

*Let us pray: Lord, in this life we are surrounded by those who wish to bring harm and desecration to You and Your word. We pray that You would keep us safe from all false prophets and that You would guide this church, Your little flock, into Your heavenly pastures with true and faithful shepherds and true and faithful sheep. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Grace: God's undeserved love for each and every one of us. Mercy: God forgiving us our sin for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. And Peace: peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with God. All of these are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the seventh chapter beginning at the fifteenth verse, and we read in Jesus'

name:

***"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> "Therefore by their fruits you will know them. <sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' <sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'***

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Regardless of the book of the Old Testament, I am willing to bet that a reference to false teaching or false teachers is present. In Genesis we hear about satan who led our first parents, Adam and Eve, away from God. In Jeremiah or Ezekiel we hear about the false prophets who were leading God's people away from Him and towards false gods. In the books of the Kings we hear about Elijah and Elisha who had to contend with the kings of Israel who had set up golden calves for the Israelites to worship.

As we know things do not get better in the New Testament. During Christ's life He had

to contend with Jews who were trying to kill Him and destroy the one true religion. Once Jesus died, the Jews, primarily Saul/Paul, tried to eradicate the one true religion. After Jesus death the heresies continued: teaching that Jesus was not a man, teaching that Jesus was not God, teaching that I get to heaven once I have a special knowledge... the heresies, the false teaching, just kept coming and coming.

And even in our own day the heresies are strong. Churches that teach that baptism is not God's gift to you rather it is your pledge to God. Churches that teach that Jesus is not truly present with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper but it is, rather, a memorial meal to remember Him. Churches that teach that Jesus was not really God and the Bible is just a bunch of stories to make us feel better and teach us how to lead an okay life. Yes, every one of these false teachings and

heresies is still alive and well in the United States, and the world, up to this very day.

Yet, though the heresies continue to thrive and even make headway, we know one indisputable fact: they will never overcome Jesus. Christ, our Savior, our Redeemer, who lived and died for us will triumph over every false teacher, for every false teacher will stand before Him one day and He will proclaim to them, “I never knew you.” Wow! Knowing what those false teachers have in store is all the more reason we can praise and thank God that our Lord ***Jesus bears much good fruit.***

Now, before you think that I am going to stand up here and just berate other churches, we need to understand one important thing: false doctrine will cause you to end up in hell. I stand up here to warn you about what the world and other churches teach because I care about your spiritual well-being and I

would be a horrible pastor if I did not warn you about what the world and other religions taught against you and your beliefs. As Gerhard said about the true church in his day, “***The man who does not have the Church as his spiritual mother cannot have God as his Father.***” If we are not in the true church of God we do not have God and, thus, we have no salvation. This is how important it is that you know you are in the one true church of Christ.

Of course, we know that the one true church is not defined by four walls and a roof; rather, it is defined by the doctrine that is taught and believed. If a church does not believe in Jesus’ atoning life, death, and resurrection, they have no salvation to look forward to. What this means is that nearly one billion people have no heaven to look forward to at this moment... Any Muslim who does not know Jesus Christ as their Savior, and thus would not be a Muslim if

they did, will not be in heaven. The Muslim religion is not the one true Church of Christ. While they teach morals and ‘good living,’ they have no Christ and thus are damned to an eternity in hell.

And even in the “Christian” church there are those who are false teachers and lead people astray. They claim the title of Christian and yet they are leading people towards perdition... they look like sheep, but they are indeed ravenous wolves. Consider that a “Christian” church made the following comment, “*When we confess in the Apostles’ Creed that Jesus was ‘conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary...,’ we are not making a gynecological assertion. We are saying that God entered into Christ and, in him, is fully revealed to humankind.*” Thus you have a Christian church which denies the virgin birth of Christ... that church is the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

A church that claims the title of Lutheran and still denies the virgin birth of Christ.

There are also “Christian” churches which profess that child baptism is wrong and only adults should be baptized... this is an apt summary of 90% of Baptist and Evangelical churches in the United States. There are “Christian” churches which would have you believe that the Lord’s body and blood are not present in the Lord’s Supper... this too would be evangelicals, and even Mormons (though they are not Christians in the proper sense). There are “Christian” churches which teach that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle and homosexual marriage is perfectly normal... this would be the ELCA, Presbyterians, and Unitarians (who, also, are not really Christian). So many churches in the United States who claim the title, the mantle, of Christian and yet go completely against the very word of God.

But, please, do not feel as though you get off the hook so easily. Though we spend time looking at what other churches teach, one must examine themselves and see what you personally teach and believe. As Gerhard says about this text, “*Although Christ is thinking foremost of the fruits of false teaching when He says, ‘Each good tree brings forth good fruit, and a bad tree brings forth bad fruit,’ we can apply this equally well to all Christians in general, namely in that all true Christians should prove their faith by good fruit.*” And then we look at our lives and realize that we are not bearing the best of fruit.

“I’m a Christian and yet I cheat on my spouse every chance I get.” “I’m a Christian; yet, I don’t think that Bible is a book that should lead my life, but it’s more of a ‘pick-me-up’ when I need it.” “I’m a Christian but it is how good a life that I lead which ultimately determines my spot in heaven.”

“I’m a Christian but I don’t go to church, I do not pray, I do not read the Bible, and I do not believe in heaven or hell... but I’m a Christian.”

“I’m a Christian but my church attendance gives credence to the fact that I have never seen the inside of a church.” “I’m a Christian but my behavior would best be suited for a bar room brawl than for praising Jesus.” “I’m a Christian but please don’t ask me to live like it... it really cramps my style.”

We, as Christians, have a lot of growing to do. Yes, through faith in our Savior we can claim that title of Christian, but we still have much room for growth and improvement.

No, we will never improve enough to assist in our salvation, though some “Christian” churches claim that you can. No, my salvation has been earned for me full and free by Jesus Christ my Savior. He came into

this world and taught God's word, His truth, to all people. Jesus lived a perfect life in perfect obedience to God and His word. Jesus fulfilled all of the commandments perfectly, for you and for me. He did that because He knew that we are not and would not be perfect children. He lived and died for us because He wanted us to be assured that our future was found in heaven.

Jesus lived, died, and rose again from the dead to assure you that heaven is waiting when this life is over. Jesus rose for you to assure you that when you were baptized and buried with Christ, you too will rise with Him on the last day. Jesus rose to announce that He has overcome satan, death, hell, and all false teachers... He will not be overcome, He is the overcomer. This is what Jesus Christ has done for you.

And now through faith in Jesus and all that He has done for you, you have the strength

to improve your life. This improvement will not get you into heaven, but it will allow the world to see you, and to see your heavenly Father. As Luther says, "***So my external works aid nothing to the end, that I am or become good, but make known and reveal the good treasure, and the heart in which it lies concealed. For this treasure that lies concealed in the heart, God desires to make known, and not to be left concealed.***" Our works show forth the love of our Lord and Savior... may we always continue to bear good fruit for Him.

And yet, we know that in this life we will not always bear good fruit... well, thanks be to God that His Son Jesus Christ has. For all those times that we are not perfect children, we can run to Christ, we can turn to our baptism, we can run to the Lord's Supper... all these places that promise us the forgiveness of our sins, this is where we can seek our aid and comfort.

Dear friends, thanks be to God. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ, in this world we are confronted with many false teachers and false teachings. We must be ever vigilant in our learning and in our teaching. We must not stray from the simple words of Christ and what He says, for when we try to make Christ bend to our reason, then we are being false teachers. However, when we bend our reason and our will to that of God, we will be proclaiming His true and holy word.

Thanks be to God that He has given me His word and His sacraments which continue to strengthen my faith in all that Christ has done for me. Thanks be to God that He has given me His true Church with faithful pastors who teach His word in truth and purity. And thanks be to God that His Son, Jesus Christ, has borne abundant good fruit for me to claim as my own through faith in Him.