

Matthew 7:13-29 • Testing for True Righteousness

Introduction

In the corporate world there is the mantra, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." While it may be far easier to mathematically measure a company's output and profitability, God's Word often provides the parameters for spiritual measurements of the demands it makes on Christ's followers. By studying its usage throughout Scripture, we not only arrive at the proper definition of what it means to possess the quality of righteousness, but the biblical standards proving the degree to which it is present. Christ provides three tests which will prove if our righteousness is truly from God; false or counterfeit forms of Christianity will fail these tests.

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

[Read v.13-14]

Q: Given the overall context of the Sermon on the Mount to this point, what are these two ways referring to?

A: They refer to two types of lifestyle: the easy, comfortable, popular life, or the more difficult way of self-denial.

Q: How might the two gates for each of these ways be characterized?

A: Entrance to the popular life is gained through the broad gate of self-sufficiency, the more difficult way of self-denial through the narrow gate of surrender.

Q: How is this a test for true righteousness?

A: True righteousness is exemplified by self-denial.

Point: Note that in the following example, two men turned from Christ because they failed this test:

Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side of the sea. Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."

Matthew 8:18-22

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

Matthew 16:24

Application: What are the things which you really haven't fully given over to Christ? How well do you recognize that nothing can be held back, even things that seem "good" or important?

¹⁵“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰So then, you will know them by their fruits.

²¹“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²²Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

[Read v.15-23]

Q: In the examples given, what is the definition of a “false prophet”?

A: It’s not limited to someone proclaiming a false gospel, but includes those who are false professors of faith in Christ.

Q: How are they ultimately identified as being false?

A: Their inner nature has not changed; they merely wear the outward guise of a sheep. Unlike true believers, they are clinging to the world’s ways internally and therefore still corrupted by it.

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

2 Peter 1:4

Q: So how can we detect these false believers?

A: “You will know them by their fruits”. (v.16) We’re commanded to be fruit inspectors by employing the test of spiritual fruit.

Application: *What fruits does Christ seek? How are these things specifically measured?*

1. The first measurement is given to us in the Beatitudes provided in the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.
2. There is the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*”
3. There is the fruit of the lips, our testimony and praise to God in Heb. 13:15, “*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.*”
4. There is the fruit of holy living in Rom. 6:22, “*But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.*”
5. There is the fruit of good works in Col. 1:10, “*so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*”
6. There is the fruit of lost souls won to Christ in Rom. 1:13, “*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.*”

Professing Christians may be involved in religious activities and pretend to be saved, but if they are honestly born again, they will reveal these tangible fruits in their daily life.

Q: What will be the response of false believers when Christ returns according to v.21-23?

A: They will be surprised at the judgment having both fooled themselves and allowing their minds to be blinded by Satan. They are deceived into thinking they are saved.

Q: But how should it have been obvious that their Christianity was counterfeit? Why should it have really been no surprise at all?

A: Because of the absence of these fruits, their lack of deeds according to God’s Word and ways. This is why they’re labeled as those “*who practice lawlessness*”.

Application: Do you see that spiritual fruit is not supernaturally provided or the result of chance? Since it comes about by putting God's Word into practice, how well are you personally seeking to be spiritually fruitful?

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

²⁸When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; ²⁹for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

[Read v.24-29]

Q: What do the two builders have in common?

A: They both use the same materials and plans to the degree that from the outside no one can tell the difference between their two houses.

Q: What is the actual difference?

A: Whether or not it is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, the Rock.

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11

Q: How is this difference ultimately revealed?

A: In times of testing. Only those founded on the Rock will stand, all others will crumble and fall.

Point: Righteousness is not based on a church, movement, creed, or even a “good life”, but on Jesus Christ alone. Throughout Scripture, the true believer has stood regardless of the test (e.g., Noah, Joseph, Abraham, Moses, David, etc., etc.) and false believers during such times have fallen away (e.g., Israel in the wilderness, Christians in Rome who deserted Paul, etc., etc.)

Application: To what degree do you agree with the statement, “A child of God is proven by lasting through the storms that test them?” How does this translate to your own experience? How well do you consistently prove that you’re a doer of the Word and not merely a hearer?

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:22-25

Overall Application

Compare and contrast your own spiritual condition to these tests:

- The test of self-denial
- The test of spiritual fruit
- The test of obedience

Compare and contrast your local church and its various ministries.

Compare and contrast those professing Christ.

Matthew 7:13-29 • Testing for True Righteousness Page 3 of 3