

## 041: Depart From Me!

(based on Sermon #35 in the Life of Christ Series)

Imagine the worst words you could possibly hear:

- “You’re fired!”
- “Your loved one just died.”
- “All of your possessions burned up in the fire.”
- “You’re under arrest!”
- “You have only a few months to live.”
- These are truly awful things to hear, and there are many more dreadful things any one of us could hear at any moment in life.
- Did you notice the one common thread between them?
- They relate solely to the time of our life on Earth.
- But a day is coming when multitudes of believers will hear words of far greater consequence.
- I am referring to the verdict of Jesus pronounced upon their lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ:
- “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”
- By far, those are the worst possible words a believer could ever hear, for they are of age-lasting consequence.

Jesus concludes His Sermon on the Mount with this warning:

- Matt 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.
- 22 Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?”
- 23 And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”
- What a painful verdict!

- Oh, the agony of soul that will be experienced by those hearing such tragic news!

Unfortunately, most evangelicals teach that these words do not apply to believers, but rather to unbelievers.

- However, that interpretation is not consistent with the context of the Sermon on the Mount, as we have seen all along.
- According to Matt. 5:1-2, this sermon is for those believers who desire to follow Jesus in discipleship.
- It is not a message for those who are unregenerate.
- The Sermon on the Mount, in a nutshell, is about how believers can qualify to inherit the kingdom of the heavens, the ruling realm of the Messianic kingdom.
- All believers will be resurrected and will live in one realm of the kingdom or other, but only faithful saints will dwell in the heavenly ruling realm of the kingdom.
- That is what the phrase, *kingdom of heaven*, is referring to (see v. 21).
- All others will dwell in the darkness outside of that realm, namely, on Earth.

When studying the dire pronouncement given by Jesus in the text (Matt. 7:15-23), the broader context must be considered (Matt. 5-7).

- The verses immediately preceding the text (vs. 12-14) are about the importance of practicing the golden rule and choosing the narrow gate and difficult path, which is the road that is typically less traveled by children of God.
- The verses following the text (vs. 24-27) are an admonition to build our lives on the rock, representing the immovable Lord Jesus Christ, rather than on the sand, which results in certain destruction.

- Given the clear context, the text cannot be soteriological in nature (relating to matters of salvation), but rather misthological (relating to matters of sanctification leading to reward).
- That being the case, the verdict given by Jesus in v. 23 is an example of what some believers will hear at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

In this text Jesus warns of two types of behaviors that will surely result in a negative verdict at His Bema seat — fallacious teaching and lawlessness.

- He refers to prophets and those who prophesy in His name.
- This would include pastors, preachers, teachers, evangelists, missionaries, Bible college professors, etc. — religious leaders and ministers of all types.
- The passage opens with a warning:
- Matt 7:15-16a 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.
- Many quote this verse out of context and suggest that we are to inspect the fruit — and by that, they mean the *behavior* — of professing Christians, to determine whether or not they are truly believers.

Over the years I have heard many folks say, "I doubt that so-and-so is saved, because he or she doesn't act like a Christian; there is no fruit."

- Sometimes the "fruit inspectors" will outright insist a person is *not* saved, based simply on what they are seeing in the person's life.
- This mentality is driven by an incorrect understanding of salvation doctrine, which is typically taught by one of the two major soteriological positions.

- The Calvinist doctrine of perseverance (the "P" of the "T-U-L-I-P" acrostic) is one possible culprit.
- It teaches that if a professing believer does not generally behave as a Christian ought, then that person was never saved.
- The Calvinist perseverance doctrine is unbiblical.
- The other possible culprit is Arminianism, which essentially says that if a person is not living righteously, they have lost their salvation.
- That is not biblically correct either.
- Did Jesus intend that we should pronounce folks unsaved based on their bad behavior?
- Absolutely not! Only God knows whether or not someone has believed on Jesus for eternal life.
- It is not our business to inspect fruit in that sense of the term.

These words — *You will know them by their fruits* — must be understood within context.

- Jesus is providing a litmus test for determining whether religious teachers are true or false, *not* for determining whether people are regenerated or not.
- Fallacious teachers may have fine-looking leaves and bark and flowers, but these are mere ornamental aspects of the tree that can easily deceive an onlooker.
- The key is to analyze their fruits.
- Matt 7:16-18 Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?
- 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.
- 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

What does Jesus mean by "fruits?" Commentator John Gill sums it up well:

- By "fruits" are meant, not so much their external works in life and conversation; for a false prophet may so behave, as not to be discovered thereby ... and false teachers among Christians may have the form of godliness, and keep it up, though they are strangers to, and even deny the power of it: but their doctrines are here meant, and the effects of them.

We have scriptural substantiation for Gill's commentary in the words of Jesus, as found in Matt. 12:33-37.

- 33 Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.
- 34 Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.
- 35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.
- 36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.
- 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

False teachers (Gr., *pseudoprophetes*) are characterized by fallacious words (i.e., erroneous teaching).

- They preach and teach unscriptural doctrines.
- The behind-the-scenes lifestyle of a false teacher may also be wicked and unfruitful, but we often are not privy to that side of their lives.
- We are typically only exposed to their teaching.

- Fallacious teachers are called wolves in sheep's clothing because their teaching devours and causes saints to self-destruct rather than progress in discipleship.
- As we shall see later in this study, the Pharisees are a classic example of wolves in sheep's clothing during Christ's day, yet the Pharisees were regenerated Israelites, not unbelievers.
- Because Jesus refers to these fallacious teachers as *wolves*, the tendency is to assume they are unbelievers who would never be found in a so-called Bible-preaching church.
- However, the adjective *ravenous* used to describe these wolves is used four other times in the New Testament, translated each of those times as *extortioner*.

Remarkably, the apostle Paul applies this word to believers.

- 1 Cor 5:11 I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. (Emphasis mine)
- In 1 Cor. 6:10 Paul also warns that extortioners will not inherit the kingdom of God, meaning that believers who behave in this manner will not be rewarded with a position of ruling in the New Jerusalem.
- The point is that inwardly ravenous (extortionist) teachers may be regenerated religious leaders — pastors and evangelists and Bible college professors, for example — but their teaching about the kingdom is fallacious, counterproductive and, therefore, harmful.

We are to beware when we discern that a religious teacher's doctrine, and the effects of it, are in opposition to Scripture.

- In this sense only are we to be fruit inspectors.

- We are *never* instructed in the Scriptures to analyze someone's behavior in order to determine whether that person is regenerated or not.
- We determine whether or not someone is saved by their verbal testimony.
- Do they claim to have believed on Jesus for eternal life?
- We are, however, to examine the *teachings* of teachers, and see if those teachings are in line with Scripture.

Jesus uses the analogy of good trees vs. bad trees and good fruit vs. bad fruit — contrasting types of plants and produce — to identify the work of fallacious teachers in contradistinction to those who teach truth.

- Grapes do not come forth from thorn bushes, nor are figs produced by thistles.
- So we should not expect that fallacious prophets — likened to bad plants — would produce quality, useful fruit, teaching that is consistent with the Word of God.
- The fruits produced by their ministries are bad, typical of their doctrine.
- In other words, they are producing carnal, fleshly, licentious followers, perhaps even unwittingly.
- Fallacious teachers are a serious danger and threat to discipleship.
- Satan uses false prophets to sidetrack Christians from the narrow way to the broad way.
- Children of God are admonished to beware of them upon inspecting their fruits (i.e., their doctrine and its effects).
- Again, as believers, nowhere are we instructed to analyze the fruit (i.e., behavior or works) of other professing Christians for the purpose of pronouncing them saved or unsaved.

Leave that business to God, who declares:

- Jer. 17:10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.
- **In Matt 7:19** Jesus said, Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- Beware of fallacious teachers, for God will judge them.
- Incidentally, the assumption is commonly made that this fire is Hell-fire.
- But it is important to remember that Jesus is using metaphors — good trees, good fruit, bad trees, bad fruit — to illustrate His point.
- The fire is also likely symbolic, referring to temporal judgment.

John the Baptist also warned of judgment by fire for the Jewish religious leaders, if they did not repent.

- Matt 3:7-10 When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"
- 8-9 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
- 10 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John said this to the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were regenerated, along with the rest of the nation.

- The fire likely refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, which we know — from our historic vantage point — occurred in AD 70, at the hand of the Romans.

- John’s point is that because these religious leaders were teaching incorrect doctrine, and thereby keeping others from inheriting a place in the kingdom of the heavens, they would be severely judged.
- In fact, Jesus blasted the scribes and Pharisees repeatedly in Matt. 23, pointing out numerous areas of erroneous teaching.
- Verse 13 sums up the spirit of His rebuke:
- Matt 23:13 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

I wonder how many fallacious teachers and preachers stand in the pulpits of evangelical Christian churches, including those of the self-proclaimed “fundamental, Bible-preaching” variety, teaching error each Sunday.

- I’m not calling into question their personal salvation, merely their unbiblical message that “all believers will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ and all will rule with Him.”
- What is the fruit of this message?
- The church has become licentious, a congregation of lawbreakers.
- For if all believers will be rewarded and will rule with Jesus, what does it really matter how we live here and now?
- Can you see the danger of this message?

Listen again to what Jesus says to the Pharisees and apply it to modern Bible teachers:

- Matt 23:13 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven

against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

- Those who continue in this erroneous teaching, causing disciples to stumble off the narrow path that leads to life, will hear “Depart from Me!” when they meet Jesus in judgment to give an account of their lives and ministries.
- They are no different than the Pharisees of Christ’s day.
- Consequently, they will be excluded from New Jerusalem and will live out their millennial existence on Earth, weeping and consciously regretting their atrocious behavior.

Remarkably, multitudes of Christians blindly follow fallacious teachers, who are also blind to truth.

- Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees “blind guides” (Matt. 23:16, 24).
- I wonder if that is what He would call today’s pastors and evangelists and Bible college professors who are essentially doing the same.
- Incidentally, this is not merely a problem in liberal Christian denominations that do not hold to fundamental Bible doctrines.
- It is also a major problem in so-called conservative, fundamental churches that claim to be upholding Bible truth. What a tragedy!
- Christianity is full of immature, baby Christians, many of whom have been saved for several decades, but remain infants, nonetheless.
- Granted, their ministers are largely to blame, and one day those ministers will pay a high price when Jesus excludes them from the kingdom of the heavens.
- But that does not excuse individual believers from culpability.

We are all commanded by God to be students of the Word.

- 2 Tim. 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
- Reading and studying the Bible is not merely the task of ministers.
- It is for all believers, so that we can instantly discern whether teaching is right or wrong, based on the Word.
- Those who do not know the Bible are much more likely to be carried astray, and they will give an account for their laziness at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

We have seen the fallacious teachers who are guilty of teaching error and will be excluded from Christ's presence in the kingdom era.

- Let us now examine the second category of teachers found in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Matt 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.
- 22 Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?"
- 23 And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

In contrast to the ravenous (extortionist) wolves in the preceding section who are teaching erroneous, unbiblical doctrines, these wonder-working teachers are practicing lawlessness.

- That means they have been living unrighteously, allowing sinful behaviors to continue and go unchecked.
- That's what God thinks of them. But notice what they think of themselves.

- They say, "Lord, Lord." 1 Cor. 12:3 says, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."
- This implies they are believers, and because of their service for God, they expect to inherit the kingdom.
- In other words, they believe they are entitled to hear "Well done!" and to rule and reign with Jesus in His coming kingdom.
- But Jesus doesn't see it the way they do.
- Here is what they are essentially claiming:
- We have prophesied in Your name.
- We have cast our demons in Your name.
- We have done many wonderful works in Your name.
- Thus, they claim to have preached and performed signs and wonders in the name of Jesus, as opposed to the name of the enemy.
- Jesus never questions their claims, so they appear to be correct.

Jesus deems this group of teachers unfit for kingdom inheritance on two grounds:

1. They do not obey the will of the Father, and
  2. They practice lawlessness.
- Based on what we learned earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, they will be *in* the kingdom but will be considered *least* in the kingdom.
  - Matt 5:19-20 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
  - 20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The righteousness of the wonder-working prophets does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

- They may keep the *letter* of the law, but they do not keep the *spirit* of the law.
- They may be outward conformists, but inwardly, they are not obedient.
- Lawless Christians will be *in* the kingdom but only as subjects in the darkness outside.
- They will not be in the castle, so to speak, ruling with the King.
- Thus Jesus will pronounce to those who are lawless, “I never knew you; depart from me.”
- Is Jesus condemning this group to Hell?
- No, that is not consistent with the immediate context, or the broader context of the Sermon on the Mount, or even the overall context of Matthew’s Gospel.

The Greek word translated *depart*, simply means “to go away.”

- Thus, those who receive a negative verdict must depart from His presence.
- In this context, that does not mean they go to Hell; the passage does not say that.
- If Jesus intended a hellish condemnation, He could have said so.
- The key to understanding this verdict is knowing which judgment is in focus.
- Notice Christ’s statement in v. 22, “many will say to me *in that day*.” What day is this?
- This is obviously the day in which Jesus is judging His own, the Judgment Seat of Christ, for these people are begging for entrance into (that is, inheritance in) the kingdom of the heavens, the ruling realm of the kingdom, the New Jerusalem.

- Unbelievers will not face Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which occurs *before* the Millennium.
- They will give an account to Jesus *after* the Millennium, at the Great White Throne Judgment.
- So it would make no sense for them to beg for inclusion in the kingdom of the heavens — the ruling realm of the millennial kingdom — for it will have concluded by that time.

How, then, do we explain the strong denouncement of Jesus?

- How can this be directed at believers?
- Jesus will *declare* to them, “I never knew you” (v. 23).
- The Greek word translated *declare* is usually translated *confess* in the New Testament.
- Vine says that, here in Matt. 7, it means “to declare openly by way of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of the facts.”
- The same word is used in Matt. 10:32-33:
- Matt 10:32 Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.
- 33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. (Underline mine)

Jesus is speaking to His disciples in Matt. 10 (see vs. 24a, 25a, 37-39).

- He promises that if they will confess Him before men, He will confess them before the Father.
- To *confess* is to agree with God — the same word is used in 1 Jn. 1:9 (“If we confess our sins ...”).
- If you live in agreement with God before others, then Jesus will agree about your lifestyle before the Father.
- The opposite is also true.

- Jesus is saying to these wonder-working teachers, “I cannot confess you before the Father, because your lifestyle is not in agreement with what I have taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, I must confess that I never knew you.”
- Vine adds some important insights on the word *know* (Gr., *ginosko*) and the phrase, *I never knew you*:

He says, and I quote:

- “*Ginosko* frequently implies an active relation between the one who knows and the person or thing known ... thus in Matt. 7:23 ‘I never knew you’ suggests ‘I have never been in approving connection with you.’”
- Jesus obviously knows who these wonder-working teachers are.
- They are children of God who have served in Jesus’ name.
- But He does not approve the *nature* of their life and ministry.
- They are disobedient ministers!
- They have entered the wide gate and followed the broad way that leads to destruction.

Notice how this same Greek word (*ginosko*) is used in other passages:

- 2 Tim 2:19b The Lord knows those who are His.
- The context dictates that the word *knows* means “approves.”
- The Lord *approves* of those that are his — those who have followed his will.
- The idea of approval runs throughout this text.
- For example:
- 2 Tim 2:12a If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.

- 2 Tim 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
- Thus, Jesus *knows* those who are His.
- He is in approving connection with them.
- The same idea is also found in Rom. 7:
- Rom 7:15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.
- The word *understand* is *ginosko*.

Paul is not merely saying that he does not *know* what he is doing.

- He is fully aware of his actions, but he does not *approve* of them.
- That is how the word *know* is used in Matt. 7:23.
- Jesus is essentially giving the verdict, “I do not recognize your lifestyle as valid; I do not approve of it.”
- *Ginosko* is also used in Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth:
- 1 Cor 8:3 If anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.
- God obviously *knows* everyone, but He *especially knows* those who love him, because those who love Him are keeping His commandments (John 14:15).
- They are in fellowship with Him, for they are living righteously.

Jesus is not talking to unbelievers in Matt. 7.

- He is not saying that He doesn’t *know* them because they are not God’s children.
- Rather, He does not know them because they are not obediently following Him, loving as He loves, choosing to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus.



- Those who cry out “Lord, Lord” in Matt. 7:21-22 are believers.
- However, they have not served according to the qualifications as given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Therefore, Jesus does not accept their lifestyle, and will declare them to be unfit to rule with Him in the coming kingdom.
- Their verdict will be: “Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”
- They will not be granted entrance to New Jerusalem, the ruling realm of the kingdom.
- Instead, they will be relegated to the relative darkness outside New Jerusalem.
- In other words, they will dwell on Earth during the Millennium, weeping and gnashing their teeth, consciously regretting their foolish lifestyle choices to pursue fleshly, lawless living, rather than living for Jesus.
- What a tragedy!

#### Who are These Lawless Ones?

- Matt 5:19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Underline mine)
- Lawless believers are those who break Christ’s commands.
- In the context, these are the commands He has given in the Sermon on the Mount.
- But notice the other offense of lawless ones — *teaching others* to break Christ’s commands also.
- I don’t know of any Bible teachers who would deliberately teach believers to live unrighteously.

- But could they be doing so unwittingly?
- When Bible teachers instruct their audiences that all believers will be rewarded because of their position in Christ and that nothing of a negative nature will be brought up at the Judgment Seat of Christ, they are misrepresenting the Scriptures and doing a great disservice.
- Those who heed that message will tend to live lawlessly, for if there is no prospect of negative reward, then what does it matter how one lives?

#### That teaching implicitly condones licentious living.

- Adding insult to injury, when those same teachers claim that the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to New Testament, church-age believers, but applied exclusively in the past to Old Testament Jews and will apply again in the future to Jews in the millennial kingdom, then why would anyone bother to live in the manner Jesus has outlined in the Sermon on the Mount?
- Could it be that the lawless ones in the context of Matt. 7 are those pastors, evangelists, and Bible college professors, who are actively engaged in ministry — preaching and doing many wonders in His name (at least in their own thinking) — but who have unwittingly dismissed some of Christ’s teachings as irrelevant, pronouncing sections of Scripture as not applicable for New Testament believers?
- Will they not be called “least” in the kingdom for doing so (see Matt. 5:19 above)?
- The context of Matt. 5-7 seems to imply that these lawless ones are not merely fleshly believers, but teachers who pervert the gospel of kingdom inheritance in some degree and do not live according to the kingdom

way of life outlined by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

- I never want to hear Jesus say to me, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”
- I assume you don’t either.
- Thankfully, we don’t have to hear those words.
- We can hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord”
- But we must learn, apply, and teach His truth about the kingdom, and we must live as kingdom citizens now.
- To that end, we must, by God’s grace, live out the principles of the Sermon on the Mount.
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS