

# SPIRITUAL INCONSISTENCIES

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Text: Matthew 7:15-23

■ Eugene H. Peterson, in *Subversive Spirituality* writes, “When you look at our history, it is no wonder that spirituality is so often treated with suspicion, and not infrequently with outright hostility. For in actual practice spirituality very often develops into neurosis, degenerates into selfishness, becomes pretentious, turns violent.

How does this happen? The short answer is that it happens when we step outside the Gospel story and take ourselves as the basic and authoritative text for our spirituality; we begin exegeting ourselves as a sacred text ... True spirituality, Christian spirituality, takes attention off of ourselves and focuses it on another, on Jesus.”

-- Eugene H. Peterson in *Subversive Spirituality*. Christianity Today, Vol. 41, no. 12.

For too long we have allowed spiritually deceptive people, who want to set themselves up as the standard, to affect our understanding of what truly is spiritual. And with the advent of religious TV and radio we have an even greater challenge before us. Some may have the label of a conservative Christian and some may consider themselves to be liberal and enlightened in their point of view—wolves travel in different clothing. But why is it that we can't seem to understand who we're dealing with? Why are we so easily lead astray in the church world by every Johnny-come-lately? How is it possible to know those who are seeking to lead us astray?

The scripture teaches us that over time, the spiritual inconsistencies in a person of false nature will be revealed. It is with this in mind that Jesus offers us several revealing *observations* concerning how to know those wolves in sheep's clothing.

## **I. *BEWARE OF SPIRITUALLY DECEPTIVE PEOPLE* (vv. 15-16).**

### **A. Spiritually deceptive people try to hard to appear as one of God's own (v. 15).**

■ A person may be full of talk about his own [religious] experiences. But often it is more a bad than a good sign. It is like a tree that is full of leaves that seldom bears much fruit. Or it is like a cloud which, although it appears to promise much fullness of rain, is only wind to a dry and thirsty earth. ... Strong, false affections are much more likely to declare themselves than true ones. It is the nature of false religion to be showy and visible as it was with the Pharisees.

-- Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*. Christianity Today, Vol. 30, no. 9.

### **B. Spiritually deceptive people will ultimately be revealed by the nature of their heart (v. 16).**

■ “Living according to kingdom norms can be feigned for a time; but what one is will eventually reveal itself in what one does. However guarded one's words, they will finally betray him (cf. 12:33-37; Luke 6:45). Ultimately false prophets tear down faith (2Tim 2:18) and promote divisiveness, bitterness (e.g., 1Tim 6:4-5; 2Tim 2:23), and various kinds of ungodliness (2Tim 2:16).” (EBC)

## **II. *BE AWARE THAT THE HEART DETERMINES THE BEHAVIOR* (vv. 17-20).**

### **A. It is impossible for behavior to differ from the heart for long (vv. 17-18).**

■ John Calvin wrote, “The human heart has so many crannies where vanity hides, so many holes where falsehood lurks, is so decked out with deceiving hypocrisy, that it often dupes itself.”

-- John Calvin in *A Calvin Treasury*. Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 4.

Even a deceived heart will reveal itself eventually.

**B. Ultimately, every heart is revealed and judged (vv. 19-20).**

■ “The illustration of this comparison, of the fruit's being the discovery of the tree. You cannot always distinguish them by their bark and leaves, nor by the spreading of their boughs, but by their fruits ye shall know them. The fruit is according to the tree. Men may, in their professions, put a force upon their nature, and contradict their inward principles, but the stream and bent of their practices will agree with them. Christ insists upon this, the agreeableness between the fruit and the tree....”

(from Matthew Henry's Commentary)

**III. BE SURE THAT GOD IS FOOLED BY NO ONE  
(vv. 21-23).**

**A. Our *reward* is not based on what we *say* but on what we *do*  
(v. 21).**

Isn't it good to know that God knows the whole story and will reward each appropriately—God is not mocked.

**B. Our *assurance* is not based on our performance but on the  
condition of our heart (v. 22).**

**C. Our *acceptance* is based entirely on who we know (v. 23).**

## CONCLUSION

Major Osipovich, an air force pilot for the former USSR, planned to give a talk at his children's school about peace. But he would need time off during the day to give his talk, so he volunteered for night duty. And that's how Major Osipovich found himself patrolling the skies over the eastern regions of the Soviet Union on September 1, 1983--the night Korean Air Lines Flight KE007 strayed into Soviet air space.

Soon the Soviet pilot was caught in a series of blunders and misinformation. In the end, Major Osipovich followed orders and shot down the unidentified aircraft. **The actions of an air force major preparing to talk about peace plunged 240 passengers to their deaths and sparked an international incident that pushed world powers to a stand-off. *Our talk is important. But our actions carry far more weight.***

-- Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 3.

It is clear that through these poignant *observations* that a spiritually inconsistent life will be the ultimate downfall of some.