




## ▸ *Authority Acknowledged* ◀

JESUS'S WORDS HAVE AUTHORITY.

### **MATTHEW 7:15-29**

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.

 **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?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **MATTHEW 7:1-29**

In chapter 7, Jesus continued to teach His followers what they were to be and to do. First, He addressed the way His followers were to relate to others (Matt. 7:1-6). In contrast to the judgmental attitude of the pious religious leaders, Jesus's disciples were not to judge (evaluate) others in hopes that they themselves would come off better in such an analysis. Jesus illustrated this in a humorous fashion using lumber and splinters to make His point. He indicated that the disciple wouldn't want others to treat them judgmentally, so they shouldn't treat others with critical judgment either.

Returning again to the subjects of both prayer and provision, Jesus taught His followers that God is ready and willing to answer their prayers (vv. 7-12). Using vivid illustrations, Jesus pointed to a loving Father who will take care of His children as they petition Him.

The remainder of chapter 7 points to contrasting ways to live. One way is God's way, which is the narrow way that few travel. The other way is the way of the world, pictured as the broad way which leads to destruction. Many are the travelers on that path. God's way produces good fruit. The world's way produces bad and worthless fruit. God's way secures entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The world's way ends in eternal separation from God. God's way is built on the strong foundation of Jesus's teachings. This foundation will withstand the storms of life. The world's way is to ignore Christ's teaching, and this choice will end in tragedy.

When Jesus finished teaching His disciples, the crowd that had been listening was amazed because He taught "like one who had authority, and not like their scribes" (v. 29).



**Read Matthew 7:15-29 in your Bible. Make a list of words that describe the lifestyle of followers of Christ and another list of words that describe the way of the self-righteous religious leaders.**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## FRUIT (MATT. 7:15-20)

<sup>15</sup> “Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. <sup>16</sup> You’ll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> So you’ll recognize them by their fruit.”

### VERSES 15-20

Jesus warned His disciples to be alert for *false prophets*. This pointed to the scribes and Pharisees. Outwardly these religious leaders appeared righteous, but inside they were filled with selfishness, greed, and hypocrisy. The phrase “wolf in *sheep’s clothing*” arises from this. Later, Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees, saying “woe to you . . . hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside of it may also become clean” (Matt. 23:25-26).

### DID YOU KNOW?

Wolves are used symbolically in the Bible to describe people who cause harm to others—they ravage and devour for personal gain (Gen. 49:27; Jer. 5:6; Ezek. 22:27; Zeph. 3:3; John 10:12; Acts 20:29).

These religious leaders could be discerned by *their fruit*. Though Jesus said we are not to judge (v. 1), He called His followers to be “fruit inspectors.” He illustrated this in terms of gathering *grapes . . . from thornbushes* and *figs from thistles*. What a bush is by nature determines the type of fruit it bears. What a person is in the heart determines the type of behaviors and attitudes they exhibit. In the same way, *every good tree produces good fruit* and *a bad tree produces bad fruit*.

Later, Jesus said that “from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander” (Matt. 15:19). The condition of the heart is evidenced by the lifestyle produced.

Jesus regularly condemned hypocrisy. He promised judgment on those who were simply wearing religious masks. In verse 19, He continued using the image of trees and fruit by stating that a tree that doesn’t produce genuine fruit will be **cut down** and destroyed by **fire**. This is the theme that was preached by John the Baptist: “The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt 3:10).

This section began with the command to “be on your guard against false prophets” (v. 15). It ends by making the simple, yet profound statement, **you’ll recognize them by their fruit**. We are not to judge one another in the sense of having a judgmental, holier-than-thou attitude. Yet we are to discern the genuineness of people’s profession by inspecting the fruit of their lives.



**How can you tell the difference between judging someone (v. 1) and discerning fruit (v. 20)?**

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## **OBEDIENCE (MATT. 7:21-23)**

<sup>21</sup> “**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.**” <sup>22</sup> **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?’** <sup>23</sup> **Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’”**

### **VERSES 21-23**

Verses 21-23 uncover the masquerade of those who pretend to be Christ followers. They may make the outright confession that Jesus is **Lord**. But the genuineness of such a profession is evidenced by obedience to the **will of the Father in heaven**. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15).

The **kingdom of heaven** is a metaphor for the rule and reign of God as sovereign Lord. To enter the *kingdom* is to submit oneself to live under the rule of God, as evidenced by a lifestyle of obedience. To not do so is an indication that one is not a part of the kingdom.

Jesus spoke of people who engage in religious activities but are not true followers of Christ. Some are teachers and preachers, while others perform miracles including exorcisms. Religious activity can be a mask that disguises a heart far from God.

### ***Religious activity can be a mask that disguises a heart far from God.***

Notice the repeated emphasis on doing these religious activities ***in your name***. While these words often are used in Scripture as a mark of genuineness, they can also be used to disguise a false profession. Such is the case here.

In response to these play-acting followers, Jesus pointed to a day of final judgment when an accounting will take place. These false believers will offer all types of pleas about their spirituality and good works in Jesus's name. However, they will be exposed for the counterfeits they are.

Jesus emphasized that religious activities are not necessarily synonymous with obedience. The religious activities described here were outward, showy, charismatic activities. But they were all empty substitutes for obedience in daily living.

Verses 22 and 23 closely parallel Jesus's parable about the ten virgins who awaited the coming of the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13). Five of those maidens were foolishly unprepared for the groom's arrival. When they finally arrived at the door to the wedding banquet, they discovered that it was locked. Their cry was, "Master, Master." But they were denied entrance into the banquet. The words of the Master's rejection were simply: "I don't know you" (25:12).

Here are those same words used for those who masqueraded as Christ followers. To these who cry out, ***Lord, Lord***, the reply will be ***I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers***. Their end will be eternal separation from God.

We must not delude and deceive ourselves into an empty and false profession of Jesus as Lord. Do we really know Him or are we playing games of charades before God?



## What does obedience to God's Word reveal about one's relationship with God?



### 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.)

### WISDOM (MATT. 7:24-29)

<sup>24</sup> **“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. <sup>25</sup> The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash.” <sup>28</sup> When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.**

### VERSES 24-25

Jesus called His followers to build their lives on the strong foundation of His teaching. He illustrated this with a parable about houses, foundations, and storms. Building a life is like building a house. The foundation of any house is essential. In this parable, a choice was made of building the foundation on solid rock or shifting sand.

We build a rock-solid foundation for life when we listen to and follow Jesus's words. The one who does this is **wise**. Building your life on the teachings of Christ is the only sensible thing to do.

Jesus contrasted two groups who faced the same storm in life. Compare the description of the storm in verse 25—***the rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house—***



with the storm's description in verse 27. It's the same storm. Following Jesus doesn't exempt us from the same storms that everybody faces. However, believers have a secure foundation that makes it possible to weather the storms. The storms of life reveal the foundation on which we are building our lives.

#### VERSES 26-27

Jesus addressed those who did not act on His words. These people might have thought they were secure because they heard His teaching. Perhaps they even claimed to follow Jesus (v. 22). But they did not act on His words. Jesus called this group **foolish**.

Jesus continued to contrast two groups: those on the narrow path and those on the wide path (vv. 13-14), the good tree and the bad tree (vv. 17-18); the rock and the **sand**; and the wise and the **foolish**.

If you have ever built a sandcastle on the beach at low tide, you know what happens when the tide rises. The same is true with a house built on the sand. It cannot withstand the storm. In Jesus's words, the house **collapsed with a great crash**.

***Building your life on the teachings of Christ  
is the only sensible thing to do.***

#### VERSES 28-29

Jesus **had finished** what He set out to say, and the people were **astonished**. This was no mild reaction on the part of the crowd. They were blown away at the authority Jesus exhibited in His teaching.

In their astonishment, the crowd contrasted the **teaching** of Jesus to that with which they were familiar—the teaching of the **scribes**. There was no comparison—Jesus's teachings were superior. Therefore, the crowd recognized His teaching as having greater **authority**. They recognized Him as the authority on God's law.

Such a development immediately set up the coming conflict with those who considered themselves the authority on all things pertaining to God. The **scribes** were always quoting other rabbis as their source of authority or referring to the traditions of Judaism. Jesus, however, referred to no other source or tradition. This fact was not lost on the crowds. They saw that His teachings needed no outside source of authority. Jesus Himself was the authority.



**Who in your circle of friends needs to hear and act on the message of the gospel?**

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**BIBLE SKILL:** *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?

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**Explore the Bible Prayer Guide**

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.




## APPLY THE TEXT

- + 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.

 **How can the members of your group encourage and hold one another accountable to hear and act on Jesus's words? 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.**

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 **Consider areas of your life where you struggle in obedience to God. 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.**

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 **Memorize Matthew 7:24.**

*Prayer Needs*

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