

Authority Acknowledged

JESUS'S WORDS HAVE AUTHORITY.

Matthew 7:15-29

15 “Be on your guard **A** against false prophets who come to you in **sheep’s clothing** **B** but inwardly are ravaging wolves. **16** You’ll recognize them by their **fruit**. **C** Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? **17** In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. **18** A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into **the fire**. **D** **20** So you’ll recognize them by their fruit. **21** Not everyone who says to me, ‘**Lord, Lord,**’ **E** will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ **23** Then I will announce to them, ‘**I never knew you**.’ **F** Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’ **24** Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on **the rock**. **G** **25** The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it **didn’t collapse**, **H** because its foundation was on the rock. **26** But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn’t act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. **27** The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a **great crash**.’ **I** **28** When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were **astonished** **J** at his teaching, **29** because he was teaching them like one who had **authority**, **K** and not like their scribes.

Exploring Key Words

- A** “Beware” (KJV; ESV); “Watch out” (NIV). To be vigilant and protective against potential harm or deception, directed either at oneself or others.
- B** A metaphor for the false prophets who claim to speak for God but teach deception. They are really “ravaging wolves” looking to devour those not grounded in truth.
- C** As a wolf’s true nature will be revealed in time, visible outcomes reveal a person’s true character. Good fruit (like grapes and figs) doesn’t come from thornbushes and thistles.
- D** A common New Testament image for judgment and destruction (see Matt. 13:42; Rev. 20:15).
- E** It is impossible for humans to see beyond words to an individual’s heart and motivation. But Jesus is not deceived by those who claim Him but reject the “will of my Father in heaven.”
- F** Some may fool others on earth with good deeds, but their spiritual emptiness will be laid bare before Jesus at His judgment.
- G** In contrast to those who only act like believers, wise people build the lives on Him. He becomes the solid foundation for their lives.
- H** The rain, rivers, and winds represent the trials and challenges of life. Those who are grounded in Jesus will not collapse under pressure.
- I** “Great was the fall” (KJV; ESV). The Greek wording suggests ruin and failure. Paul used it to describe Israel’s stumbling in Romans 11:11.
- J** “Amazed” (NIV). The term indicates a strong emotional response of awe. (See Mark 1:22.)
- K** The scribes’ authority was rooted in repeating traditions and other teachers. Jesus’s authority rested in His own character and His firsthand understanding of God’s Word and will.



NOTES

Fruit (Matt. 7:15-20)

- Jesus continued His Sermon on the Mount by warning His listeners about false prophets, who can be deceptive and dangerous.
- He taught that false prophets are recognized by their fruit (character and behavior). True disciples can be identified by their good works.
- Judgment and eternal punishment await those who aren't true disciples.

Obedience (Matt. 7:21-23)

- True disciples affirm Jesus's lordship, submit to His authority, and obey His commands. Neither words nor actions are suitable proof that someone follows Jesus.
- A person transformed by the gospel is a true disciple. True disciples seek to obey Jesus in all areas.

Wisdom (Matt. 7:24-29)

- The wise person is the one who has responded to Jesus's teachings, while the fool rejects the gospel. The wise man is prepared for the day of judgment, but the one who hears and doesn't act on Jesus's words will suffer ruin.

Summary Statements

Jesus's words have authority.

- Believers' lives should exhibit spiritual fruit.
- Believers are known by their desire to obey God's Word.
- Believers can stand firm on God's Word.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:24

Key Doctrine

The Scriptures

All Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. (See Psalm 119:89; 2 Timothy 3:15-17.)



For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at goExploreTheBible.com.

ENGAGE

Who is someone you know that you would consider an authority in a particular field? If you had a choice, in what field of expertise would you like to be considered an authority? (PSG, p. 58)

- When we need to get it right, we often turn to the “authority.” The authority is supposedly the most knowledgeable and experienced person in his or her field.
- The authorities are the ones you count on to have the correct information and skills. To be recognized as an authority in an area of expertise is a unique honor. When that person speaks, people generally pay close attention.

Bonus: Who holds the greatest amount of authority over your life? Why?

EXPLORE

FRUIT (MATT. 7:15-20)

Bonus: When is it fun to wear a mask or dress like someone else? When can it be a problem?

- Jesus warned about “false prophets.” This pointed to the scribes and Pharisees. Outwardly they looked righteous, but inside they were selfish, greedy, and hypocritical. Jesus compared them to wolves disguised as sheep.
- False teachers can be identified by “their fruit.” Genuine fruit (grapes and figs) don’t come from brambles or thistles. Good trees produce good fruit, and bad trees produce bad fruit. One’s heart is revealed by one’s life.
- Like a tree that doesn’t produce fruit is destroyed, those whose hearts don’t produce good fruit will be condemned. As believers, we can’t judge others with a holier-than-thou attitude, but we can recognize godly fruit revealed in the lives of those professing a relationship with Jesus.

How can you tell the difference between judging someone (v. 1) and discerning fruit (v. 20)? (PSG, p. 61)

OBEDIENCE (MATT. 7:21-23)

Bonus: How do you feel about people who claim to be one thing, but act like the opposite? Why?

- The “kingdom of heaven” is a common theme in Matthew and describes the rule and reign of God in this world. Entering the kingdom means submitting to His rule, as evidenced by obedience. Rebelling against God’s rule is an indication that one is not really a part of the kingdom.
- Many may pretend to be Christ followers and might even make the outright confession that He is “Lord,” but the validity of their profession is proven by obedience to the Father. Jesus said many would engage in religious activities in His name without truly following Him.

- Jesus emphasized a day of final judgment. False believers will point to good works done in His name, but they will be exposed as counterfeits. Rather than acknowledging them, He will banish them from His presence eternally.

What does obedience to God’s Word reveal about one’s relationship with God? (PSG, p. 63)

WISDOM (MATT. 7:24-29)

Bonus: If you were going to build a house, what would you build first? Why?

- Jesus called His followers to build their lives on the strong foundation of His teaching. Building a life is like building a house. The foundation of any house is essential.
- Building on a rock-solid foundation involves listening to and following Jesus’s words. The one who does this is wise and will withstand the storms of life. Others may think they are secure, but the storms will wreck their lives because they do not listen to or obey Jesus’s words. They are foolish.
- People were “astonished” at Jesus’s words. His teaching carried more authority than the religious leaders because it was rooted in God’s law, not man-made traditions.

Who in your circle of friends needs to hear and act on the message of the gospel? (PSG, p. 65)

CHALLENGE

Encourage the group to consider how they can encourage one another to avoid hypocrisy and bear genuine fruit for the kingdom.

Make a list of ways this might be done—phone calls, meeting weekly in pairs, encouraging text messages. Pair up with a group member and commit to weekly connection for accountability. (PSG, p. 66)

Challenge individuals to examine their lives for areas where they are struggling to submit to God’s leadership.

How about your prayer life? Sharing your faith? Giving of your resources to God? Your thought life? Name other areas where you need to intentionally seek to shore up your obedience. (PSG, p. 66)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week’s study.

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 65)

Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Wise people build their lives on the foundation of Jesus. Look up the passages in which the psalmist referred to God as his “rock”: Psalm 18:2; 62:2,6. List other images in these verses used by the psalmist to describe what it meant to have God as his rock (for example, “fortress”). Prophets also described God as a rock. Read 1 Samuel 2:2 and Isaiah 26:4; 28:16. Note qualities such as “everlasting” and “unshakable.” Now read the following New Testament passages: 1 Corinthians 3:11; 10:4; and 1 Peter 2:4-8. ***How do these verses add to your understanding of Jesus as your foundation?***

Direct the group to describe the qualities of a rock. Emphasize that rocks often are symbols of strength and stability. Instruct adults to complete the Bible Skill on page 65 of the PSG. After a few minutes, review what they found in their study.

OBJECT LESSON: POTTED PLANT

Prior to the session, secure a potted plant. During the session, encourage adults to share some ideas for keeping the plant healthy, as well as identifying signs that it might be dying. Highlight Jesus’s illustration of the good trees and bad trees.

Affirm that we can nurture healthy spiritual lives, but we also need to be on the lookout for false teachers that spread deception and spiritual disease. Encourage adults to make a list of common false teachings that would be easy to accept as truth.

Lead a brief discussion on how believers can be “on guard” and protect their hearts and minds from the deceptive words of false teachers today.

HEARING AND OBEYING

Matthew 7:24 encapsulates a foundational biblical principle: genuinely hearing God’s Word leads to action. Hearing necessitates a change in lifestyle or obedience to what is heard. Consider the Hebrew word *shema*, as found in passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Listen [*shema*], Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” In Hebrew thought, one cannot claim to truly hear God’s Word without hearing and actively responding in obedience.

Likewise, the New Testament connects hearing with doing. For example, believers are encouraged to “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jas. 1:22). True faith is not a static noun (belief) but a dynamic verb (believe). It involves trust and corresponding actions. Without obedience, hearing becomes empty and self-deceptive.

Modern culture often separates belief from action, reducing faith to intellectual agreement or emotional affirmation. For instance, people may claim to “believe in God” without living in a way that reflects His will. This shallow understanding of faith sharply contrasts with the biblical perspective.

In the Gospel of John, for instance, the active verb “believe” (*pisteuo*) is used approximately 100 times, while the static noun “belief” (*pistis*) is never used. In John, faith is not a one-time decision or static belief but a continuous, active act of trusting Jesus as the source of eternal life (John 20:31).

John’s use of *pisteuo* emphasizes the importance of an active, trusting relationship with Jesus over mere intellectual agreement. To believe requires a dynamic engagement with our faith. True faith hears *and* responds, reflecting the biblical truth that genuine hearing leads to action. As Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commands.” To hear and not act is to build on sand. In contrast, hearing and obeying is to build on solid rock.