

Matthew 7:16-20: The Tree and The Fruit, Part 2

Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?

Grapes and figs are good fruit. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is symbolized as a fig tree. We see Israel represented as a fig tree (in Hosea 9:10 and in Jeremiah 24), or a fig tree that bears no fruit (Jeremiah 8:13). In the New Testament, we see in Matthew 24:32-35 the Parable of the fig tree. Grapes are used over and over to represent the fruit that comes forth from we who are the branches, God's servants. Jesus says in John 15:1-6 **"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 so that it may bear more fruit.** And so, we see that God cares about His branches bearing fruit **4 Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me.** And so, if the only way to produce fruit is to abide in Christ, then it's not reasonable at all to think that these people who don't even know God, are not even His sheep, are going to be able to be used by God to produce good fruit. In fact, out of the storehouses of their hearts, what they are is going to come forth, and what they produce is going to come from their fallen nature, and these sinful hearts are going to produce bad fruit.

What about those with whom we have doctrinal disagreements? What about those we think are erring in terms of their interpretation of scripture? Do we immediately point a finger at them and yell out "False Prophet, False Teacher"! No, remember that Jesus characterizes false prophets as unbelievers. So, unless we know that person's heart, by their teaching or by their personal lives well enough to say that they're unbelievers, meeting Jesus' definition, then we'd better be careful.

So, how do we handle this? Well, the first thing to understand is that as Christians we are supposed to have humility. And that means that we have to examine the scriptures closely, and see if we are the ones in error. Remember Matthew 7:1-2 **"Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."** Be careful in this area—these could be God's Kid's you're slandering and bad-mouthing, undermining and falsely accusing—and He will take notice. And since the sins that we are guilty of, easily catch our attention when someone else is doing them, we have to be very careful that we're not judging other for the same sins that we're guilty of (Rom 2:1-3 **2 Therefore you have no excuse, you foolish person, everyone of you who passes judgment; for in that matter in which you judge someone else, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3 But do you suppose this, you foolish person who passes judgment on those who practice such things, and yet does them as well, that you will escape the judgment of God?**

17 So every good tree bears good fruit,

Good fruit is that which automatically results from a life lived for Christ. The Holy Spirit will mold our character, and change us from the inside out, while at the same time producing fruit in our lives. When we dedicate ourselves to serving Jesus, it puts us in the right attitude of humble service to God that He can use us. And we find that He does, and often in unexpected ways. As Galatians 5:22-23 tells us: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."** (Galatians 5:22-23). And since this Greek word refers to the natural product of a living thing, it refers to what the Holy Spirit brings out from the inside out of the believer. The fruit of the Spirit is produced by the Spirit, not by the Christian. The Greek word is singular, showing that "fruit" is a unified whole, not independent characteristics. As we grow, all the characteristics of Christ will flow from the inside out in our lives.

but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

Galatians 5 contrasts the good Fruit of the Spirit, with the bad fruit of the deeds of the flesh saying **19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, 20 idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions,**

factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. And so we expect that the hidden lifestyle of false prophets and false teachers looks like this, while their public appearance looks like a sheep. We see this in Jeremiah when God takes him into the hearts of the priests serving in the temple...God says in Jeremiah 23 1-2. And what were they doing? The shepherds were afraid of the evildoers around them, and were delivering the sheep into their hands, they were worshipping false Gods, and scattering the sheep, because of their evil ways, they were strengthening the hands of evildoers to harm the sheep, to benefit themselves. These were adulterers, both spiritually, and physically, they were destroyers of the flock, instead of shepherds of the flock. Probably one of the best sections of scripture that illustrates what false teachers and false prophets are like is found in 2 Peter 2:1 **But false prophets also appeared among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you,** And so, just like Jesus, Peter is describing false prophets as being among the sheep. Now, in order to be among the sheep, that means that the false prophets have to be different from the sheep—i.e. not saved. I mean, it would make no sense for Paul or Jesus to say, “Watch out! There will be sheep among my sheep”. 2nd Peter continues the description of false prophets in terms of both the kind of doctrine that they will bring, and in terms of their fate.

who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

What are destructive heresies? Well, sadly there’s no definitive list, but some examples are:

1. It is a destructive heresy for a man to think that he can be saved without faith in Christ, or while ignoring or denying the redemptive work of Christ.
2. It is a destructive heresy for a man to think that he is safe and saved while yielding to corrupt passions and living a careless life any old way they want to
3. it is a destructive heresy for a man to regard himself as a Christian, and think he is right for heaven, while possessing nothing of the mind and spirit of Christ.
4. It is a "heresy of destruction" for a man to think that if he abstains from great and glaring transgressions he may safely indulge in sins of the heart
5. It is a "heresy of destruction "for a man to think that he is a Christian sheltered by the blood of Christ while he consciously and continually disregards the commands of Christ.
6. It is a "heresy of destruction" for a man to boast that Christ is all in all to him while he withholds himself and all he has from Christ.
7. It is a "heresy of destruction" for a man self-complacently, to suppose that he may be saved, and have no love for God, and cherish hatred for others.

So the most important thing is to examine ourselves to take inventory to make sure that we haven’t been duped into one of these false teaching. Don’t let your flesh deceive you about it.

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

And so, since a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, we won’t see the teaching of these damnable heresies in the doctrine professed by God’s shepherds. Similarly, abiding with Jesus is going to produce the fruit of the Spirit in a person’s life. And, of course we won’t see the impurity and indecent behavior, and destructive attitude toward the sheep as we see in the false teachers. Similarly, a non-Christian can’t produce fruit of the Spirit, but only, ultimately harm and destruction.

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

The destiny of the one who does not abide in Christ, does not remain in Christ is described very similarly to the false teachers and false prophets. We see a description of both their behavior and their destiny in 2 Peter 2:2-5, John 15:6

20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Jesus encapsulates this in the same statement that He began with. Once we know what to look for, we find it is much easier to tell the difference between the true and the false, the good and the bad fruit.