

## Tests for Discipleship

*Matthew 7.13-27*

Sometimes I have trouble keeping up with what's going on in the world! Things happen so fast, and thanks to cable and satellite television, and the Internet, they're reported almost as soon as they happen. If we're not paying attention or tune in at that very moment, that story will be over and forgotten, and they've moved on to something else. It's hard to keep up!

Many of us have jobs which require us to stay current with the latest trends in our respective fields. There are new inventions, new technologies, new procedures that are supposed to make us more efficient. Your computer can be programmed to constantly look for updates to its software. Social networking websites, such as FaceBook and Twitter, help us stay up-to-date on what's going on with our friends.

Football coaches view films of games to evaluate the performance of their players. Class reunions help us get up-to-date with what everyone has been doing. A doctor may have received her degree years ago, but if she hasn't stayed up to date with the latest advances in medicine, many of us would just as soon go somewhere else. We have newspapers and magazines and journals, and websites and blogs and texting and email—and the list goes on and on.

All of this is done in an effort to keep up-to-date, to avoid being passed by. In the fast pace of our world today we soon discover that it is good to take the time every once in a while to examine ourselves to see if we are doing our jobs the best we can.

**Well, are you up-to-date in your walk with Christ?** You may have accepted Christ a long time ago, and you know your salvation is secure. But how long has it been since you took a long and honest look at how closely you are following Him in all that time since?

Though He did not call them this, Jesus gave us **four tests for discipleship**, tests which the follower of Christ can read and pray about, to see if he as an individual has stayed "up-to-date" in his Christian experience. If you have questions about your relationship with Jesus, you could look at these as four tests for determining if you are really saved.

## **1 Test One: The Road You Travel, vv. 13-14**

In these verses Jesus showed us two ways—one leading to life, the other leading to eternal destruction. One way was good and the other way was evil. Jesus was speaking basically of a decision that every one of us must make somewhere in his or her life. We can choose the broad way, with all of its attractiveness and popularity. Or we can choose the narrow way, Jesus says, which very few actually enter, but which leads to eternal life.

The true follower of Christ has chosen to enter in through the narrow gate. How much easier it would be to travel the path that is so much more attractive, so much easier to find! And how natural it is for us to go along with the crowd, to do what everyone else is doing!

We do not need anyone to show us where the broad way is, the one that leads to destruction. We simply have to follow the desires of our own sinful hearts. Just live without self-denial, and you'll find it. Don't obey the law of God, don't confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, don't obey His teachings, and the broad way will open itself to you. You don't really have to do anything, anything at all.

Oh, but we do need a Guide for the narrow gate. That Guide is Jesus Christ Himself! There are many paths that lead from this one, paths which look to be smoother, easier to travel, better for the feet, paths which do not require much work or exertion on our part at all. Because of that, the Christian is constantly faced with decisions about which road he will travel.

Will he travel the road that is paved by Satan in such a way as to make his journey to hell that much quicker? Or will he travel the road that is paved by God in order to make his journey into the kingdom of God that much sweeter?

When I am tempted by sin, however attractive it is, do I choose the road of life, or the road of death? Do I choose Christ, or Satan? In my dealings in my business, do I follow those practices which honor Christ, or do I merely go along with what everyone else is doing? When I hear someone begin to tell a story that brings dishonor to Christ's Name, do I sit and listen like everyone else, or do I take a stand for the cause of Christ? When the alarm clock goes off on Sunday morning, or when a call is made for workers in God's Kingdom, do I decide for Christ, or do I decide for Satan?

Many people travel the broad road because they do so purposefully, but others do so out of carelessness. I've been meaning to be praying. I've been intending to start back to church and Sunday School. I've been thinking about starting to tithe. I know I should watch what I say a little more closely. I don't think I should be going to those places anymore, or hanging out with those people anymore, but I do. I have some bad habits, and I've tried to quit—maybe I will someday. I haven't really given myself completely to Christ, but maybe I'll do that someday, too.

The name of that game is “Carelessness,” and the way you win it is to do nothing at all.

But if you would follow Christ through the narrow gate and along that narrow path into life eternal, with all of the joys here and in Heaven, you must choose to follow Him. You've got to make that decision! Do it now before you've been swept along by the crowd and by the pressures and demands of your life, before your sins have you so tightly bound that you can no longer hear God calling to you. Enter in by the narrow gate—make that decision!

The first test of discipleship is the road you travel: “Am I on the right road?” is the question to ask yourself on a regular basis.

## **2 Test Two: The Fruit You Bear, vv. 15-20**

In this passage, Jesus was warning against false prophets, against those men and women who pretended to have a direct commission from God, as though God Himself had given them the exact words that He had not given anyone else. They were the kinds of people who said, “I believe this is what God wants me to do or say. God told me to say this, or God told me to say that.” Those are wonderful things to say, if they are true. But the lives of these people, Jesus said, contradicted what they said. Their very actions and their very words show that they haven't heard at all what God has been telling them.

Jesus said in verse twenty that we could know them by their fruits. He compared their lives and the lives of us all to trees which bear fruit. Some of them bear good fruit, but others can only bear bad fruit. I cannot always tell the kind of tree by looking at their bark or their branches or their leaves. But I do know their fruit, and can tell that a pear grows on a pear tree. I know an apple tree is an apple tree because of the apples on its branches. I know them by their fruit.

Men and women are known, not so much by what they profess, but more importantly what they actually do, or what kind of fruit their lives produce. **Jesus**

implied that every life produces *some* sort of fruit. But whether that fruit is good or bad: *that* is the question.

A corrupt tree cannot, as hard as it may try, produce good fruit. It may look pretty, may give a lot of shade, and may be as tall as any tree around it. But when you test the fruit, you find that the tree is worthless. Trees planted for bearing fruit, must bear fruit, or they are worthless.

An unbeliever cannot live a holy life. No matter how hard he tries, something is missing. He may put on a good show; he may fool the preacher and everyone in the church; he may even deceive himself and his family. He may appear to be righteous and pious in all respects, but there will be something forced, unnatural, something deep inside which will betray him. Whatever goodness there is in his actions is only an outward goodness, because there is nothing deep inside that has changed him into a new creature of God.

And no matter how long you have been a member here in our church or any other church, no matter how long you've taught a Sunday School class, no matter how long ago it was that you were ordained as a deacon, if you have not all by yourself confessed your sins to God, seeking His forgiveness, and asked Jesus Christ to come into your life as Lord and Savior, then your life will be barren. There will be no good fruit.

What kind of fruit are we talking about? There are many things we could point to as being example of this fruit, but a good place to look in the Scriptures is in the fifth chapter of Galatians: *“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*

So the second test of discipleship is the fruit you bear. Ask yourself, “Is my life bearing the fruit of the Spirit? Is the fruit of my life good fruit?”

### **3 Test Three: The Will You Obey, vv.21-23**

Jesus gives us the key to entering the kingdom of heaven. It is doing the will of the Father in heaven. It is obeying what we know for a fact to be the will of God. Obeying the will of God is a direct result of following the right road and bearing the right fruit. The Spirit will never lead us to commit adultery. The Spirit will never lead us to give in to temptation, or to lie, cheat, steal, or hate or kill.

So when all is said and done, the proof of our love *for* God is our obedience *to* God. These people of whom Christ was speaking would one day hear Him say, “Depart from me, you evildoers!” because their lives were a lie. They said they loved God, but they didn’t obey Him. There is no point in saying we love a person if we do those things which break that person’s heart. There is no point in confessing our love for God with our lips, and then denying Him with our lives. But yet that is exactly what many of us do. How can we call ourselves disciples of Christ?

The quarterback called time and trotted over to the sidelines to confer with his coach, who gave him a few brief, pointed instructions. The quarterback nodded his head, and said, “Okay, Coach!” But when he got back out on the field, he proceeded to do just as he pleased, calling an entirely different play from the one the coach had given him. In spite of his saying, “Okay, Coach,” he went ahead and did exactly what he wanted to do.

That sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? Yet do we not do the Lord that way? Don’t we say, “Lord, Lord,” and then proceed to do exactly as we please?

A cowboy once put it this way: “Supposed I’m working for Rancher Jones. If I sat around just bragging on Jones to other people, a’ singing songs about him, that’d be exactly what a lot of church folks are a’ doing. But that wouldn’t please Rancher Jones, and he would soon hire another cow hand to take my place. But when I get in the saddle and scout over the plains and see that Jones’ cattle are all right, that they get water and pasture, and keep the rustlers from stealin’ ‘em, then Jones knows that I love him, and he treats me mighty good.”

The test, then, is not what office we hold in the church, or where we live, or what our name is, or how much we give to the church and missions, but whether we obey God’s will or not. The test is the will we obey. Am I doing what I please without regard to the Savior, or am I seeking to know and follow the will of God?

## **4 Test Four: The Foundation You Lay, vv. 24-27**

Jesus here divides those who hear His words into two different groups: those who hear and obey, and those who hear and ignore. He compares them to two men: one built his house upon the rock, and the other who built his house upon the shifting sands. Jesus has condemned words without action to back them up, and now He condemns hearing without action.

The true disciples of Jesus Christ have a different foundation for their lives than do people who do not know Christ. On the surface, we may look like anyone else, but there is a fundamental difference, perhaps one that can't always be seen at first. The difference goes much deeper than just what you might see. The disciple of Christ has a different foundation for his life. His motivations are different, his convictions are different, his priorities are different. He has different views about money, service, personal responsibility, citizenship, achievement and recognition.

The true disciple of Christ has these different viewpoints and convictions because he has a different Foundation. His house, his life, is built upon the Rock of Jesus Christ.

Every one of us builds a house, so to speak. The choice of the foundation is ours. Are we building for this world, or are we building for the world to come? Christ alone is the Rock that is to be our foundation, and anything else is sand, however attractive, however strong it appears to be, however available to us. Christ is the only true foundation upon which we can safely anchor our hopes and our lives.

In Palestine, the builder must plan his work. Most of the year there are many gullies which are pleasant little hollows, but following a storm those gullies become raging torrents of rushing water. If the builder was short-sighted, he may build his house in such a gully, or perhaps even in the dried-up bed of a river, but when the storms came, his house would be disintegrated. It has no foundation.

Even an ordinary site might tempt the builder to begin construction on the smoothed-over sand, and not bother digging down to the shelf of rock below. How tempting it is to ignore the necessity of digging down deep into the deeper things of God! How easy it is to superficially skim over the Bible, or perhaps not read it at all. How easy it is to go to church and sit in a pew, and never become involved in service the kingdom of God. How easy it is to give a little money, without giving yourself. How easy it is to neglect those very things which would strengthen our lives and give us a proper foundation. How easy it is to neglect our prayer lives, to neglect our witnessing, to settle back and allow our souls to slide ever downward.

It is a sad thing indeed, but there are those of us here today whose lives are being built upon nothing but sand, instead of the Rock of Christ. Every time we decide to miss a worship service or a prayer service, or attend those services, we are building a foundation. Every time we skip our own quiet times alone with God, or pray fervently, we are laying a foundation. Every time we allow our children to make

decisions which we know will hurt them, or guide them in the way of the Lord, we are laying a foundation.

We cannot escape that fact. **We are laying a foundation through what we do. What kind of foundation are *you* building?** What kind of foundation are you helping your children to build? Is your life and your home based on solid Christian teaching? Does your home and family life bring honor to Christ, or is your home filled with things which bring dishonor to Christ? Is your mind filled with thoughts and words which are disobedient to God's will? Or are your heart and mind centered on the lofty thoughts of holy obedience to the One who loves you more than anyone else?

Is your life committed and dedicated to Christ? That is a good foundation to begin with, and the true disciple of Christ will examine his life from time to time to see if he is still on the foundation of Christ.

That is test four: the foundation you lay. Are you building your life on the right foundation?

Those are the four tests: **the road you travel, the fruit you bear, the will you obey, the foundation you lay.** So here is my prayer for you today: every time you receive a text message on your cell phone, every time you watch the evening news, every time you pick up a newspaper or receive an update from a friend, may the Lord remind you to stay up-to-date with Him.