily accept or reject someone. We must patiently inspect his or her fruit.

Types of fruits will identify a false teacher

### 1. Character.

In Scripture, fruit often refers to character.

**Galatians 5:22-23**, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

When you look in the Bible and you want to find out about fruit.

**Luke 3:8-14**, *Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. <sup>9</sup>And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." <sup>10</sup>So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" <sup>11</sup>He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."*

<sup>12</sup>*Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" <sup>13</sup>And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." <sup>14</sup>Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said*

to them, *“Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.”*

**2 Peter 2:3**, *By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.*

Their teaching and ministry will primarily be about making more money and filling their pockets. In addition, they will commonly be identified by their abusive leadership.

**2 Timothy 3:6**, *For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts,*

They will seek to control people’s time, money, and relationships.

Often, they will become abusive when others make their own decisions.

They often claim, or at least act, as though they are the medium between God and their people, as if people can’t discern God’s voice and make their own decisions.

Furthermore, they often are identified by their lusts, sexual harassment, and multiple affairs, among other vile acts, tend to follow them.

False prophets will be identified by their character or lack thereof.

## **2. Teaching.**

**2 Peter 2:1**, *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*

They will be known by their destructive heresies, which not only destroy them but others.

**Isaiah 8:20**, *To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

Examples of their destructive teaching:

### **a) unbalanced teaching.**

Balanced teaching speaks about both God's love and judgment. However, false teachers tend to focus on one or the

other. When they focus on love alone, it creates an undisciplined people who don't fear God or hate sin.

One of the most popular teachers said that he wouldn't speak on sin because his people needed to hear about God's comfort more. The problem is without understanding sin and God's judgment, nobody can be saved. It is a crucial part of the gospel.

One cannot accept the good news without first understanding the bad news.

**Jeremiah 6:14**, *They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace.*

These prophets focused on God's love and blessing but neglected other aspects of his character.

Others only teach about God's wrath, often creating a fear in people, which allows them to be controlled and manipulated.

Teaching about God's wrath apart from his love and grace ultimately fosters a works-based salvation and turns people into Pharisees who condemn and judge one another.

Truth and love should be balanced in the right way!

## **b) Heretical view of the doctrine of salvation.**

This is implied by the immediate context of choosing between the broad road and the narrow road (**Matthew 7:13-14**).

The narrow road leads to life, while the broad road leads to destruction. Some lead people down the broad road by teaching belief in Christ without repentance, Lordship, or taking up one's cross.

People can live any way they want (antinomianism).

**Jude 1:4**, *For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

“Cheap grace”—a grace that doesn't change us.

Some even teach that one can take Christ as saviour first and Lord later.

Again, the road has been broadened. Jesus Christ said that nobody could be his disciple without hating mother, father, brother, sister, and even one's own life.

Whoever does not take up his cross cannot be Christ's disciple.

**Luke 14:26-27**, *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”* <sup>27</sup>*And whoever*

*does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*

Some teach the broad road of works salvation. One needs to be baptized to be saved, practice the Lord's Supper, or do some other work.

Every religion teaches the need of works for salvation except true Christianity.

**Ephesians 2:8-10**, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

With that said, true faith will always produce godly works. But we are not saved by these works.

Others teach the broad road of universal salvation. Jesus Christ is the way to heaven, but only one out of many ways. Buddha, Muhammad, and others all speak of the same god and heaven.

However, Jesus Christ said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me"* (**John 14:6**).

### **c) Heretical view of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.**

In warning the Ephesian church about false teachers.

**1 John 4:1-3**, *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup>By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, <sup>3</sup>and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*

The cult attacking Ephesus twisted the doctrine of Christ—denying either his humanity or deity. Modern cults do the same thing.

Prominent ones often teach that Christ was a created being and is not God or not eternally God.

Some even say Christ was an angel.

Beware of unorthodox teachings about Christ.

They are the fruit of false teachers.

False teachers often undermine the authority of Scripture itself.

Like Satan in the Garden of Eden, they challenge others with, “Did God really say?”

They teach that one can’t believe everything the Bible says.

One can’t believe the historicity and/or ethical requirements of the Bible.

When Scripture is removed as the only basis for doctrine and living, other foundations can be established. The teacher himself can become the standard by which all things are tested.

Beware of teachers who undermine the authority of God’s Word. When they do this, it is simply an opportunity to establish some other authority—including their own.

### **3. Influence.**

**2 Peter 2:2**, *And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.*

The influence of a false teacher’s life and teaching will bear bad fruit in his or her converts.

**2 Timothy 2:17**, *And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort,*

Like cancer, it rots beliefs, then character, and ultimately pulls people away from Christ and his church. False teachers will be known by their ungodly influence on others.

## **How should the church respond to the rampant spread of false doctrine?**

### **1. Must constantly test the teachings.**

Church members must be like the Bereans.

**Acts 17:11**, *“they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so.”*

God honours them in Scripture because they tested everything that Paul said to make sure it lined up with God’s Word.

Each church must develop a culture of opening their Bible to test the teachings they hear, and not just accepting them.

If the sermon is void of Scripture or not primarily based on Scripture, there is a problem.

Our spiritual leaders must be held accountable for accurately preaching the Word. Good shepherds will appreciate this and encourage it. It means they are developing Bereans in their congregations!

## **2. Must discern without being judgmental.**

**Matthew 7:1**, *“Judge not, that you be not judged.*

Christ taught that his followers must not judge lest they be judged. This doesn't mean we shouldn't call out sin and false doctrine. It means we must call it out in ourselves first. We must take the plank out of our own eye before we take the speck out of another's (**Matthew 7:3-5**).

Also, we must be careful of our attitudes.

A judgmental attitude takes joy in the failures of others.

Though Jesus Christ calls us to be discerning, He doesn't give us freedom to become heresy hunters—attacking every doctrinal (or moral) failure of others.

All of us have some doctrinal error.

Personal sin affects our ability to always understand God's Word properly.

**John 7:17**, *If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*

Therefore, we must be gracious when others fail doctrinally and help them come to the truth.

However, we must not tolerate heretical doctrinal errors that ultimately can be damning. When it came to the gospel, Paul said that anybody who taught another gospel should be accursed—condemned to hell.

**Galatians 1:9**, *As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*

### **3. Must become mature to protect by studying and knowing God's Word.**

Scripture describes those who are commonly led astray by false teachers and doctrinal error as spiritual children.

**Ephesian 4:14**, *that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*

The spiritual child stage is a dangerous stage of life because like regular children, spiritual children lack wisdom and commonly endanger themselves because of it. This can lead them into various false doctrines that stay with them throughout their lives and potentially lead them away from Christ all together.

Whatever we learn in our early childhood often stays with us and that is true with spiritual adults. Many of us have corrupt areas of doctrine that are hard to root out, which were planted during our spiritual childhood.

When Paul warned the Ephesian elders that some of them would become wolves that taught false doctrine.

**Acts 20:31-32**, *Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.* <sup>32</sup>*“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

God’s message will protect us as we study it deeply.

Are you aiming to deeply study God’s Word?

#### **4. Must protect others.**

Though we all bear the responsibility to protect ourselves through deeply studying Scripture, God has specifically called spiritual leaders to protect the flock.

**Ephesians 4:11-14**, *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the <sup>13</sup>edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup>that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*

Few of us will do this from the office of an elder, but many of us will do this from the role of a spiritual mother or father, or older brother or sister.

**1 John 2:12-14**, *I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. <sup>13</sup>I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. <sup>14</sup>I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and*

*the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.*

If we never mature in Christ, we will never effectively protect others or deliver them when they are caught in sin. That is primarily what many of Paul's letters do. They are written to combat false doctrine, equip those fighting it, and deliver those caught in it.

We must all develop Paul's pastoral affection and skill to effectively help others.

During spiritual infancy, we primarily care about ourselves and our welfare.

During spiritual adulthood, we become consumed with others and their spiritual welfare.

**Jude 1:22-23**, *And on some have compassion, making a distinction; <sup>23</sup>but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.*

## **Conclusion:**

**Matthew 12:33-35**, *“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. <sup>34</sup>Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup>A good man out of the good treasure of his*

*heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.*

If this were the last Sunday I were ever to preach at our Church, I think I would preach this message as Apostle Paul warned the church!

Will you commit yourself to study and discern the False teachers and prophets?

Also help those who follow such people?