Know the Bible to Examine the Doctrines

Matthew 7:15-23 T Trinity 8

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The subject of last week’s sermon leads us into this week’s sermon:

God fills us up with good things that lead to salvation,

Not things that lead us to decay and emptiness.

We’re filled with God’s grace –

Which we receive in baptism, the Word of God, and the Lord’s Supper.

These saving gifts are apprehended and held on to by our faith.

These things don’t save unless faith believes the promises located in these means.

These promises in these means come from the Bible,

And Christian faith feeds off the words and promises of God located in the Bible.

I occasionally get the question– how much of the Bible do I really need to know?

I mean, all that really matters is that I believe, right?

Can’t I just know the basics and that’s good enough?

Can’t I just trust what you’re teaching me is biblically sound doctrines?

Usually, these questions come from laziness,

not from a well-informed understanding of the faith.

But Jesus today tells us why knowing the Bible is important.

Just before today’s Gospel text starts, Jesus tells us what’s at stake:

He says, **“Enter by the narrow gate.**

**For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction,**

**and those who enter by it are many.**

**For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life,**

**and those who find it are few.”**

In today’s Gospel, Jesus warns us of those who lead us into the wide gate,

which leads to destruction.

He says, **“Beware of False prophets.”**

These false prophets will look like one of God’s own,

Yet they will devour your soul.

But how do we know a prophet is false,

so that you can avoid them and reject their teaching?

Jesus says, “**you will recognize false prophets by their fruits**

**[…] every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.”**

When Jesus says that you will recognize them by their fruits,

We may think of other Scripture where fruit means what someone does,

Like their works done in faith.

But we shouldn’t look at someone’s works alone to see if we should follow them or not.

Rather, fruits also refers to the doctrines they teach.

So primarily, if we want to know if we should follow a teacher or not,

we look at the doctrines they teach.

And we take what they say and examine it in light of the Bible.

Though eventually, their teachings, if false, will manifest itself in evil actions.

But we must examine what people say in light of Scripture,

Before we follow them.

The fruits of the tree referring to doctrines is referenced by Jesus in Matthew 12:33-37.

Jesus said, **“Either make the tree good and its fruit food, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of Vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.**

In this statement to the Pharisees,

Jesus says they’re accountable for the false teachings they say.

The same goes for all of us.

We will give an account to God on the last day for the words we speak.

Each individual is accountable for the words that flow from one’s heart.

Our words either bring out good or evil.

And our words have a huge impact on judgment day -

For as Romans 10:10 says,

**“For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”**

False teachers and prophets use their words to deceive you.

Jeremiah 23:17 says **“They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord,**

**‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart,**

**they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’”**

A false teacher will give you false promises.

They will say – ‘it’s okay to not increase in knowledge and faith as the Scripture teaches. It’s okay you don’t know the Scripture or ever flee to it in times of trouble.

All you need to do is follow your heart and do what you think is best.’

They will lead you away from what God tells you to do,

And tell you to trust yourself.

But to follow your heart is to not follow Christ,

Because as Scripture says, out of the heart comes all sorts of evil.

False teachers will also try and lead you towards hypocrisy –

To outwardly do godly things,

Without having faith and trust in our hearts behind what we do.

For example, we’ve been taught that we are forgiven through confession and absolution.

And that we’re forgiven of our sins in the Lord’s Supper.

This is true!

However, how should we come to these means of grace God gives us?

Should we think that if we go through saying the words,

Or eating and drinking the body and blood,

That we’re pushing the right magical buttons that will get us into heaven?

Or, should we come to God in these things with true repentance?

Where we completely shun our sinful ways,

Turn from them,

And receive forgiveness of our sins from God because of our failures,

And also help and strength from God to live a life bearing fruit in what we say and do?

Faith must receive what’s given in confession and communion,

Or else we’re continuing to harden our hearts toward God’s ways.

By faith, we follow the Word of God,

For in it, we learn we’re sinners.

Not that we mess up sometimes,

But that because of our sins,

We deserve to enter the wide gate which leads to hell.

But also in the Word of God, we hear of our Savior, Jesus.

He is our redeemer.

He has taken our sins from us,

And paid the punishment that our sins deserve.

Having been freed from the punishment of our sins,

We live as free children of God,

Who listens to our heavenly Father intently,

That we wouldn’t enslave ourselves to our sins once again.

Through a rejection of continuing to live in our sin,

And trusting what our heavenly Father teaches in His Word,

We enter the narrow gate into heaven,

Where Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Faithful Christians seek to hear their Heavenly Father talk to them in Scripture.

This isn’t to say that we’re saved by Bible readings.

A heartless, faithless reading of Scripture does your faith no good.

However, faith leads true Christians to hear and hunger for God’s Word.

The sinful flesh is lazy and doesn’t want to read God’s Word,

But we discipline ourselves to know the truth of the Scriptures,

So that we aren’t lead astray by false prophets.

Because the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour you!

And he sends false teachers to be his cronies in this work.

If we don’t discipline ourselves in the ways of righteousness,

Meditating on his Word Day and night as Psalm 1 teaches us to do,

We leave ourselves vulnerable to following anyone who quotes a Bible verse.

If we don’t know God’s word,

We don’t know what teachers to follow,

And we don’t know what sins we need to confess,

And in what ways we need to discipline our sinful flesh,

Exercising self-control so that we don’t submit to false teachers,

To the point where it drags us to hell with them.

And so, with the Word of God, we examine all teachers.

That includes me – your pastor.

Compare what I teach to Scripture,

To see if my fruit is healthy –

That is to say, if what I teach is a good and true biblical teaching.

Or, if something I taught was not good fruit –

That is, a false teaching that needs correction.

This is important for us all,

For the gate is wide leading to destruction,

But the gate that leads to life is narrow and hard.

So to answer the question, “How much of the Bible do I need to know?”

We should know the Word of God well –

Not only because it fills us.

But because by it,

we judge which teachers are false prophets,

who lead us down the wide path to hell.

And by knowing the Word of God,

We know which teachers are good,

who lead us towards Christ to receive His grace and forgiveness,

that’s given to His children in the means of grace and received by faith.

And in this doing, we follow the narrow path which leads to heaven.

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