

## Only One Gospel

**SCRIPTURE** Matthew 7:15-20: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. ★ Upon concluding the body of His sermon, Christ calls for His hearers to respond decisively. He presents a series of figures in pairs. There are two gates and two roads (7:13-14), two trees and two fruits (7:15-20), two wills and two lords (7:21-23), and two builders and two foundations (7:24-27). In presenting these pairs Christ is making a statement about ultimate reality. He effectively heightens the singularity of His person, work, and message. There might be many opinions, many philosophies, many perspectives, and many religions but all these are in the same class while Christ stands entirely alone in a class all His own. He has just commanded entrance through a narrow path by a narrow gate that points to Him (7:13-14). There is no other way to enter the kingdom of heaven. He effectively presents an astonishingly singular means of salvation for humanity—a narrow gate. How, then, does this paragraph (7:15-20) connect with the previous? Why is there only one gospel? Discuss the importance of knowing and making this known.

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2. Christ warns of the impending threat of deception. It poses continual danger. Not only is the way singular, unpopular, hard, and hard to find, many will try to distract and deceive you away from it. Many will insist that Christ is not the only way, that Christ is not the only gate. By implication, Christ is here urging His disciples to not only go the way of the narrow path, but to stay on it. What do false prophets do (read Matthew 24:11)? Christ says that they will “come to you in sheep’s clothing.” Why does Jesus portray them as dressing up like sheep? Discuss the implications of such deception. Will they be easy to spot? Will they appear threatening?

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

3. The word prophet describes someone who speaks for another (Titus 1:12). As it relates to God, a true prophet is one who speaks for God (Jeremiah 23:30–32; Ezekiel 22:27–28). The primary function of a prophet is to shepherd the people of God, speaking the word of God (Jeremiah 23:1, 26, 18, 22; Matthew 9:36). Prophets are subject to the written Word of God (1 Corinthians 14:32, 37; Acts 17:11). Jesus is the true prophet *par excellence* (Deuteronomy 18:15, Matthew 21:11). He speaks for God uniquely, since He alone is God in human flesh (Hebrews 1:1–2). Discuss the implications of Jesus issuing a warning about false prophets at the conclusion of Him speaking? What does this imply about Jesus' words? About Jesus Himself? About our response to Him?

4. The greatest threat to Christ's church is not open opposition, but deceiving voices from within. Read 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 and Acts 20:28–31. Only the nature of these false prophets is revealed, not what they teach. The context requires that we understand anything which distracts and diverts someone from the narrow way and gate—anything contrary to the exclusivity of Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) and His lordship (Matthew 7:21–23)—is a false gospel. Like other false prophets this may include preaching peace when people need repentance (Jeremiah 8:11; 23:17), preaching vain hopes (Jeremiah 23:16), preaching visions and directions as from the Lord when they are not (Ezekiel 22:28), and seeking money (Jeremiah 6:13). It also points to passive failures like failing to alert God's people to dangers (Isaiah 56:10). The early church (in *Didache*) identified false prophets as those who seek to take advantage of the church's generosity, who lead for their own selfish benefit, and even those who teach truth yet do not practice what they teach. Guarding our hearts and tongues from unprofitable talk (slander, gossip, mockery, etc.), what are some examples of deceiving messages within the church today? Read 1 Timothy 6:4–5 and discuss some of the results of such deceiving voices. Are the dangers of these wolfish voices dangers felt in this world? Discuss the Trojan horse analogy. How do we guard from such dangers?

5. ★ Discuss the following statements: "We miss the point if we do not see the emphasis on Christ as the only way, the only gate—the only righteousness of God upon which our eternal life depends. We miss the point if we do not see the all-important matter as the truth of the gospel—as Christ Himself. The gospel doesn't have to do with self-image, self-help, success, making money, winning, or staying healthy. The Bible is preoccupied with the holiness of God and our sinfulness before Him. No amount of religion, good deeds, or self-sacrifice can ever forgive sin and make you right with the God that gives you life and holds you accountable. The gospel alone makes reconciliation between God and man possible. The unrighteous can be made righteous—(2 Corinthians 5:21)—by His wounds we are healed."

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

6. Christ's words here demand a great deal from us. They demand keen discernment. Jesus points us to see that there is a way to recognize deceivers. "By their fruits." To summarize we may say that the gospel produces fruit that makes much of Christ in doctrine and deed. Jesus starts with the distinction of the "kind" of fruit (7:16) and then the "quality" of fruit (7:17-19). Who expects to gather grapes from thorns? It is a law of God's ingenuity: Everything in nature reproduces after its kind. This is also true with spiritual realities. The gospel has its own seed in it and brings forth after its own kind. Discuss the following statement: *"There is an unequivocal necessity of change when the gospel meets sinners. Either the gospel will change the sinner, or the sinner will change the gospel. The two cannot coexist unchanged."* Read Matthew 12:33 and discuss how this, again, points us to the gospel.

7. How are the trees distinguished? Were their environmental conditions different? Is this a matter of **nature** or **nurture**? What does this imply regarding changes in government, education, economy, or society in general? What does this imply regarding changes in our personal circumstances, health, wealth, relationships, employment, etc.? While such changes may aid the true Christian in their yield of fruit, they will never change a person's nature. What is the key to producing "good fruit"?

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

8. The “fruit” that Jesus speaks should not be oversimplified. Jesus plainly states that we will recognize false prophets by their fruits (7:20), but what are these fruits? We suggest at least three categories: (A) Their **words** (Matthew 12:33–37; Luke 6:45; 1 John 4:1; 2:22–23; 4:3; 2 John 7–9). But words alone will not do (7:21). (B) Their **works** (Matthew 6:1–2, 5, 16; 23:13–33; 2 Corinthians 11:12; Philippians 3:18–19; Colossians 2:8, 16–23; Titus 1:16; 2 Peter 2:1–3; 3:17; Jude 1:4). But we may not recognize a false prophet even by their words and works (7:21–23). The ultimate test of one who speaks for God is found in (C) their **worship**. The key to recognizing a minister who is true to Christ and His gospel is indicated by Jesus in John 7:18 (see John 5:41, 44; 12:43; 17:4). Importantly, this includes both their *words* and their *works*, but goes further. It speaks of their hearts. It is not enough to be orthodox. It is not enough to be without outward abuses. Read and discuss Matthew 15:8; Philippians 3:2–3; Galatians 6:4; 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 4:8–9. Discuss the importance of overtly seeking to make much of Christ in ministry. What are some practical implications concerning what we listen to, whom we watch, and what we read? How does the importance of the local church play into this (Ephesians 4:11–14; Hebrews 13:7)?

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