

Sheep and Wolves

Scripture

“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. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor [can] a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:15-20 NKJV)

Commentary

What an interesting picture the Lord paints for us in this passage. He describes false prophets as cunning devils. They put on sheep’s clothing and seek to devour the flock. Hunters would cover themselves with animal skins and crawl out among their prey to be undetected until right before the deadly strike. This effectively hid the danger from the prey until it was too late.

However, God warns His children about this kind of ambush. He tells us to evaluate prophets by their fruit. This is sound advice because a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. The question is, “How does one evaluate fruit?”

The nature of the animals that Christ used in this passage will help us considerably. Sheep are docile animals. Good pasture, water, and protection are about all they need. On the other hand, wolves are brutal predators who seek the life of the weak and defenseless. So, how might these traits manifest themselves?

Probably the greatest difference is motive. In the case of wolves, self-interest will outweigh selflessness. They will be dressed as a sheep, but only skin deep. The inner person will be exposed by careful scrutiny.

Most love to seize power as was the case of many Pharisees. “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.” (Luke 20:46-47 NKJV)

They will twist the Scriptures to gain leverage. Seeking to control people they will place legalistic burdens on you. “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” (Colossians 2:8 NKJV)

However, the greatest issue is their lack of love. “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have [it] more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, [he who is] not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My [sheep], and am known by My own. As

the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” (John 10:10-15 NKJV) “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15:13 NKJV)

As it is written my friends, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:16 NKJV)

Prayer

Gracious Father, protect us from evil men. Give us wisdom to spot the wolves that infiltrate our churches. Protect us from overzealousness as we readily acknowledge that we all are selfish at times. However, let us see the patterns of behavior that issue from the heart. Then, Lord, give us the wisdom and courage to do what is right and holy before you, amen.