

Lesson 17

Fruit Inspection

Icebreaker:

What is your favorite fruit and how do you check it for quality?

Introduction:

As Jesus begins to draw the Sermon on the Mount to a close, He continues to admonish His disciples to be discerning, to know the difference between good and evil. He cautions them to be wary of false prophets. Then He explains how to discern them and their error.

The simple definition of a prophet is a person who declares the will of a god to people. They are usually endowed with supernatural gifts, which serve as signs and wonders to people that their testimony is authentic. One of the common gifts is the extraordinary ability to foretell some future event; hence many times they are called seers. As their primary responsibility is to reveal the will of god they can be classified along with teachers. Some prophets and teachers are true and some are false.

The one true God wants people to heed His prophets and His teachers because they are sent as gifts to aid the people in walking in the way of righteousness. However, the Israelites were told to test the prophets to see if they were false. These tests can be found in the thirteenth and eighteenth chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. There are two tests and the failure to meet both tests, resulted in the death of the prophet.

The first test involved speaking in the name of the Lord. Even if the sign or wonder came to pass as the prophet declared but he told the people to serve other gods, he was false. The second test involved a prophet speaking his own mind. Even if a prophet came to the people in the name of the Lord but his sign or wonder did not come to pass as he said, he was false.

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 7:15-29, Luke 6:43-49

The Sermon on the Mount Matthew 7:15-20 and Luke 6:43-45

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

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. For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit; nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. 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."

Matthew 7:21-29 and Luke 6:46-49

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
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Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE **LAWLESSNESS**.' Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great." The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Lawlessness. Living without law or in violation of the law. Although followers of Jesus Christ are not under the Law of Moses, they are still under law ... The Law of the Spirit of Christ.

The Command:

Beware of false prophets.

The Lesson:

With the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection from the dead, power was given to the Church to prophesy and perform signs and wonders. However, it would provide an opportunity for false prophets and teachers to creep in unnoticed and destroy God's people from within. Jesus foresaw this time of deception and warned the disciples that in the last days false prophets would come and mislead many. Knowing that some would be able to both speak in His name and perform signs and wonders that would come to pass, Jesus instructed His disciples to use a third method to test the prophets and teachers: the test of character. "*You will know them by their fruits*".¹

These false prophets are difficult to detect because they disguise themselves as members of Jesus' flock but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. From a previous lesson we discovered that dogs are those who have rejected God in their hearts and wolves are part of the canine family. The Apostle Paul spoke to the Church at Ephesus concerning these men.² "*I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.*" Based on the book of Jude verse 11 it appears that the false prophets and teachers have three basic traits in common. Jude says, "*For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.*"

Cain, Balaam and Korah have several things in common with one another. Each of them intimately knew God, heard Him speak, and was placed in a position of prominence by God. They each worshipped God and made offerings to Him. However, none of them was content with God. Each was motivated by covetousness and wanted to override God authority by doing things their own way. And each of them was responsible for the death of God's people.

¹ Matthew 7:16 and 20

² Acts 20:29-30

Cain was the first-born son of a man and woman. He knew the story of Adam and Eve's failure to obey God, their consequences, and the curse upon the land. And He knew of God's forgiveness and mercy towards his parents when God provided skins as a covering for their nakedness. Yet Cain tried to obtain God's favor by the works of his hands and the sweat of his brow when he brought an offering from the produce of land that God had cursed. God rejected Cain's offering but accepted his younger brother Abel's, who brought the first born of his flocks.

Abel honored God. He had respect for God's authority and trusted in His ways of doing things. He recognized God's favor was not obtained by man's effort but through his thankfulness for God's provision. Abel did not have to work by the sweat of his brow on the land that God had cursed to bring his offering. He had only to be thankful to God for his sheep. They provided Abel with food, drink, and clothing. Then, through no effort on Abel's part, the sheep multiplied naturally providing an offering to God and an increase in his wealth. Because Cain coveted his brother's favor he murder him.

Balaam was a prophet of God. He was able to accurately hear God's voice, foretell the future, and had power to bless or curse people. Balak, king of the Moabites, hired Balaam to curse Israel. However, God prevented him from doing it. First, Balaam was rebuked by his own donkey and second, God only allowed him to bless Israel. But Balaam coveted the king's gold. Despite knowing God's will in the matter, Balaam instructed the king on a method that would destroy Israel. The king was to send the women of Moab to entice the men of Israel. The women would turn the hearts of the men to worship and serve the gods of Moab thereby causing God to destroy His own people because of their sin. The plan worked and many of God's people were destroyed.

Korah was an Israelite. He was a descendant of Levi, whose tribe officiated as priests. He belonged to the clan of Kohath, which was held in high esteem because God had chosen them to bear the sacred furnishings and utensils used for worship in the tabernacle. Korah was a leader of his people. He knew God, he had seen all the miracles that God had performed through Moses and that God had chosen Moses to lead the people. Yet he rebelled because he coveted Moses' power and authority. His rebellion resulted in the destruction of himself, his family and two hundred and fifty other leaders of Israel and their families.

After the short review of these men's lives we see that their primary focus was self-promotion. Their actions show they were motivated by personal gain not by the love of God and man. Cain, Balaam and Korah are used in Scripture as examples that wrong motivation can occur in the three different aspects of man: body, soul, and spirit. The way of Cain involves the body. It is satisfying the desires of the flesh and is evidenced by **1) unholy living in the midst of the people of God.** The error of Balaam is satisfying the desires of the soul by greed and is evidenced by **2) teaching that causes the people of God to fall.** The rebellion of Korah involves the spirit. Its basis is pride and consists of grumbling and complaining against God, His leaders and His ways. It is evidenced through **3) causing division in the people of God.**

Jesus clearly tells His disciples that not everyone who declares that Jesus is Lord actually belongs to Him. He is cautioning His disciples about an error concerning salvation that will creep into the Church. According to the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans 10:8–11, the way of salvation is explained. *"THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART-- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.'*"

The apostle Paul simply and correctly states the way of salvation. But men will pervert this truth. In his second epistle the Apostle Peter warns his hearers that the untaught and unstable will distort what the Apostle Paul teaches, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. Next he cautions them to be on their guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, they fall from their own steadfastness. Then he encourages them to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.³

The perversion that Peter is talking about concerns the lordship of Jesus Christ. It involves giving only mental ascent to the fact that Jesus is Lord. People will simply say the words “Jesus is Lord” and believe they will be saved. To them the statement becomes a magical incantation or ticket to heaven. Whereas the truth of the matter is that when a person confesses that Jesus is Lord, he is in fact stating that he will do everything that his Lord commands him to do. When a person does not do as his Lord commands it shows that he is a hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another. His behavior reveals his character. He really doesn’t believe in his heart that Jesus is Lord or he would do what Jesus says. As James puts it in his epistle, *“Faith without works is dead.”*

Jesus affirms this when He says, *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness”*.⁴ Those who pervert the gospel of grace do so by declaring that they are no longer under law, but grace. When this means to them, that they are free to live in any manner of their choosing, it is a perversion. In essence they are saying that there is no authority greater than themselves and they can do whatever is right in their own eyes. There is no one who is Lord of their life.

In his epistle to the Romans chapter 6, verses 14-15, the Apostle Paul does state that the followers of Jesus Christ are no longer under law, but under grace. When read in context of the whole epistle it is understood that Jesus’ disciples are no longer bound to follow to the letter of the Law of Moses. But by the grace of God they are bound to follow the law of the Spirit. The obligation under the law of the Spirit is to be motivated by love for God and others in everything a person says and does.

The Apostle Paul brings further clarity to the issue in his epistle to the Galatians by contrasting the Law of Moses and the Spirit of Christ. In Galatians 5:18, he states that a person being led by the Holy Spirit is not under the Law. But he doesn’t stop there. His next statements show whether the Holy Spirit or a person’s own flesh is leading him. *“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law”*.⁵

Jesus clearly exposes this perversion of the Gospel in His parable of the two house builders. Both men built houses to protect themselves from the storm. The storm represents the wrath or judgment of God since He alone controls the forces of nature. The houses represent the means by which the men will be saved from the wrath or judgment of God. One man’s salvation was based on sand, which equates to only hearing Jesus’ words. This man’s hope of salvation was destroyed.

³ 2 Peter 3:16-18

⁴ Matthew 7:23

⁵ Galatians 5:19-23

The other man's salvation was based on rock, which equates to both hearing and doing Jesus' words. This man's hope of salvation proved adequate.

In the gospel of John 12:47-50, Jesus reiterates this truth. *"And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."*

Application:

Jesus wants His disciples to be fruit inspectors, to discern good and evil, and to choose for themselves that which is good without judging others. By using Scripture we can begin to discern false prophets and teachers.

1. Read the following passages of Scripture in order one at a time.
 - a. Jude
 - b. 2 John :7-11
 - c. 1 John 2:18-23, 4:1-6, and 5:1-5
 - d. 2 Peter 2:1-22
2. Identify the behaviors of false prophets and teachers revealed in each passage of Scripture.
3. List each behavior under one of the three basic character traits exhibited by Cain, Balaam or Korah.

The Way of Cain (desires of the flesh ... unholy living in the midst of the people of God)

1. Ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness.
2. They defile the flesh.
3. Caring for themselves.
4. They are worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.
5. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.
6. They indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires.
7. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime.
8. They have eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin.
9. They forsake the right way.
10. They entice by fleshly desires.

Error of Balaam (greed ... teaching that causes the people of God to fall)

1. They deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.
2. They speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.
3. They do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.
4. They do not abide in the teaching of Christ.
5. They do not listen to the Apostles.
6. They deny that Jesus is the Christ.
7. They do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
8. They secretly introduce destructive heresies.
9. In their greed they will exploit you with false words.
10. Entice unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed.
11. Promise freedom while they live in corruption.

Rebellion of Korah (grumbling and complaining against God, His leaders and His ways ... pride causes division in the people of God)

1. Reject authority.
2. Revile angelic majesties
3. These are grumblers, finding fault.
4. Mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.
5. Ones who cause divisions.
6. They do not remain in the Church.
7. They do not keep God's commandments.
8. Despise authority.
9. Daring.
10. Self-willed.