

# The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE  
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 7:16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

Matthew 7:17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Matthew 7:18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Matthew 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Matthew 7:20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

The Didache (*teaching*), short for "*Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles*," is a short early Christian writing containing instructions for Christian communities. The text, believed by many to have been written prior to 150AD, can be seen as a handbook for pagan converts, with three main sections dealing with Christian lessons, rituals such as baptism and communion, and Church organization.

Here is a section, translated by J.B. Lightfoot, that echoes the Lord's words about false teachers:

11:1 Whosoever therefore shall come and teach you all these things that have been said before, receive him;

11:2 but if the teacher himself be perverted and teach a different doctrine to the destruction thereof, hear him not;

11:3 but if to the increase of righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord.

11:4 But concerning the apostles and prophets, so do ye according to the ordinance of the Gospel.

11:5 Let every apostle, when he cometh to you, be received as the Lord;

11:6 but he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need

11:7 but if he abide three days, he is a false prophet.  
11:8 And when he departeth let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he findeth shelter;  
11:9 but if he ask money, he is a false prophet.  
11:10 And any prophet speaking in the Spirit ye shall not try neither discern;  
11:11 for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven.  
11:12 Yet not every one that speaketh in the Spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord.  
11:13 From his ways therefore the false prophet and the prophet shall be recognized.  
11:14 And no prophet when he ordereth a table in the Spirit shall eat of it;  
11:15 otherwise he is a false prophet.  
11:16 And every prophet teaching the truth, if he doeth not what he teacheth, is a false prophet.  
11:17 And every prophet approved and found true, if he doeth ought as an outward mystery typical of the Church, and yet teacheth you not to do all that he himself doeth, shall not be judged before you;  
11:18 he hath his judgment in the presence of God;  
11:19 for in like manner also did the prophets of old time.  
11:20 And whosoever shall say in the Spirit, Give me silver or anything else, ye shall not listen to him;  
11:21 but if he tell you to give on behalf of others that are in want, let no man judge him.  
12:1 But let every one {that cometh in the name of the Lord} be received;  
12:2 and then when ye have tested him ye shall know him, for ye shall have understanding on the right hand and on the left.  
12:3 If the comer is a traveler, assist him, so far as ye are able;  
12:4 but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days, if it be necessary.  
12:5 But if he wishes to settle with you, being a craftsman, let him work for and eat his bread.  
12:6 But if he has no craft, according to your wisdom provide how he shall live as a Christian among you, but not in idleness.  
12:7 If he will not do this, he is trafficking upon Christ.  
12:8 Beware of such men.

These men always appear to be Christians. They look like sheep, Jesus said; but they are really wolves hiding among the sheep seeking to devour.

The Didache lets us know that one way they devour is by ripping people off and taking advantage of them financially. Giving is a discipline Jesus recommends, and there's nothing wrong with supporting ministers and missionaries. But we should be extra cautious in asking for funds and in how they are spent.

Verses sixteen through eighteen deal with the detection of the false prophets. **You will know them by their fruits.**

A tree or plant produces fruit according to its character. Thornbushes cannot bear grapes; thistles do not bear figs. A good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit. This principle is true in the natural world and in the spiritual world. The life and teaching of those who claim to speak for God should be tested by the Word of God.

We look for *fruitfulness*, not *flawlessness*! All of us fall and fail at times; we all have our flaws. But we should also bear fruit.

The kind of fruitfulness Jesus meant was probably two-fold: Personal and doctrinal.

On a personal level, you should look for a person to be doing good works that speak of the love of God in their heart. You can't say you love God and not actively, selflessly, serve others from love. You can't say you have faith and produce no works.

As these false prophets and teachers develop in the New Testament they are often described as living carnal, sensual lives. They are materialists who give in to the sinful cravings of the flesh. Rather than the fruit of holiness they are fleshly.

On a doctrinal level, only a correct presentation of essential biblical teaching will bring forth fruit. When things like the trinity, the virgin birth, the deity of Jesus Christ, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the inerrancy of Scripture, the infallibility of Scripture, and the inspiration of Scripture are abandoned then no real fruit is possible.

Churches that downplay the Gospel because they don't want to offend anyone are doing people more harm than good. You cannot take anything away from the Gospel and think it will produce real, lasting fruit in people's lives.

We have become far too tolerant of false prophets and teachers within the Church. Instead of speaking out against them people get angry with those who speak out against them!

KRDU introduced Dave Hunt as the most hated man in Christianity. Wow!

Why? Because he speaks out against false doctrine and names names of those spreading it.

It's tricky. This week I watched a video clip of Joel Osteen interviewed by Larry King. Osteen is pastor of Lakewood Church in Texas – one of the largest professing Christian congregations in the world.

Here is a snippet:

KING: ...we've had ministers on who said, your record don't count. You either believe in Christ or you don't. If you believe in Christ, you are, you are going to heaven. And if you don't no matter what you've done in your life, you ain't.

OSTEEN: Yeah, I don't know. There's probably a balance between. I believe you have to know Christ. But I think that if you know Christ, if you're a believer in God, you're going to have some good works. I think it's a cop-out to say I'm a Christian but I don't ever do anything ...

KING: What if you're Jewish or Muslim, you don't accept Christ at all?

OSTEEN: You know, I'm very careful about saying who would and wouldn't go to heaven. I don't know ...

KING: If you believe you have to believe in Christ? They're wrong, aren't they?

OSTEEN: Well, I don't know if I believe they're wrong. I believe here's what the Bible teaches and from the Christian faith this is what I believe. But I just think that only God with judge a person's heart. I spent a lot of time in India with my father. I don't know all about their religion. But I know they love God. And I don't know. I've seen their sincerity. So I don't know. I know for me, and what the Bible teaches, I want to have a relationship with Jesus.

Later, on his website, Osteen posted an apology (which is no longer accessible):

It was never my desire or intention to leave any doubt as to what I believe and Whom I serve. I believe with all my heart that it is only through Christ that we have hope in eternal life. I regret and sincerely apologize that **I was unclear on the very thing in which I have dedicated my life.**

Jesus declared in John 14; I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. I believe that Jesus Christ alone is the only way to salvation. However, **it wasn't until I had the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview** that I realize I had not clearly stated that having a personal relationship with Jesus is the only way to heaven.

It's tricky, isn't it? Hard to nail down.

Ole Anthony, of the Dallas-based Trinity Foundation, has described Joel Osteen's message as "cotton candy."

Others have referred to it as "Christianity Lite."

But what concerns critics, including many Christian apologists, most is that Osteen's theology borrows heavily from the Word-Faith movement. Word-Faith theology includes so many aberrant, and/or outright heretical teaching and practices that many Christians consider the Word-Faith movement to be aberrational at best, and - theologically - a cult of Christianity at worst.

We're called upon to examine persons and their doctrine for fruit. To the extent Osteen is a word-faith prosperity guy, he'd be a false teacher.

The stakes are too high. People are led astray and the prophets and teachers are themselves headed for condemnation.