

MATTHEW 7:20 LITMUS TEST: WHAT KIND OF TREE ARE YOU?

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The Folly Of Trying To Determine Who Is And Who Isn't Saved, Misuse Of Matthew 7:20, The Litmus Test For True And False Prophets, Moses Advice And Prophecy Regarding Jesus, Jesus Confirms Moses' Prophecy, Ezekiel's Proof Of A True Prophet, The Lord Warned Of Future False Christs And False Prophets, Modern Superficial Christians, Clouds Without Rain, Withered Fruitless Trees, Hypocritical Lord Lord Group, Lip Service Or A Doer Of God's Word?, Salvation And God's Unknowable Ways, There Are None Righteous And None Would Stand Without Christ, We Are Saved By God's Grace And Mercy Alone, Examine Your Own Life First Instead Of Judging The Salvation Of Other People, Closing Remarks, Bill's Bible Basics Suggested Reading List

Over the years I have noticed a dangerous trend on some of the social networks. While I have discussed it before in some of my Bill's Bible Basics articles, this morning I felt compelled to mention it again. The sad and dangerous trend I am referring to are the online Christians who have foolishly taken it upon themselves, and who go around determining who is, and who is not, saved.

I am sure some of my readers know exactly what I am talking about. I've personally seen Christians erroneously make such statements as "Well that person is a Roman Catholic. As such, he cannot possibly be saved. He is damned to Hell." Or maybe someone will say, "That person believes this, so she cannot possibly be saved." Or else perhaps, "That poor individual believes that, so there is no way that he can be saved." And on and on it goes, ad nauseam. It is pathetic.

My friends, for those of you who are guilty of doing this, you really need to STOP, because you are treading on very dangerous ground! Simply put, who is saved, and who is not saved is NOT your determination to make. Salvation is God's domain, and not yours or mine; and when we try to make such a determination, we are clearly overstepping our bounds and becoming judge, jury and prosecutor. What foolishness, and

what arrogance!

Now, no doubt there are certain Christians who will read this short commentary who will be quick to resort to one of their favorite standby Bible verses. I am referring to the following well-known verse, which even I have quoted on many different occasions:

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Matthew 7:20, KJV

Such proud Christian brethren will then quickly retort with a comment such as "See! We can know whether or not a person is saved simply by looking at their fruits!" Sadly, either knowingly -- and thus intentionally -- or possibly due to their own ignorance, they're taking that verse totally out of its proper context. The true fact of the matter is that Matthew 7:20 has absolutely nothing to do with the subject of Salvation. Furthermore, all we need to do is read the previous five verses in order to understand Matthew 7:20 in its proper context. Consider the following group of verses:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Matthew 7:15-20, KJV

So exactly who is Jesus referring to in Matthew 7:20 when He says "their" and "them"? He tells us quite plainly in verse 15 when He says "Beware of false prophets". That is exactly who the "their" and "them" are in verse 20. That being the case, the next thing we need to do is to determine what the Lord is referring to when He uses the phrases "evil fruit" and "good fruit". Considering that Jesus is providing His followers with a litmus test for determining who is a false prophet, the evil and good fruit can only be referring to one thing only. That is to say, true and false prophecies. So what we clearly see then is that with this lesson, Jesus is actually paraphrasing what Moses himself wrote in the Book of Deuteronomy, which is the following:

"But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."

Deuteronomy 18:20-22, KJV

Furthermore, you will find it very interesting to know that it is right before these verses that Moses prophesies about Jesus, and refers to Him as a Prophet. Again, consider the following verses:

"And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

Deuteronomy 18:17-19, KJV

As some of you will know, Jesus spoke of these very verses in the Gospel of John when He said the following to the unbelieving Jews:

"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

John 5:45-47, KJV

Now isn't that interesting! Moses prophesied of another true Prophet who would arrive in the distant future -- meaning, of course, Jesus -- who would be rather similar to himself, and then he even informed his listeners how to distinguish a true Prophet of God from a false prophet. And then a few millennia later, Jesus arrives on the scene and He shares the very same litmus test with His band of followers as Moses had done many centuries earlier. Thus, in my view, what the Lord is REALLY saying in Matthew 7:15-20 is "Look at my fruits to determine whether or not what I am saying to you comes to pass. If it does, then you will know that I am a true Prophet of God."

That is EXACTLY what the Prophet Ezekiel wrote as well, as we can determine by the following verse:

"And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them."
Ezekiel 33:33, KJV

What I also find interesting is the fact that Matthew 7 is not the only place in the Gospels where Jesus touched on the topic of true and false prophets. In fact, in His well-known Olivet Discourse, the Lord warned His followers regarding the false prophets and false christs who would come in His name, and claim to be Him. In other words, they would claim to be Jesus Christ returned to the Earth, as He had promised to do. Consider the following group of verses as clear evidence of this truth:

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many . . . For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."
Matthew 24:11, 24, KJV

"For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect."
Mark 13:22, KJV

So to reiterate my previous point, it should be evident to you by now that Matthew 7:15-20 has absolutely nothing to do with the issue of Salvation. Thus, to try to use said verses as a justification for determining whether or not someone is saved or not is both misguided and wrong. Furthermore, there is another good reason regarding why Matthew 7:15-20 should not be used in that erroneous fashion. Allow me to share it with you for your consideration.

The simple truth of the matter is that there are indeed many bogus Christians in the world today, and the situation becomes worse with each passing year as the Church further compromises with the world. On the surface, such individuals appear to be the finest Christians in the world. They seem to say the right things, and they appear to do the right things. However, sadly, they are really shallow, empty vessels who do not possess the true Spirit of God. I was just reminded of the dark words that were written by Jude, the brother of James and of the Lord:

"These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: CLOUDS THEY ARE WITHOUT WATER, carried about of winds; TREES WHOSE FRUIT WITHERETH, WITHOUT FRUIT, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."

Now isn't that interesting! The Lord warned His followers to closely examine their fruit in order to differentiate a true Prophet of God from a false prophet. Years later we see Jude describing these obviously false, pretentious brethren as withered trees who bear no fruit. This immediately reminded me of yet another incident which we find in the Gospels. Consider the following group of verses:

"Now in the morning as he [Jesus] returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!"

Matthew 21:18-20, KJV

The point is, the outward appearance does not always reveal the truth. As I said a moment ago, many modern Christians are experts at wearing a very deceptive facade. They seem to be the real deal to the untrained eye, and to the undiscerning spirit. But they are deceivers at best. As I have pointed out before, Jesus was very familiar with such hypocritical people who presented themselves as one thing, but who were actually something else altogether. For example, consider what He said at the beginning of Matthew 23:

"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."

Matthew 23:1-3, KJV

Jesus Himself warned His followers that there are many people in the world who have deceived themselves into believing that they have rightly earned a fast train to Heaven due to all of the wonderful things they have supposedly done in the name of

the Lord. However, regarding these superficial pretenders, He had the following to say. Personally, I call them the "Lord, Lord Group". Guess where these verses are found? Right after the verses I already shared with you in Matthew 7:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Matthew 7:21-23, KJV

Now, if the previous verses aren't already enough, allow me to share a few more related verses with you which really expose the difference between true sacrificial service to the Lord, and empty lip service:

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

Luke 6:46, KJV

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

John 13:17, KJV

"Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Matthew 15:7-9, KJV

"Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Mark 7:5-7, KJV

"Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;"

Ephesians 6:6, KJV

Wow! Doesn't that sound just like a lot of the popular, showy

preachers that we see plaguing the Christian world today? Yet it is nothing new. Such individuals have been around for many centuries; even since the time of Christ. Following are some additional Bible verses which stress the importance of truly living our faith, and not just giving the Lord lip service:

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."
James 1:22-25, KJV

"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."
James 2:20-26, KJV

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."
James 4:17, KJV

"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."
Matthew 25:10-12, KJV

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then

shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

Matthew 25:31-46, KJV

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last."

Luke 13:24-30, KJV

Returning to the issue of the foolish practice of trying to determine whether or not another person is saved, the simple fact of the matter is that you do NOT know how the Lord may be working in another person's life behind the scenes. There may be some people who appear to be saved in your mind, but who are not truly saved. On the other hand, there are also folks who you would never think could possibly ever be saved, who really are saved. The bottom line is that we don't always understand God's unknowable ways, as is plainly made rather evident in the following verses. Only He knows who is and who isn't ordained to Salvation:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."
Isaiah 55:8-9, KJV

So, to reiterate this point once again, it is NOT your place to determine whether or not that individual is saved. Again, that is God's domain alone. My gosh! If we were to determine how many Christians are saved based on what they say and do, I would dare say that we would ALL fail the test, because we have ALL at one time or another said and done things which we shouldn't, even AFTER coming to know the Lord. After all, consider the truth which is found in the following verses:

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one . . . For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"
Romans 3:10, 23, KJV

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"
Psalm 130:3, KJV

"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."
Lamentations 3:22-23, KJV

As for those of you who may believe otherwise, you really deceive yourselves, plain and simple. As all Christians know, or at least should know, our Salvation is based solely on our faith in the atoning Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which was a gift of God's grace and mercy. Period. It has nothing to do with our works or with what we say or do. If such were truly the case, then Christ died needlessly. Here again are a few

well-known verses for your consideration:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Ephesians 2:8-9, KJV

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;"

Titus 3:5, KJV

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Galatians 2:16, KJV

So to those of you who are guilty of trying to judge another person's Salvation, again I say to you, please just STOP it! Desist from stepping on God's toes! Instead of worrying so much about whether or not another person is truly saved, I urge you to examine your OWN life first, and make sure that you are truly walking in a way which is pleasing to the Lord. Please consider the following two Bible verses"

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

2 Corinthians 13:5, KJV

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Philippians 2:12, KJV

With these thoughts, I will bring this article to a close. It is my hope that you've found it informative and enlightening, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life as well. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you'd take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information and further study, you may want

to refer to the list of reading resources below which were either mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server. To read these articles, simply click or tap on any link you see below.

A Discussion Regarding Philippians 2:12

Are You a Burning Ember for the Lord?

Are You Saved and Sealed and Healed and Filled?

Dead to the Law: God's Laws Written on Our Hearts

Elijah: Where Are the True Prophets of God?

Facebook False Prophets and Misguided Teachers

Free From the Fear of Death: Law and Works vs Grace

Is the Message of Salvation Meant for All Men?

Message to the World

Not Everyone is a Child of God

OSAS: Are We Once Saved, Always Saved?

Salvation is Free Through Jesus Christ

The Office of Prophets and Teachers

The Parable of the Sower: Salvation and Service

This Little Light, Glory of the Lord and Our Bright Future

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