

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Know Them By Their Fruits

The ever-present threat of false teachers requires diligence on our part. Jesus provides a simple test to help us identify these threats before we take the bait.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matt. 7:15-20).

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is a positive affirmation of the character of those who would be His disciples. The attitudes and behaviors that He promotes as creating happiness in life have been validated in the lives of countless people through the ages.

But as Jesus began to draw His sermon to a close, He issued a warning against those who would lead us down a different path. There are false prophets, He says, who will offer us the same benefits, but via dangerous short cuts.

How can we identify these false teachers? The usual answer is that we

must compare what men teach with what Jesus and His apostles taught; if it does not match up, it’s false teaching and should be rejected.

While that is certainly valid, that’s not the answer Jesus gave here. Instead, He invites us to look beyond the teaching to the *fruits* of the teaching; that is, examine *what the teaching produces*. What impact does the teaching have on the lives of those who follow it or are influenced by it? You don’t have to be a Bible scholar to recognize rotten fruit when you see it.

For example, in contrast to the high standard of sexual ethics that Jesus taught, modern culture offers a much more casual standard. Sexuality is considered just another adventure to be explored with others, without boundaries or restrictions. Millions of young people have bought into this liberating philosophy—but at a terrible price. Broken hearts, jealous rages, psychological and emotional baggage, STDs, and a host of other issues are the fruit of this no-rules lifestyle. The fruit is bad because the root (teaching) from which

it springs is bad, and it’s a wise young person who spots that connection before taking the bait.

At the opposite extreme, there are those who zealously push a religion of artificial rules designed to ensure that no mistakes are ever made. Every extension of every detail is carefully thought out and made an article of faith and a test of fellowship. The problem with this approach, of course, is that no two people agree on every detail, so the result is endless wrangling over excruciatingly complex interpretations. In other words, the fruit of endless strife and conflict exposes the core teaching as bogus. That’s not the religion Jesus promoted.

If we want to inoculate ourselves against the influence of false teachers, we would do well to study the fruits of truth and error, such as described in Gal. 5:19-26, 2 Cor. 12:20-21, and Jas. 3:13-18. Learn to recognize the *symptoms* of false teaching, and it will be easier to identify the teaching as true or false. That does not relieve us of the responsibility to study the teaching, too; but it’s a good place to start.

– David King