

CHAPTER IV AUTHENTIC NARROW DISCIPLESHIP AND PREACHERS

According To Jesus And His Doctrines of Grace

¹⁵*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

¹⁶*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

¹⁷*Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*

¹⁸*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

¹⁹*Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

²⁰*Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

Matthew 7:15-20

An Obvious Contextual Connection

The two preceding verses in Christ's Sermon presuppose a close relation between these warnings about *false prophets* and their *fruits*, and the *narrow gate* and *narrow way* therein proclaimed by Jesus. Since these verses of our text are a vital part of Jesus' invitation at the close of His Sermon (*verses 13-27*), the connection should become evident to the Bible interpreter. Christ has just made clear that authentic discipleship is really in direct contrast with the worldly masses and their position on the Great Broad Way. He warned against living according to one's own carnal inclinations, against doing what is natural to all ordinary men, and against experiencing no change when one professes faith in Him. He has just emphasized His strict requirement for a change from the ways of the worldly masses.

Immediately after those teachings about the *narrow gate* and *narrow way* as contrasted with the *wide gate* and *broad way*, He now deals with how so many are deceived into thinking that the *wide gate* and *broad way* end in *life eternal*. Jesus warns against the

promoters of wide gate and broad way reasoning. Jesus condemns the promoters—the preachers—of any broad kind of lifestyle for His disciples. Jesus denounces the Devil’s prophets who promulgate a wide-gate Jesus in their preaching, and warns against the prospect that men can be “in Christ” without a radical change both in heart and in life, a change that He has just declared in *verses 13 and 14*. Jesus called authentic discipleship *the narrow way*, entered only through a *narrow gate*. But there are *prophets*—preachers—who go about with a perverted, broad gospel, which is not really the gospel of grace at all,

⁶I am made to be marveling that so quickly you are changing opinion away from the one having called you within the grace of Christ unto another gospel of a different kind:

⁷Which is not another of the same kind; except in this sense, there is someone troubling you and wishing and desiring to reverse the gospel of the Christ.

⁸But even if we, or an angel messenger himself out of heaven, should evangelize you with a gospel different from what we evangelized you with, dedicated to destruction let him be.

⁹As we have first uttered, even now again I am saying, Since someone is making proclamation of a gospel to you different from what you received from me, dedicated to destruction let him be. Galatians 1:6-9 ADT ²⁷

These false preachers know only a permissive christ who does not really exist at all. They know, worship, and preach a false christ, an idol, a false god who is not God or Christ at all. They know nothing of the holiness of the real God, Jesus Christ, without which holiness no man shall see the Lord. Therefore, through their persuasions of flesh-appealing psychology they gain great numbers of true professions in their own false god and his christ, which are really false professions of the true God and His Christ.

Jesus knows the importance of making clear to His authentic disciples how to detect these kinds of *false prophets*. Therefore, He included in this final appeal of His great Sermon, a recognition

²⁷ Author’s Distinctive Translation

of the false preacher and how to determine the validity of a man's calling as from God, or if its origin is from the pits of hell. That determination rests not on outward appearance, but on the kind of doctrinal and human *fruit* they produce.

Sheep's Clothing and Angels of Light

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Matthew 7:15

¹¹*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*

¹⁴*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*

¹⁵*Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. II Corinthians 11:13-15*

How does a disciple determine who is and who is not a *false prophet*?²⁸ How does a disciple know who to listen to? Jesus answers these questions in our text. He had just begun the opening of His Sermon's invitation in *verses 13* and *14*, and now begins to finish up the Sermon with this warning of men who *come to you in sheep's clothing*. Jesus' reference to this apparel indicates the impossibility for the unaided natural senses to distinguish between the false and true preacher; they look like sheep. There are no wolves' fangs protruding out of their disguise because their corrupt nature is completely hidden within a sheep's veneer. They appear as true as any sheep might appear. They have all the right sounding words and phrases. They have an entirely correct demeanor. Their deportment is unquestionably smooth, and is, to all outward appearances, a spiritually motivated manner as befits a servant of Jesus Christ. Even their words are shrouded in the language of Christian theology. So, how do disciples ascertain which "preachers" are genuine and which are false? How can we obey

²⁸ "Prophet" and "preacher" are used interchangeably throughout the exposition, the former being the Old Testament emphasis, the latter being the New Testament equivalent.

our Lord's admonition to *beware of false prophets* if we cannot know them by their appearance? Jesus gives us the solution to the problem in the words that begin and end this warning about false preachers, *verses 15 and 20, Ye shall know them by their fruits.*

False prophets, false preachers, wolves in sheep's clothing, and Satan's ministers are the same persons; they are false teachers who appear as interpreters, instructors, and ministers of the Word of God and Christ's doctrine. They are men who have been transformed into *messengers of light* while they really propagate darkness. They wear *sheep's clothing* such as Christ's sheep possess. They appear gentle and meek in their outward facade but *inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

Ravening Wolves

Jesus defined *wolves* as those who are opposed to Him and to His Kingdom. *Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matthew 10:16).* Wolves are full of an innate malice toward sheep, just as Satan's ministers are similarly isposed toward Jesus' sheep. They are as opposed to Christ and His work and to its proclamation as is Satan. Satan is the transforming power in them to deceive the very elect, if it were possible (*Matthew 24:11, 24*). Jesus' warning means that the great danger which His own sheep shall "encounter upon the new or narrow way, will arise from the influence of false prophets.... The main idea of the simile is the disguise of an old and evil kind under a new garb of piety."²⁹ They are among the true sheep. They are pastoring churches. Their great numbers are menacing the truth of the gospel of the grace of God through their hideous antinomian doctrine of a *wide gate* and *broad way*. They sow tares among the wheat, which tares are not infrequently as indistinguishable as the *wolves in sheep's clothing*. Both the *wolves* and their devotees are, for many folks, difficult to distinguish from the true under-shepherds and sheep. According to Christ, the determinant for distinguishing between the true and false is in the fruits. Understanding their nature does not come from any illusory bearing of the pseudo pastor-preachers.

²⁹ John P. Lange, Matthew, Commentary On The Holy Scriptures (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, n.d.), p. 144.

False preachers of a wide gate experience with Jesus will be manifested as *ravening wolves* and their doctrine of “easy believism” will be proven false at His judgement. The disappointment and distress of a sudden reversal of what one thought was one’s eternal destiny will make the propagators of Savior-only salvation to appear indeed as *ravening wolves*. The sudden degradation of such profound and gigantic proportions will be the unveiling of the *wolves*, the removal of the *sheep’s clothing*, even the revelation of the *ravening* nature of their duplicity. In the next section (*verses 21-23*), the broad way disciples, together with their pastors, who preach a wide-gate Jesus and a supposed “easy believism,” are unmasked for what they really are. Unexpectedly, *sheep’s clothing* will no longer cloak the wolves’ ferocious and violent nature and their damning doctrine of “easy-believism.” The *ravening* denotes the greedy search for their prey who are savagely harmed by their assertion to be and occupation as *prophets*. The great disappointment of having one’s expectations smashed and then reversed, reveals the prophets for just what they are: *false prophets* with hearts of and ministries from *voracious, predacious, and rapacious profligates*. The great judgement of God through Jesus Christ will in like fashion raven, devour, and consume them for an eternity. As the wolfish preachers were in reality *ravening* preachers, so will be Christ’s judgement similarly *ravening* to them and their followers in the end, as Christ is about to pledge in the closing of His Sermon, *Matthew 7:24-27*.

I. THE “MANY FRUITS” OF FALSE PREACHERS

Jesus referenced *fruits* or *fruit* seven times in these six verses. He began and ended with the same, or nearly the same, allusion to *knowing them by their fruits*. In *verse 16*, *Ye shall know them by their fruits*. Again in *verse 20*, *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them*. Obviously, Christ put great emphasis upon these *fruits*, using plurals.

What are the *fruits* by which we can positively recognize and unerringly know false preachers? The immediate context demands a specific answer to that question. The preceding verses refer to two kinds of wayfarers—those *few* walking in the *narrow* Christian way, or the *many* on The Great Broad Way. Obviously, the fruit of any preacher’s ministry are those who are influenced by his efforts. In this context it is either the *few* or the *many*, the travelers of the *narrow* or the *broad* way, the entrants into a *narrow* or a *wide* gate. But Jesus is emphasizing plurality of *fruits*. Purposefully in the original, Jesus used the plural six of the seven times when He referred to κωρπους, *fruits*. Jesus referenced this same plurality in *verse 13* just preceding and in *verse 22* just following this emphasis. The *fruits* are the *many* who enter the *wide* gate and live on the *broad* way (*verse 13*), and are the *many* who fail to have *known* Jesus in spite of their supposed great works for Him (*verse 22*). Therefore, these *fruits* are the false professors of *verses 13 and 21-23*, the same persons. The context demands that understanding. This would indicate that the *fruits* of the false preachers are their *many* converts, as well as, but secondarily, everything else that makes them false disciples.

Jesus’ emphasis upon the plural *fruits* of false prophets makes the *fruits* threefold, each leading to and contributing to the next in sequence. First, *their fruits* are their doctrines of a wide gate entrance into Christ’s salvation and the broad way lifestyle that naturally follows that kind of inaugural experience. Secondly and primarily, *their fruits* are the *many* numbers of their

disciples, denoted by the frequent plurals of Jesus, which are the results of their ministries. Multitudes flock to a doctrine that sanctions salvation at no cost to one's desires or lifestyle. Thirdly, this preaching leads to their disciples' fruits, which are the unrestrained and unconverted lifestyles of their *many* undeterminable false professors, who live in accord with what they heard the false prophets preach.³⁰ Those fruits mark a preacher as false, but notice it is their fruits. When all three factors are a consistent part of a preacher's ministry, then Jesus brands him FALSE.³¹ According to Jesus this is a three-staged process: first, the preaching of a wide-gate Savior; second, the many numbers of their converts; and third, the unrestricted and unchanged lifestyles in their converts. The three are the outgrowth of an essentially false ministry. There is a deductive progression and spontaneous succession producing the fruits by which His true disciples are to know the false preacher and the pseudo Christian.

³⁰ A church itself might be predominately righteous and holy, yet, because of a wide-gate Jesus being preached by the latest Pastor, his vast numbers of baptisms place on the church rolls *many* broadwayers, who are subtly referred to as "our inactive members." In most modern-day churches the "inactive members" by far outnumber the "active members," again authenticating, the *many* and the *few* referred to by Jesus in His use of fruits.

³¹ It must be kept in mind that all three factors determine falsity, and that large numbers or large congregations alone do not in any way discredit any ministry. Charles Haddon Spurgeon of the 19th century and John F. MacAthur Jr. of the 20th century are prime examples of true ministries which were/are "*many-oriented*"; but what brands them as true prophets is the true doctrine which they both believe[d] and practice[d] (i.e. Bible teaching and preaching of The Doctrines of Grace, which effect the presentation of a "Narrow-gate Jesus."), and the practical result of those doctrines upon the lives of their converts. Numbers alone mean nothing. Unfortunately, this cannot be said of most large, "*many-oriented*," ministries. To them, numbers mean everything, and The Doctrines of Grace mean nothing. Consequently, their *many* supposed, but false, converts attest that these modern-day prophets and their works are false. Over their church doors is the title, **JESUS, SAVIOR ONLY**; there is nothing of the Almighty Christ or of His real Lordship inside their mega-churches or in the lives of their *many* converts.

To begin with, the false message of salvation through a wide-gate Jesus is preached, which then leads to the *many* followers who anxiously clutch at such a permissive Christ, who then live as wicked and unchanged disciples of doom and continue to believe and to promote this false message. And believe it they do, even to the death. These false prophets as well as their converts are so convinced by their preaching a wide-gate Jesus, that in *that day* of judgment their *many* numbers will claim to have *prophesied*, to have *cast out devils*, and to have *done many wonderful works*, all in the *name* of Jesus.³²

Known By Fruits

Jesus used the metaphor of trees and their fruit as representative of false preachers and their fruit. In other words, the tree will bear the same fruit as the particular species of its origin. The question, *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?* is much more meaningful since it is asked before the tree and fruit metaphor. The *trees* are *thorn* and *thistle* trees. They have that in their nature. They are not *fig* or *grape* trees. The phrase, *thorns and thistles*, is first found in *Genesis 3:18*, and Christ no doubt meant to reference these words' grouping and meaning here as applicable to the kinds of trees that false preachers are, and to what kinds of *fruits* will be the natural yield from them. Their wares, *thorns and thistles*, refer to the curse of sin placed upon the ground for man's sin against God.

Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.
Genesis 3:18

The *thorns and thistles* are the result of sin; they could be said to be the fruits of sin. Sin was sown and the ground brought forth *thorns and thistles*. This is the metaphor that Christ uses in His Sermon's conclusion. False prophets bring forth the *fruits of thorns and thistles* through their false doctrine. Through their ministries of a wide-gate Jesus, they bring forth disciples like unto themselves. They produce only more broad wayfarers whose lives are unrestricted from the curse of sin. The yield from sowing a doctrine of "easy-believism" is *children of hell* like themselves, and more followers of the world's way of living. Just as a particular tree

³² *Matt. 7:21-23*, the text and subject for Chapter V, p. 67.

produces fruits precisely as itself, so false prophets produce disciples—*fruits*—precisely as themselves. Sinners and perverters of the truth of the gospel of grace produce more sinners and perverters of the truth of grace just like themselves.

The Good Tree

Jesus' use of the words a *good tree* and *good fruit* and a *corrupt tree* and *evil fruit* have significant meaning also. The two words *good* in reference to the *trees* and *fruit* are diverse in the original text. The *good tree* is one who is good, profitable, generous, and virtuous in himself (*I John 2:29; 3:6-7*). It is his nature because he is born again and led by the Holy Spirit to be filled with the fruit of the Spirit. *Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance* are a part of the true prophet's life as well as his disciples' lives. Jesus says that kind of *tree* (prophet) will produce that kind of *good fruit*.

The Good Fruit

The word translated *good* in reference to *fruit* means "beautiful as contemplated from a point of view as the harmonious completeness, the balance, proportion, and measure of all the parts one with another."³³ Applied to Jesus' teaching in our text, this would refer to the unabridged righteousness and regulated balance of the lives of the disciples of true preachers of the true grace. The disciples of the true God-called and gifted preacher will be balanced and regulated Christians who live in accord with and are changed by the Word of God. They are balanced, proportioned, and measured precisely by the living and powerful Word of God.

The Corrupt Tree

Jesus says that kind of *good fruit* will never be the *fruit* of the false *prophet*, because they are *corrupt trees* that produce only *evil fruit*. *Corrupt* means a decaying, rotting, diseased tree that because of its condition produces only *evil fruit*. The preachers of "easy-believism" are diseased, rotting, and decaying in sin. It is

³³ Richard Chenevix Trench, Synonyms Of The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) p. 389.

just because they themselves have never entered into the *strait* or *narrow gate* of Jesus that they are yet in their sins. They know nothing of the real Lordship of Jesus. They kept their sinful nature and continued in a propensity for a broad way of living when they supposed that they were being saved; therefore they are still rotting, decaying, and dying in sin. Their doctrine is *evil*; therefore their work is *evil*. “He who works iniquity, however he may prophesy in the name of Christ, is yet a false prophet”³⁴

The Evil Fruits

The *evil fruits* are the converts of the *corrupt trees* (*false prophets*). *Evil* is πονερος, meaning “aptness to do shrewd turns, to delight in mischiefs...; a loving to trouble our neighbour and to do him ill...; crossness, perverseness, and peevishness of action in our intercourse with others”³⁵ The followers of these wide-gate preaching *false prophets* are hard to please with spiritual food, and will show ill humor or impatience toward preachers and believers of God’s Word. They can never really forgive and will cause trouble over the slightest things. They take things wrongly if at all possible, and even when it seems impossible. In short, they are evil fruit in the church of God. These kinds of *fruits* are the results of ministries that preach a broad lifestyle and a non-creedal Christian life. Church rolls are full of these kinds of professors who never become possessors because they heard and believed a false message of “easy-believism” preached by neo-evangelists and ignorant pastors. These are nothing more than *false prophets*—sowers of tares—of whom Jesus warns us to *beware*.

Beware

Jesus warned His hearers to *beware of* the dangers imposed by false preachers whose message of a false salvation would endanger *many*. *Beware of* is literally “observe or consider away from.” The warning means for us hearers to take heed or to guard against false preachers by moving away from them. They are to be

³⁴ John Albert Bengel, New Testament Word Studies (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971) I, p. 134.

³⁵ Trench, p. 316.

avoided by Christ's disciples because of their corrupting and damning influence. These are men who preach another gospel other than the true gospel presented in His Sermon and in His Word through His special Apostles. Paul's word was *Let them be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9)*. They sound good to their listeners, but they are *false prophets*, meaning that they are not called or ordained by God. They are the "professionals of the pulpit" who seek to tickle the ears of their listeners. Their messages never really challenge or threaten the lifestyles of anyone. They are always able to soothe over any portion of God's Word that would bring conviction of sin and wrongdoing. They never *reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (II Tim. 4:2)*; therefore they falsely lull their listeners into being at ease on the Great Broad Way. Their followers will close their eyes at death and awake amid the dissolution of eternal and spiritual woe, because they believed and endorsed *false prophets*.

One of the foremost "traits of falsity" these preachers exhibit is a failure to lead their listeners from the lifestyles that end in *destruction*. They are *false* in the greatest sense of the word because they cause multitudes to end in chaos while promising them bliss. They are *false* in the evil fate that they promote and the good destiny that they impede. While promising men *life eternal* through a wide-gate Jesus, they actually are making each listener *twofold more the child of hell than themselves*. Every one of their "converts" will end in *destruction* while expecting delight. Some of their converts never hear many sermons after their false professions. The sparse percentages of the vast hordes of their converts who do attend church desire only smooth messages of delight.³⁶ They who are content to be sitting under their ministries

³⁶Though their numbers are great indeed when compared to real believers as stated by Jesus (*many*, as opposed to *few*, vs.13-14), the larger percentage of that vast number do not attend church at all, or if they do, it is irregular. But because of their enormous numbers there are *many* more indeed who do attend church and are of great influence in the church as compared with the smaller number of true believers. This is at least partially caused by the "easy-believism" preached from the pulpits of many churches, and the permissive life-styles that it allows, tolerates, and encourages. These large numbers are content to attend preaching that never challenges their false profession of a wide-gate Jesus.

in this life will at death hear “False! False! False!” ringing in their ears forever. But they were instructed differently by their *false prophets*. They went through a wide-gate Jesus and lived a somewhat unrestricted life, which their *false prophets* promised would end in life eternal.

Throughout Israel’s history she was plagued by these kinds of *false prophets*. The Old Testament is full of references to their wicked message of *Peace, peace*, when there was no peace for those who believed their false hope of deliverance.

¹⁶Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you; they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.

¹⁷They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of this own heart, No evil shall come upon you.
Jeremiah 23:16-17

The *false prophets* of today are comparable to those in Israel. These *wide gate* and *broad way* preachers calm men in their sins instead of denouncing and condemning it and them. *They heal the wounds of sinners slightly* with their promises of a salvation with their sins (*Jer. 8:11*). They prophesy *smooth things* (*Isa. 30:10*), and thus allure men to follow their wicked perversion of the true gospel of the free grace of God. Their doctrine is an invention of their own evil and corrupt imaginations. “There is nothing in their preaching that searches the conscience and renders the empty professor uneasy, nothing which humbles and causes their hearers to mourn before God; but rather that which puffs up, makes them pleased with themselves and to rest content in a false assurance.”³⁷ Modern neo-evangelists and mistaken pastors are guilty of having become the *enemy that came and sowed tares among the wheat* (*Mt. 13:25*).

³⁷ Arthur W. Pink, An Exposition Of The Sermon On The Mount (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p.339.

The purpose of the *false prophet* is “to offer salvation on cheaper terms, to make the gate wider and the way to heaven broader than did Christ and His apostles. They make vital godliness to be a less strict and easier thing than it actually is, more agreeable to fallen human nature, and thus they encourage the unregenerate to be satisfied with something which comes short of true grace.”³⁸ Accordingly, they fit well into their master Satan’s plan to thwart the real power and purpose of the work of Christ. And as John wrote, *They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them (I John 4:5)*. It is this worldliness that is the secret of their popularity, a worldliness and popularity that are foreign to the true preachers of Christ.³⁹

Inward Ravening Wolves

Jesus said that *inwardly they are ravening wolves*. This refers to the natural adamic depravity which masters all naturally born, but not twice born, men. A *ravening* wolf is one whose actions devour the sheep spiritually and only seek the sheep in order to satisfy fleshly and bodily desires. These are the men who simply choose the ministry as all ordinary men choose their secular occupations. To them the gospel ministry is a “job” which is to be carried on with and through the philosophies of man’s basic humanistic creed. The success of their “ministries” is measured in numbers. It is budgets, buildings, and baptisms that motivate their existence. They compromise any and all principles in order to add to these most important gauges of achievement.

False preachers have little, if any, strong convictions except in the three “B’s” named above. They will disdain preachers who stand for righteousness and truth regardless of the personal cost. Their ministries are more important to them than any truth. They reason thusly: “If I stand steadfast for what is right until it costs me

³⁸ Ibid. ³⁹ See *Luke 6:22-26* for the description of the ministries of false and true prophets. Basically, the false preachers win popularity, while the true prophets tend to lose popularity among Christendom and in the professing local church. Cp. *II Tim.4:3-4*.

my ministry or decreases it in any way, I will certainly be unable to do the great measure of my good works;⁴⁰ therefore I must preserve my opportunity to minister my beliefs above all else.” That is the philosophy and outlook of the false preacher.

In effect Jesus warns,

Beware of false prophets, who come to you protecting themselves and their livelihood rather than the sheep. They never reprove, rebuke, and exhort My sheep, who feed on just such uncompromising presentations of the truth, which false preachers fear to deliver. Through their perverted notions and self-serving actions they harm the true sheep who need the truth of the Word; and in this manner they become as wolves devouring My lambs because of their unenlightened and inwardly unchanged corrupt natures. Actually, they are like bad trees bearing corrupt fruits. The exclusive fruit of their lives is only more corrupt persons like unto themselves.

⁴⁰ As claimed in verse 22.

II. THE MENACING SIN OF FALSE PREACHERS

Thorns and thistles are both the plants and the *fruits* of those plants; that is, *thorns* come from *thorns*, and *thistles* come from *thistles*, and they each produce more of their kind. Jesus is saying that the same kind of fruit is produced from each prophet as what he is innately. True prophets produce *grapes and figs*; both are good fruits to be enjoyed in the sight of God and by man. However, *false prophets*—the tolerant, the accepting, and the moderate professionals of the “cloth”—produce *thorns and thistles*; both are evil fruits in the sight of God and man.

After His Kind

And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after this kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind. [Added emp.] *Genesis 1:12*

The concept of original sin is in the *thorns and thistles* because they are precisely the products of original sin. It was only after the original sin of our ancestors that God told them that as a result of their sin,

Thorns also and thistles shall it [the earth] bring forth to thee. *Genesis 3:18*

Jesus is saying that the ministries of false prophets produce the same kinds of fruits as did the original sin; they dispense a spontaneous production of more results of sin and sinners like themselves. Lives of sin from persons still in the grip of original sin are the produce, result, and consequence of a false prophet. On the other hand, *grapes and figs*, which represent lives of righteousness from the saints who are now freed from the powers of original sin, are the produce, fruit, result, and consequence of the true prophet. The message of a non-restrictive lifestyle for Christians and an easy entrance into the Kingdom through a wide Jesus will produce increased sin and more evil in men and will not result in true salvation and changed lives.

Sin: The Natural Produce Of Sinful Trees

When Jesus introduced *thorns and thistles* into this metaphor of *trees* and their *fruit*, He referred to sin as the natural produce of false preachers because they are still in sin as well as their disciples. It is simply a case of sin begetting more sin, or sinners producing more sinners. *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.* One needs only to inspect the lives of the converts and disciples of a preacher to discern the true integrity of a preacher. The presence or absence of an outgrowth of *thorns and thistles* among them will determine the merits of their ministries, and will also settle the issue of whether he is a false or true prophet.

Flaming Preachers

Jesus' warning against *false prophets* (preachers) has a degree of peril about it. He said that as men *hew* down trees that produce no good fruit, so God will *hew* down all *false prophets* (preachers) and *cast* them into the *fire*,

*Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn
down, and cast into the fire. Matthew 7:19*

This fire is the *destruction* that awaits all those on the Great Broad Way (v.13). The same fate awaits both the proclaimers of a perverted gospel and the believers of a perverted gospel, *and many there be which go in thereat.* In the end, God will manifest those who are false, but meanwhile we have their *fruits* to settle the issue. "The fruits indeed are the credentials or tests of the truth or falsehood of the prophet. Should not a judgement nourished by faith in Jesus be able to see through a false prophet, no matter how impressive, with the same certainty as valueless fruit is recognized and the tree estimated accordingly?"⁴¹ Therefore, there should be no problem for Christians who discern the things of good and evil, who discern things spiritual, who discern things Biblical, to be enabled to *know* and to discern false preachers. Indeed, does not the Lord Jesus twice say in our text, *By their fruits ye shall know them?*

⁴¹ Bengel, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

Beware of a Powerless Gospel

This warning concerning *false prophets* comes after Jesus' words, *few there be that find it* (v.14), intimating that a major human factor for such a sparse number finding *life* everlasting is the ministry of *false prophets*. Consequently, immediately after saying, *few there be that find it*, Jesus warns, *Beware of false prophets* (v.15). Also, this correlation denotes that the human reason why so many continue on *the broad way that leadeth to destruction* is the mistaken message of the ease of salvation given by false preachers. They are responsible for the fictional "wide-gate Jesus" which causes so many to continue on the broad way of their natural birth. All men are born into this world already on a broad way, but false preachers offer a Jesus and a salvation that is just as broad as the way of *destruction* which they are already traveling. This is the connection of these verses with the preceding warning of the wide gate and the broad way *that leadeth to destruction*.

Jesus urged all potential disciples who hear His Sermon to heed the significance of these warnings against the many false doctrines and the many false disciples and the many false lives that claim to be Christian doctrines, Christian disciples, and Christian lives. These warnings relate to every person who considers Him and thinks to follow Him. In these verses of our text, Jesus warns,

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, who preach a gospel void of a God-empowered repentance. Their message is void of the indispensable experience of My power to change men's lives because it voids a resurrected Savior. Therefore, their fruits are evil where men's lives are concerned. The dominant focus of false prophets devoids God's holiness, without which no man shall see Me, the LORD. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, what I say to you I say unto all, Beware

*of false preachers who fail to emphasize the fundamental truth of authentic narrow discipleship. My discipleship is confining, restrictive, and altogether life-changing from its inception and in its continuing experience. Therefore, avoid them, flee from them, do not support them, because any who fail to preach these great truths is a false preacher preaching false doctrine.*⁴²

—Jesus Christ, 35 A.D.

Amen!

⁴² *Matthew 7:15- 20 (TheText); Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 5:20; Matthew 7:13-14.* This truth is at the very heart of His entire Sermon on the Mount, and all the gist of His teaching, both the teaching during His personal life and in His holy Apostles' Scriptures. Amen.