

Discerning Fruitage

Key Verses:

“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?”

—Matthew 7:15,16

Selected Scripture:

Matthew 7:15-23

OUR LESSONS THIS MONTH

have focused on Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law, thereby freeing Jews from its condemnation. Since Gentiles were never under its authority, all who would be henceforth drawn to the Gospel calling, whether Jew or Gentile, were free from the Law’s stipulations. The new requirements for all those dedicating their life wholly to God would not be according to works, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Hence, the church throughout the Gospel Age has been instructed to develop selfless love of the brethren and of

all mankind, as demonstrated by the Heavenly Father.

Having established the standards that apply to each one of us, Jesus turns his attention in today’s lesson to the danger of following those who would divert us from our goal through deception. This warning seems to be especially applicable to the church at this end of the age, and is very similar to Matthew 24:24, which is part of Jesus’ great prophecy of our day.

One example of false prophets in Jesus’ day were Gnostics, who preached salvation through special knowledge instead of through the blood of Jesus Christ. A similar example in our day can be found in those who preach a

“prosperity gospel,” claiming that God rewards faith with increases in health and wealth. Both of these are false teachings, disguised in sheep’s clothing of proclaiming salvation, and appeal to earthly thinking. However, they are contrary to Jesus’ teachings, which state, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”—Matt. 6:19-21

Such false prophets of our day mostly appeal to fleshly curiosity and fancy. The Apostle Paul warned of this, saying, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” (II Tim. 4:3) Most who engage in this work seek fame, prominence, and honor among men for their own aggrandizement. The footstep followers of Christ must continually be on the lookout for false teachers, and call the attention of the sheep to such.

As God’s children, we each have an individual responsibility to watch out for each other’s spiritual well-being. As noted in our Key Verses, part of this is found in looking for, and in promoting, the fruits of the spirit in one another. This is in contrast to the fruitage of false prophets, which are along the lines of sin and degradation. Paul identifies the proper spiritual fruitage: “Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”—Gal. 5:22,23

The Apostle Peter also espouses that the development of the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit is an assurance of making our “calling and election sure.” Referring to this, Peter states with surety, “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:10,11 ■