

JUSTIFICATION AND JUDGMENT¹

JOHN W. ROBBINS

President

The Trinity Foundation

Unicoi, Tennessee

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. 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?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”

—Matthew 7:21-23

This passage of Scripture is widely misunderstood. The Baptist John MacArthur, the Christian Reformed Norman Shepherd, and Pope John Paul II all misunderstand the passage, and they misunderstand it in essentially the same way. They all—Baptist, Reformed, and Romanist—appeal to verse 21 for the same reason: It seems to teach salvation by doing, rather than by merely believing. After all, Jesus does say that it is only those who *do the will of His Father* who will enter the kingdom of heaven.

In his book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, John MacArthur cites this passage and asserts: “Real faith is as concerned with doing the will of God as it is with affirming the facts of true doctrine” (189). Real faith, saving faith, according to MacArthur, is as much about doing as it is about believing, for Jesus brought a “message of works” (79).

In his book, *The Call of Grace*, Norman Shepherd tells us that “The consequence of disobedience is exclusion from the kingdom of heaven” (49). So a believer may be excluded from the kingdom for his disobedience, because belief alone is not enough. To faith one must add “covenant faithfulness.” And the most eloquent statement of the three, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1821, cites Matt 7:21 as scriptural support for its statement that “In every circumstance each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere ‘to the end’ and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God’s eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ.”

¹ This article formerly appeared in *The Trinity Review* (The Trinity Foundation, P.O. Box 68, Unicoi, TN 37692, www.trinityfoundation.org).

Notice that the *Catholic Catechism* mentions grace twice in this single sentence. Many non-Catholics labor under the mistaken impression that the Roman Church-State teaches salvation by works apart from the grace of God and Christ. But it does not, and this paragraph reflects its teaching that the good works Christians do are done by the grace of God and Christ. This common misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Romanist doctrine has contributed to (or is caused by) a misunderstanding of biblical doctrine. Our works, our doing, the Bible teaches, contribute nothing whatsoever to our salvation. They are neither an instrument for our justification nor a condition of our salvation. The difference between the Bible and Rome is not that Rome teaches salvation by faith and works-without-grace, while the Bible teaches salvation by faith and works-with-grace. The difference between the Bible and Rome is that the Bible teaches that our salvation does not depend on our works at all (whether allegedly done by the grace of God or not), while Rome asserts that our salvation depends in part on our works. The Bible affirms *sola fide*; Rome denies it.

But let us return to the text.

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 (Matt 7:21).

At first glance, verse 21 seems to be saying that the decisive difference between those who are excluded and those who are admitted into the kingdom of heaven is the difference between empty professors and actual doers of the Word. It is not those who *say*, "Lord, Lord," but those who actually *do the will of the Father*, who are admitted into heaven. In verse 21, Jesus seems to be making the same distinction that James makes in 2:14: "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone *says* he has faith but *does not* have works? Can faith save him?" The contrast in James is between a person who *says* something with his lips, but does not give evidence of his faith by his works. But, unlike James, Jesus does not explicitly mention belief in verse 21; He mentions doing and saying, asserting that doing the will of the Father in heaven is required to get into the kingdom of heaven, but saying "Lord, Lord" is not enough.

Again, at first glance, verse 21 seems to contradict verses such as Acts 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved..." and Rom 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law;" and Eph 2:8-9: "For by grace you

have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast;” and scores of other verses that deny salvation comes by doing.

This apparent contradiction in the NT raises a further difficulty: Does the Bible contradict itself? Many scholars say, Yes, it does. Or if they are coy rather than candid, they say the Scriptures contain “tensions,” “paradoxes,” and “antinomies.” The scholars apparently never consider the possibility that they have misunderstood the Scriptures. They are quick to attribute logical difficulties to the revealed propositions (and they always add that it is pious and humble to do so), but they do not even contemplate the possibility that they might not understand the text. Therefore, the text itself must be paradoxical.

But as Christians we ought to be humble and say, *Of course the Scriptures contain no contradictions, no paradoxes, no antinomies, and no tensions.* When we come to what seems to be a contradiction in our theology, we must check our premises, return to the propositions of Scripture, and conform our thoughts to what the noncontradictory Scriptures say.

The “first glance” reading of verse 21 raises still another problem: Does Jesus teach legalism? Here I am using the word *legalism* in its proper sense: the notion that one can obtain, in whole or in part, salvation by doing, rather than by mere belief. The Pope, Shepherd, and MacArthur all appeal to this verse because they all believe that Jesus does in fact teach salvation by doing here—that He here denies the sufficiency of belief alone for salvation. The central problem in verse 21 is the meaning of Jesus’ phrase: “he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” The Pope, MacArthur, and Shepherd all appeal to this verse because they believe that the phrase means “works.” But that interpretation, of course, implies that the Bible contradicts itself. And that interpretation of the phrase cannot be correct, because of what verse 22 says.

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?” (Matt 7:22).

Now if we understand verse 21 as the Pope, MacArthur, and Shepherd understand it, what Jesus says in verse 22 is both unexpected and inexplicable.

If Jesus’ point in verse 21 were that faith is not enough, that good works, or “covenant faithfulness,” or obedience is also necessary in

order to be saved, then Jesus should have said something like this in verse 22: “Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, we trusted in You alone, we had faith in You alone, we believed the Bible and Your words.’” But of course Jesus says nothing of the sort. Instead, He reports that many people will appear before Him at the Judgment and will talk about their *works*, *not their faith*. These people—the ones who present works—will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Let us examine this verse carefully.

First, Jesus says “Many.” At first glance, verse 21 suggests that there will be only a few among those who will say, “Lord, Lord” who will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had said, “Not everyone,” and, sinners that we are, we jumped to the conclusion that He meant “almost everyone.” But here in verse 22 He says “many.” Many will come before Christ Jesus and speak to Him, saying, “Lord, Lord,” and they will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Second, many will speak to Jesus “in that day:” the Day of Judgment, when every person will give an account of every thought, word, and deed done in the body. We will each give an account of our lives to God.² There is no escaping this judgment, no parole, no continuance, no diversion. The author of Hebrews writes: “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (9:27). Those are two appointments each one of us will keep: death and judgment. We will be on trial for our lives. We will not be appearing in this court as witnesses, victims, or jurors, but as defendants.

Third, each of us will speak directly to Jesus; there will be no attorneys, no priests, no pastors, no bishops, no archbishops, no popes, no confessors, no counselors, no elders, no deacons, no church, no parents, and no friends to represent us and to speak for us. We will be held individually accountable by God.

This is the basis of the idea of individual responsibility, not merely in theology, but in law as well. Individual responsibility is one of the pillars of Christian jurisprudence, and those who rant against the individual and individualism are merely displaying their ignorance of, or their rejection of, what the Bible teaches about the role and the significance

²Editor’s note: The author does not distinguish here between the Judgment Seat of Christ (for believers) and the Great White Throne Judgment (for unbelievers). In light of John 5:24 (“will not come into judgment”), it is important to realize this distinction.

of the individual person. We will each be summoned to this divine court to face the Creator of the universe. What will we say in that day?

Jesus in His mercy tells us what many will say to Him in that Day: First, they will acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ, addressing Him as “Lord.” Not only will they say it once, they will repeat it: “Lord, Lord.” Recognizing the gravity of the situation, they will plead for their lives. This repetition of “Lord” may also suggest that they think they are on familiar terms with Jesus.

Next, they will ask Jesus a series of questions, calling the Christ Himself as a witness in their defense. Notice that they will not directly assert that they have done good works. They will speak in interrogative, not declarative, sentences. Because of this, their defense will actually be much stronger than their own mere declarations would have been: They will call Christ Jesus Himself as their defense witness. They will ask Him to testify to the facts of their lives: their prophesying, exorcising, and wonder working.

Some commentators have tried to dismiss the claims of these defendants by suggesting that they will lie or exaggerate, that they really will not have done what they will claim to have done. There is nothing in the text that supports such an accusation. That misinterpretation is a desperate device to evade what Jesus is telling us in this passage. The defendants will make no direct assertions. They will ask questions. They will address those questions to Jesus, whom they will acknowledge as Lord. They will ask Him to testify to the truth of their claims. They actually will have done these things on earth: prophesying, casting out demons, and performing wonders.

Now the fact that many people will have done these things on earth implies several things.

First, it implies that these people are not mere professors, without works and without practice, as we may have concluded from our superficial reading of verse 21. They are not pew warmers; they are not spiritual spectators; they are not churchgoers who show up only on Easter and Christmas; they are not those who have no works. These people have many works, and they will call on Jesus Himself to testify to their works on earth. Theirs is not mere lip service; nor empty profession. They will have been *very* active in church and in other religious endeavors.

Second, not only are these people active in the churches, they are church leaders. They prophesy, they preach, they proselytize, they teach;

they cast out demons, they exorcise; they perform many wonders—not just a few, but *many* wonders. These are things publicly done, not things done in a corner or in the privacy of one’s own home.

Third, they will do all these works in the name of Jesus Christ. Notice that the defendants will use the phrase “in Your name” repeatedly: They will prophesy “in Jesus’ name;” they will cast out demons “in Jesus’ name;” they will perform many wonders “in Jesus’ name.” They will be leaders in professedly Christian churches. They are not Buddhists, performing these things in the name of Buddha. Nor are they Hindus, performing these works in the name of Shiva or some other Hindu god. Nor are they Muslims, doing these things in the names of Allah or Mohammed. Nor are they Jews, doing these things in the name of Abraham. These are not pagans ignorant of the name of Jesus; they are professing Christians who will do all these works in the name of Jesus Christ.

Because they were doing these things in the name of Jesus while on earth, they must have known something about Jesus, perhaps even that He is God. Some demons know no less, such as the one whose conversation with Jesus is reported in Mark 1:24: “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”

Did these defendants know as much as that demon? They were as lost as that demon. This implies, among other things, that simply acknowledging Jesus as Lord, as the Holy One of God, is not sufficient for salvation. Do not the Scriptures say that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord? And do not the Scriptures say that some people will not be saved? It therefore follows that confessing Jesus as Lord is insufficient for salvation; one must also confess Him as Savior.³

Now, consider the irony of the exegetical situation. Proponents of “Lordship Salvation” such as Shepherd and MacArthur appeal to this passage in Matthew 7 to support their view that belief alone in the Lord Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation, that we must also practice the Lordship of Christ by faithfully performing works in order to be saved. Yet this passage clearly teaches that some of those who confess Jesus

³Editor’s note: It would be clearer to say what the author himself says later in the article, “The phrase Jesus used in Matt 7:21, ‘he who does the will of My Father in Heaven,’ is equivalent to *believe the gospel*” (p. 74).

as Lord and perform amazing works will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, one may acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, perform many wonderful works, and still go to hell. Jesus Himself here warns us that “many” who confess His Lordship and perform many works will go to hell. Obviously the passage does not mean what the Pope, MacArthur, and Shepherd think it means. It is not a contrast between mere believers (who are lost) and workers (who are saved), for Jesus Himself says that the workers are lost.

Fourth, because these men were visible church leaders on earth, we know that the visible church is not the kingdom of heaven, for these men are excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Let us turn our attention briefly to the sorts of works these church leaders will have done. They will have prophesied in the name of Jesus; they will have cast out demons in the name of Jesus; they will have performed wonders in the name of Jesus. Now, these are not only works; they are extraordinary and supernatural works. In fact, they are the greatest works done by men and among men, to use John Gill’s phrase. Perhaps a few of us, but certainly not this writer, have done anything remotely as great or as impressive as these works. Our works are ordinary: attending church, being good neighbors, giving money to the church and to the poor, taking care of our families, and so on.

Now here is the question: If none of us has done or will do anything like the works these men will have done, and if these men are lost, then what hope is there for us? If Jesus Himself turns these men out of the kingdom of heaven—these many men who have performed such great works in the name of Jesus—what hope have we? If these very active, professing Christians, these church leaders, will be sent to hell, what hope have we of gaining heaven?

The answer is, we have no hope, if, like these men, we rely on our works. If we believe that our works help obtain our salvation, we have no hope of heaven, no matter how great our works, no matter how faithful our obedience, regardless of whether we act in the name of Jesus, or whether we confess Jesus as Lord. If we rely on our obedience or our covenant faithfulness or our good works, we are lost.

This is the crux of the passage, and of salvation. When these church leaders give their defense at the judgment, they will offer their works as Exhibits A, B, and C. Their plea to Jesus will be their works—works done in the name of Jesus, to be sure, but works nonetheless. And far

from lessening their guilt, doing their works in the name of Jesus increases their guilt before God.

Far from teaching a “message of works,” Jesus warns us that anyone who comes before Him at the Judgment and offers his works, his covenant faithfulness, or his life as his defense will be sent to hell. Far from teaching that our works are necessary for our salvation, Jesus here teaches that all our works contribute not one whit to our salvation.

Why will many men not be admitted into the kingdom of heaven? What is wrong with their defense? Jesus tells us plainly: They will plead their own lives and Christian works.

Their defense should be the imputed righteousness of Christ, not their works. Many will be sent to hell because they will not mention that they are sinners saved only by the righteousness of the Man Christ Jesus.

They will not mention the perfect life, sinless death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They will not mention the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to those who believe in Him. They will not mention the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ for His people. They will not mention that Jesus Christ earned their salvation for them. They will not mention that Jesus Christ suffered the penalty of hell due to them, that Jesus satisfied the justice of the Father on their behalf.

In short, they will not confess Jesus as Savior, even while they confess Him as Lord.

Jesus in His mercy has told us one thing that will happen on the Day of Judgment. This is not a parable; this is not a metaphor. This is prophecy. It is exactly what many scholars deny prophecy is: future history. When Jesus here uses the verb “will,” when He speaks in the future tense, He speaks literally, and these events must happen. We ought to heed His warning and realize that if we rely on anything we do—faithful church attendance, tithing, serving as a church officer, writing, speaking, teaching, holding crusades attended by millions, raising money, giving alms to the poor, building hospitals, Christian schools, churches, baptism, participation in the Lord’s Supper—we are lost. All our righteousnesses—Isaiah does not say *unrighteousnesses*—are as filthy rags.

Jesus tells us that many people at the judgment will argue that they deserve heaven, that they have a right to heaven because they have done many wonderful works in the name of Jesus. They will not acknowledge their depravity, for they think they are good men. They will not acknowledge the satisfaction and atonement of Jesus, because

they do not believe it. Their prayer will not be, “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” but, “Jesus, I did many wonderful works in Your name, and now You ought to reward me with heaven.” Whatever these churchgoers and church leaders may believe about themselves and about Jesus, they do not believe in their own depravity, nor in the imputed righteousness of Christ. They do not believe that the only way to heaven is through Jesus Christ. In short, they do not believe the gospel, and that is why they are damned.

The vivid warning that Jesus gives us in this passage is not merely about the futility of working for salvation. It is also a warning about believing some things about God and Jesus, but not believing the gospel. James tells us that demons believe in one God—and they are lost. That means that monotheism *per se* will not save anyone. Mark tells us that one demon recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God, and that demon was lost. That means that acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah *per se* will not save anyone. (And if anyone suggests that it is obedience that makes faith saving, it seems that no one obeys Jesus Christ more quickly in the NT than the demons to whom He speaks.)

Paul picks up on this point in Galatians, where he damns everyone, man or angel, who brings a message other than justification by faith alone. Presumably the false teachers in Galatia who were urging the Christians there to supplement their faith with works not only believed in God and in Jesus as the Son of God, but in the infallibility of the Scriptures (OT) and in Jesus’ miracles as well. Perhaps they even believed in His resurrection. But a belief in Jesus’ resurrection *per se* will save no one. That is why unbelieving, apostate churches can recite the early creeds of the church: While they contain some truth (and some error), the creeds do not contain the Gospel. Consider, for example, the Apostles’ Creed. The received form reads:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into Hell; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

What is missing from the Apostles' Creed? Read it again: There is no mention of God's law, no mention of Adam's sin, no statement that Jesus suffered and died for the sins of His people, no mention of His representative obedience and vicarious death, no mention of redemption, no mention of His perfect righteousness imputed to sinners, no mention of justification through belief alone. Jesus' descent into hell, an event that did not occur, is mentioned, and the mention of forgiveness of sins is vague enough to leave open the possibility that the Holy Catholic Church forgives sins. The Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) omits any mention of sin, mentions the word "salvation," but can hardly be said to present an explanation of it. The A.D. 381 enlargement adds some explanation, but also adds the error that water baptism remits sin.

What we need to believe was stated by Paul in Rom 3:20-28:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt 7:23).

Notice the "and then." Jesus pronounces judgment only after hearing the pleas and defenses of the men on trial. If any judge ever had the right to condemn a defendant without hearing his defense, this Judge has. But He is so scrupulous about God's law—and His law became the model for due process in civilizations influenced by Christianity—that Jesus does not pronounce judgment until after the defendants have presented their defenses.

Jesus' declaration, "I never knew you," eliminates another common perversion of this passage. Some commentators have suggested that the men Jesus will send to hell were once believers, and they performed their good works while they were believers; but they did not persevere; they were not faithful to the covenant, so they lost their "final justification." But that is not what Jesus will say to them: He will say, "I *never* knew you." He will not say, "I formerly knew you, but you were unfaithful to the covenant." Nor will He say, "I knew you once, but you disobeyed My commandments." Jesus will say, "I *never* knew you." These people, these church leaders, were *never* Christians. They were *never* foreknown, elected, called, regenerated, justified, adopted, reconciled, or sanctified. They may have been baptized, confirmed, ordained, chrismated, and canonized, but they were never born again. They were active churchgoers and church leaders; they did many extraordinary and wonderful works, all in the name of Jesus; but they were never Christians. *Christ Jesus never knew them.*

This declaration eliminates Romanist and Arminian doctrine, with its "saved on Sunday, lost on Monday" soteriology, as well as the Neolegalism of men like Norman Shepherd and Steven Schlissel. The final salvation of Christians—their admittance into the kingdom of heaven—just like their election, calling, regeneration, adoption, justification, reconciliation, and sanctification, depends not one whit on their good works, but on the perfect righteousness of Christ alone imputed, not infused, through belief alone. Believers have salvation—we possess eternal life—at the first moment of belief, and the gift of salvation is irrevocable.

Notice that Christ Jesus is the only *door* to heaven; He admits and excludes. Christ Jesus will send these professing Christians to hell. Notice that Christ Jesus is the only *way* to heaven. It is His life, work, and death alone that entitles sinners to heaven. Notice that Christ Jesus is the only *life*. When He says, "Depart from Me," He is condemning these men to everlasting death. That is what hell is: separation from Christ.

Jesus will describe these people as "you who practice lawlessness." Now if we had seen these people on earth—and perhaps we have seen some of them—we may not have reached that conclusion. After all, we would have seen these church leaders prophesying, casting out demons, and performing supernatural wonders, all in the name of Jesus. The Roman Catholic Church-State would have declared them saints.

The ersatz Evangelicals would have made them best-selling authors and celebrities. But Jesus calls them “you who practice lawlessness.” Why?

He has already told us why. All of these extraordinary and wonderful works done in the name of Jesus are lawlessness, because they are done for the purpose of obtaining salvation. These works are lawlessness because they involve an illegal use of the law. The law, Paul tells us, is given for the knowledge of sin. It is not given that we sinners might use it to gain entrance into heaven. Conviction of sin, not salvation, is the purpose of the law. Legalism, because it is an illegal use of the law, is lawlessness. “But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully,” Paul told Timothy. But using the law in an effort to obtain heaven is not lawful; it is an illegal use of the law; it is lawlessness.

But if we see some of these men on earth, we are able to recognize them as false teachers, not because of what they do, but because of what they say: They teach salvation by faith and works, by faith and obedience, by faith and covenant faithfulness. They teach on earth what they will tell the Lord Jesus Christ at the judgment. That is what they believe.

The simple and obvious notion that false teaching is the indicator by which we recognize false teachers clarifies and explains the meaning of this whole passage. In the verses immediately prior to verse 21, Jesus had been warning of false prophets. He said,

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 thornbushes 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 (Matt 7:15-20).

The trees that are cut down and thrown into the fire in verse 19 are the men Jesus commands to depart from Him in verse 23. They are the men who have done spectacular works in the name of Jesus on earth. This implies, please note, that the fruit by which we are to know them is not primarily their works, perhaps not their works at all, but their doctrine, their teaching. We have become so accustomed to thinking of “fruit” as behavior that we have missed Jesus’ point in His warning against false prophets: They are recognized by their doctrine. What

they teach is their “fruit.” That is why John gives us a doctrinal test in 2 John 7, 9-11:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.... Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your home or greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

The notion that *fruit* is doctrine or teaching, rather than works or behavior, is so clearly taught in Scripture that the dominance of the incorrect view must be attributed to our inability to read. For example, Jesus in Matt 12:32-37 says,

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Fruit is a metaphor for words, doctrine, speaking, teaching. *Evil fruit* is false teaching; *good fruit* is true teaching; and we are to judge men by their fruit, that is, their teaching. This is entirely consistent with the tests prescribed in the OT (Deuteronomy 13 and 18) for false prophets: The tests were doctrinal. The Israelites were to disbelieve false prophets even if they performed miracles and foretold the future.

Jesus prescribes a doctrinal test for false prophets because a behavioral test is unreliable. We all have known unbelievers whose behavior is better than that of some Christians. And if *fruit* means behavior, and we must judge them by their fruit, then we must conclude that they are Christians, despite what they say.

There is, however, one final question with which we have to deal. In verse 21, Jesus used the phrase: “he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” What does this phrase mean, if it does not mean works?

The answer may be found in John 6:40, where Jesus says, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and

believes in Him have everlasting life,” and in John 6:28-29: “Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”

The phrase Jesus used in Matt 7:21, “he who does the will of My Father in Heaven,” is equivalent to *believe the gospel*. Far from teaching that our works save us, the passage teaches that even extraordinary, spectacular, and wonderful works are of no value in obtaining salvation, and that the only instrument of salvation is simple belief of the gospel. Faith alone unites us to Christ. Faith alone is the instrument of salvation. By faith alone we are justified and sanctified. By faith alone we receive the imputed righteousness of Christ. By faith alone we are admitted into the kingdom of heaven.

What will be your defense in the day of judgment? Your good works? Your obedience? Your covenant faithfulness? Or will your defense be the righteousness of Christ alone? Anyone who relies on his own works (whether allegedly done by the grace of God or not), or some combination of his works and Christ’s works, will not enter heaven. Anyone who thinks he deserves heaven because of his Christian works will not enter heaven. Miracles, prophecies, and casting out demons will not help: Judas Iscariot did all three.

A thousand years ago Anselm wrote a tract for dying men, telling them what they ought to say at the day of judgment. Here is an excerpt from the tract:

Come, then, while life remains in you. In His death alone place your whole trust; in nothing else place any trust; . . . with this alone cover yourself wholly; and if the Lord your God wills to judge you, say: “Lord, between your judgment and me I present the death of our Lord Jesus Christ; in no other way can I contend with You.” And if He shall say that you are a sinner, say: “Lord, I interpose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my sins and You.” If He should say that you deserve condemnation, say: “Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between my evil deserts and You, and His merits I offer for those which I ought to have and have not.” If He says that He is angry with you, say: “Lord, I oppose the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between Your wrath and me.” And when You have completed this, say again: “Lord, I set the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and You.”

Our only hope in life and death is our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing less, no one else, will save. That is the message of Matt 7:21-23.