



BEWARE of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew vii. 15)

The Master whom we follow determines the destination to which we are going. If we follow Satan, we shall end up in the same fires and anguish as that Old Dragon. But if we follow Christ, we shall enjoy the blissful company of God and His Angels forever after.

Of course, in following Christ, we must not follow Him all the way to Bethany and stop short of Calvary. We must take up our crosses daily and follow Him all of the way down the Via Dolorosa – the Way of Suffering.

Our devotional text is taken from the Gospel lesson in Matthew 7, beginning at the 15 verse. In this passage we discover the strong similes and metaphors of false prophets being likened to wolves in sheep's clothing; and of trees that bring forth the fruits of their natures, and some that must be cut down for failure to produce fruit. And our text concludes with a dire warning to those who proliferate in the Christian community today – hypocrites! We will address the text in three parts: 1) False Prophets – who are they and how shall we recognize them; 2) The trees of good and

bad fruit – how shall we distinguish them; and 3) Hypocrites – who are they and how to know them.

1. FALSE PROPHETS: In our text we read: BEWARE of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. First of all, what is a prophet, and how shall we know them?, "And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him." (Deuteronomy 18:21-22) So, do you believe that prophets of the Lord are similar to fortune-tellers in forecasting future events? Not at all, but a prophet of the Lord will say those things that the Lord has spoken in the Spirit. The prophet of today will not speak a word contrary to those uttered by the prophets of old, for God does not change. Any who know and believe the Word of God are prophets of sorts. How can that be? Because the Holy Word of God tells us what God's judgment is against all kinds of sin. If we judge by God's perfect standard of righteousness, we can conclude, as a prophet, the answer God will deliver for such sin. A prophet speaks, preaches, and teaches the will of God as recorded in Holy Scripture.

We are to confirm every word spoken from the pulpit by Holy Scripture to see if these things be true. I can assure you with every bone of my body that I will never intentionally teach something contrary to the Word of God INTENTIONALLY; however, I am a mortal man, and mortal men are subject to errors of judgment and understanding. Therefore, a well versed and informed Christian must test all things spoken by me, or any other clergyman, by that Plumb Line of God's Word. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1) *Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.* (1 Thess 5:21) A true Christian will study the Scriptures diligently, in fact, so well that he will be able to recognize errors and inconsistencies in doctrine being preached. He will therefore not suffer deceit. The false prophet speaks smoothly and convincingly. He ACTS like a loving Christian, and he may even use the Word of God wrongly to achieve some deceit. He will emphasize the offering plate far more than the cross of Jesus. He may have a wonderful smile to hide insidious and sharp teeth beneath. The false prophet is a minister of the devil and, like his mentor, is a ravening wolf. He doesn't kill just to eat, but out of sport. America has a disproportionately large number of such scoundrels let loose in our pulpits today. BEWARE, friends.

2. The trees of good and bad fruit – how shall we distinguish them: We are told to use sight and taste. If it looks like an orange, it tastes like an orange, then it MUST be an orange. Oranges do not grow on apple trees. The kind of tree determines the fruit. The kind of heart determines the soul of a Christian, or an imposter. The fruit described relates to our works as sons and daughters of God. Are our works worthy of the title, Christian? We have misapplied grace and faith to the exclusion of good works in our day. Surely, we know that works are not the means of our salvation; but just as surely we should also know that our salvation should be evidenced by works worthy of the Name of Christ. "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance." (Luke 3:8a) "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. (James 2:17-18) There has been a

growing error being taught over the last several decades that all a sinner needs to do is “call upon the name of the Lord” and that ends the struggle. While it is true that all who call upon the name of the Lord in true faith shall be saved, it is not true that a mere utterance of that phrase will suffice. The utterance must be a genuine and sincere confession of faith from the heart and not the head. It must be followed with evidence of salvation. A new man must be in evidence following the confession.

God gave us ‘hands’ for a reason. The head is our legislative branch, the hands our executive branch, and the heart our judicial branch to determine right and wrong. It is the hands that produce fruit. They cultivate, plant the trees, and care for the trees. At due season, they harvest the fruit. In the Holy Land, trees are taxed – not the fruit of the trees; therefore, the lord of the vineyard will cut down a tree that does not produce in order to save revenue. The economy of Heaven is not unlike the same. If we produce no fruit, of what earthly good are we? The mind conceives a good project to perform. If it is in conformance to that Mind which was in Christ, the Judicial Branch – the Heart – will uphold that decision of the Legislative Branch. It is then that the Executive Branch completes the good work willed by the head. If our hands are idle, we had best find productive labor for them in short order; else we starve or shall be cut off. Faith is the electrical impulses that connect the three branches across the synapses of Wisdom, Love, and Action.

In the Museum of Amsterdam hangs a painting of several old Dutch Burgomasters who had distinguished themselves by some notable service to the people and community. In each of the paintings, there may be as many as a dozen faces and, though the canvas is a bit crowded for space, the hands are also depicted in every case.. All one sees are heads and hands. In spite of a lack of space, the artist was very careful to include the hands with different gestures of each and detail as complete as eyes and noses of the heads. I believe the point of the artist is to depict the full character of the men honored. The heads alone did not reveal complete character – what they thought, what they saw, what they felt; but the addition of hands depicted that the good works of these men followed the good thoughts that they conceived. The same is true of the Christian who has taken on the Mind that was in Christ.

There is a wonderful discussion of the head-only Christian in the classical work, *The Choir Invisible*, by James Allen Lane:

Some time, wandering in a thinned wood, you may have happened upon an old vine, the seed of which had long ago been dropped and had sprouted in an open spot where there was no timber. Every May, in response to Nature’s joyful bidding that it yet shall rise, the vine has loosed the thousand tendrils of its hope, those long, green, delicate fingers searching the empty air. Every December you may see these turned stiff and brown, and wound about themselves like spirals or knotted like the claw of a frozen bird. Year after year the vine has grown only at the head, remaining empty-handed ; and the head itself, not being lifted always higher by anything the hands have seized, has but moved hither and thither, back and forth, like the head of a wounded snake in a path. Thus every summer you may see the vine, fallen back and coiled upon itself, and piled up before you like a low green mound, its own tomb; in winter a black heap, its own ruins. So, it often is with the poorest, who live on at the head, remaining empty-handed ; fallen in and coiled back upon themselves, their own inescapable tombs, their own unavertible ruins.

Our hands must follow the good will of the mind in finding good works upon which to light and to grasp in order to bear fruit pleasing to the Lord of the Vineyard.

3. Hypocrites – who are they and how to know them: First of all, let us get our vocabulary understood. What is the meaning of hypocrite? The word is derived from the Greek text - (hupokrinomai); an actor under an assumed character (*stage-player*), i.e. (figurative) a *dissembler* (“*hypocrite*”):- hypocrite. (Strong’s) Those who are constantly performing great things and seem to be very godly often harbor a vacuum for faith. All of the good works, good acting, and posing of the hypocrite will gain no favor at all in Heaven. Good works do not exist apart from faith. The hypocrite that says all of the right things and lives like the world is only an actor. By the same token, every man that shoulders a weapon and wears an impeccable uniform is not necessarily a soldier. We see churches in America that are supposedly ‘filled with the Holy Ghost.’ They make a great show of supposed spiritual gifts and demonstrations. The worship is not peaceful, but exhausting. Many of the same people who were so moved by the Holy Spirit on Sunday morning are seen to be moved by the spirit of the bar on Monday. What is wrong with this picture? First, their worship is not reverent and worthy of the Church. Secondly, their hearts were only ‘acting’ as hypocrites in being shallow on faith and big on appearances.

How is your heart, friend?

May we be a people wary of false prophets and so thoroughly knowledgeable of the Word of God that it will be quite difficult to deceive us.

Let us be careful of wondering too far from our protecting Shepherd and into the mountain crevices where wolves lurk. Be careful that the church you attend is one that places Christ at its heart and center – a Church that is reverent in worship and true to Scripture in its teaching and doctrine.

Let us be sure that the works of our hands represent the thoughts of our hearts and not become stale salt that has been in the shaker so long that we are clumps that cannot be applied properly. Are we thus?