

Beware of Pseudo-Christianity Matthew 7:15-23

I. Who are those wolves in sheep's clothing?

- A. The context is a discussion of salvation and the Gospel.
 - 1. The narrow gate and road refer to the Gospel of grace.
 - 2. The wide gate and road are salvation by works or merit.
 - 3. The false teaching is a false gospel.
- B. It may seem like Jesus is talking about cult leaders.
 - 1. He says they look like sheep on the outside.
 - (a) But inwardly they are ferocious wolves.
 - 2. He is not talking about their conscious intentions.
 - (a) In fact, they look like sheep because their intentions are good.
 - (b) They look like Christians. They are nice, kind, loving.
 - (c) They often speak about the need to love people, to do good.
 - (d) That is why they are dangerous. They appear to be good.
 - 3. The threat they pose is subtle.
 - (a) They don't even realize it. They think they are Christians.
 - (b) But they are unveiled in verses 22-23.
 - (c) These are leaders in the institutional church.
 - (d) But they are not part of the Church, not believers.
 - (e) This can be Father O'Malley or Rev. Smith.
 - 4. The inner ferociousness is a reference to their nature (fallen).
 - (a) It is also a reference to the deadliness of a false gospel.
- C. Jesus says, "you'll know them by their fruits."
 - 1. Fruits is used several ways in Scripture.
 - (a) This is not referring to fruits of the Spirit.
 - (b) They appear to have that fruit (love, peace, joy).
 - (c) The Bible also speaks of the fruit of our lips, words (Hebrews 13:15).
 - (d) The fruit of a prophet is his/her words.
 - 2. Thorns and thistles are fallen imagery, from the curse.
 - (a) You can't get grapes from thornbushes.
 - (b) You can't get the true Gospel from a dead prophet.
 - (c) Bad trees produce bad fruit because dead people are blind.
 - (d) To be alive, you must be born again, born of the Spirit.
 - (e) Then you speak forth good Gospel fruit because you can see. So, the good fruit is the truth of the Gospel.
 - 3. Bad trees will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
 - (a) Unless they hear the Gospel and trust Christ.
 - (b) So, realize that sometimes clergy still need to be evangelized.
 - (c) Sometimes lay leaders in the church don't yet know Christ.
 - (d) Don't assume that someone knows God because of their position.
 - (e) We need to have compassionate hearts toward them.

II. Three common false gospels to be aware of:

- A. The moralistic gospel frames things in good and bad behavior.
 - 1. It is about our behavior, our being moral.
 - 2. There is an emphasis on a moral code.
 - (a) The 10 Commandments
 - (b) The rules and traditions of the church/denomination.
 - 3. Anytime God's acceptance of us is framed in moralistic terms rather than based upon grace, it is not the true Gospel.
- B. The legalistic gospel
 - 1. The emphasis is laws and rules, staying within the boundaries.
 - 2. We need to distinguish between legalistic practice and a legalistic gospel. You can be Christian and still be legalistic.
 - 3. A legalistic gospel isn't Christian at all.
 - (a) It is a false gospel because it adds requirements.
 - (b) The Judaizers in Acts called for Jesus plus circumcision.
 - (c) It is syncretistic, adding something else to the Gospel.
 - (d) We are saved by grace alone. Grace + anything is not grace!
 - (e) The Boston Church of Christ: Jesus plus baptism (only their baptism).
 - 4. Legalistic churches profess the true Gospel, salvation by grace through faith, but then advocate a legalistic lifestyle.
 - (a) There is an emphasis on the "don'ts" and a judgmental culture.
 - (b) There is a tendency to add to God's Word (Revelation 22:18-19) (i.e., True Christians don't drink alcohol).
 - (c) Legalistic churches undermine the freedom of the Gospel.
- C. A humanist gospel.
 - 1. Jesus was a good teacher but no substitutionary sacrifice.
 - 2. He taught us to love, to be good people.
 - 3. People are basically good (no fallen nature).
 - 4. A low view of the authority of Scripture (Thomas Jefferson).
 - 5. Often, a universalist view of salvation (everyone saved).

III. How do we protect ourselves against false prophets and false gospels?

- A. We need to have an accurate understanding of the Gospel, ourselves. False gospels fill gospel vacuums.
 - 1. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, not as a result of works, that no one should boast..."
 - (a) By grace alone through faith alone. Good works are irrelevant!
- B. Realize that someone can be a "nice guy" and still preach a deadly gospel.
 - 1. It is not about whether the messenger is likable.
 - 2. It is about the message being truthful!
 - (a) Does the message line up with what the New Testament says about salvation?
 - 3. Review the Gospel with your kids and grandkids, with disciples.