

# Matthew 7:15-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-7/matthew-715-20/>

*Jesus gives His disciples a warning against false prophets and a test for unmasking them.*

The parallel account of this teaching is found in Luke 6:43-44.

Jesus gives another warning: *Beware of the false prophets*. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God. A *false prophet* is someone who claims to speak on God's behalf when in reality he is lying. Jesus tells His disciples to *Beware of them*. Given what Jesus just said about entering through the narrow gate (v. 13), it is natural to assume that *false prophets* will encourage many to enter the wide gate leading to destruction. Be on the lookout for them and do not listen to what they have to say.

Jesus warns that these *false prophets* will appear innocent and harmless, they will *come to you in sheep's clothing*, but they are not harmless. Their appearance is deceptive and their effect is deadly. *Inwardly they are ravenous wolves*. These *false prophets* are looking to take advantage of *you*. They will destroy and consume your soul to get what they want. Don't let them.

Jesus tells His disciples how to recognize *false prophets*. Jesus uses a clear parable to teach how they can do this. To recognize *false prophets*, His disciples *will know them by their fruits*. *Fruits* is a metaphor for their works or what they produce. It refers to what comes out of their lives.

Christ then further explains the metaphor. *Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?* (The rhetorical answer is "No! Neither *grapes nor figs come from thorn bushes or thistles*. *Grapes come from grape vines and figs come from fig trees*.") Assuming this response, Jesus continues with a straight-forward statement. *So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit*. The *good* and *bad* trees represent *good* and *bad* men, or more specifically true *prophets* and *false prophets*. *Good* men and *good prophets* produce *good fruit* (*good* works). *Bad* men and *false prophets* produce *bad fruit* (*bad* works). Jesus then states the inverse of this truth. *A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit*.

Even though *false prophets* appear like *you*, talk like *you*, pretend to be like *you*, they are not like *you*. How can you detect them? Pay attention to their works. *You will know them by their fruits*. If their works are *bad*, they do not represent God.

Before ending, Jesus adds: *every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*. The remark informs His disciples that God will deal with *false prophets*. They will not get away with their lies. God will deal with them. He will not allow them to spoil His orchard. He won't even let them continue to take up space within His gardens. He will *cut them down* and throw them *into the fire* of His judgment.

Jesus closes the parable by repeating its primary point (which He began with): *So then, you will know them by their fruits.*

This passage is sometimes used to justify judging whether or not a person is a believer in Jesus. “If they don’t have good fruits, then they are not a Christian.” But this is an incorrect interpretation and application of this scripture. This passage’s purpose is to equip disciples with how to recognize and avoid *false prophets* and false teachers. The *fruit* test is given only in this context.

This passage does not apply to the general population. It applies to judging teachers, preachers and others who claim to represent or speak on behalf of God. Just a few verses earlier Jesus explicitly condemned judging others (Matthew 7:1-5). He is not reversing Himself here by saying, “Judge others.” He is only saying if someone claims to speak for God, then pay attention to what comes out of their lives before following what they say. Test their *fruit* to see if it is *good*. If it is rotten, then do not follow them *into the fire* of God’s judgement. It is also important to remember that God Himself is a consuming *fire* (Hebrews 12:29). And His judgement *fire* will apply to the deeds of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

### **Biblical Text**

**7:15-20 Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 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.**