

HOW TO KNOW YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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INTRODUCTION

- A. *"I've made my choice,"* wrote the basketball star. *"I love Jesus Christ and I try to serve Him to the best of my ability. How about you?"* That testimony is from a tract written thirty years ago by Bill Bradley, the former United States Senator who once ran for president. In an interview with Chuck Colson they talked about how Bradley professed faith in Christ while he was a student at Princeton University. There he became very active in The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and by the time he was playing for the New York Knicks, he was a very outspoken Christian. But things have changed. In his 1996 memoirs, Bradley says he was put off by the exclusive truth claims of conservative Christianity and bothered by the uncharitable and racist attitudes displayed by some Christians. He now says he embraces all religions, from Buddhism to Islam, *"so long as they seek inner peace."*
- B. Jesus' parable of the sower or seed (13:1-9) isn't about four kinds of Christians. What is it about then?

1. Some say it's about four different responses people make to Jesus and the gospel.
2. Jesus, however, has already indicated in Matthew there are only two possible responses people can make to Him and the gospel, not four.

Matthew 7:13-14. ¹³ **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.**

¹⁴ **But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**

3. This parable illustrates the reality of only two possible responses to Jesus.
 - a. The first three soils are inadequate responses to Jesus.
 - b. Only the fourth soil represents a favorable, appropriate and adequate response to Jesus and the gospel.
 - c. The main focus then of this parable isn't on people who profess faith in Jesus, but rather on people who persevere in faith. Bill Bradley didn't persevere.
 - d. What are the characteristics of those who persevere in their faith? What are the marks of a true Christian?

I. FIRST, CONSIDER SOME THINGS THAT ARE NOT CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO PERSEVERE AS CHRISTIANS.

- A. Merely hearing the gospel doesn't make a person a true Christian --v. 19.
When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.
- B. Merely professing the gospel doesn't make a person a true Christian (v. 20-21; Matthew 7:21).
Matthew 13:20-21 ²⁰ **The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.** ²¹ **But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.**
Matthew 7:21 **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**
- C. Merely making a nominal commitment to the gospel doesn't make a person a true Christian (v. 22; Matthew 6:24).
Matthew 13:22 **The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.**

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

II. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE CHRISTIANS, CHRISTIANS WHO PERSEVERE? CONSIDER FOUR TESTS.

A. First, there is the test of time.

1. **Luke 9:62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."**

2. This means a good finish not just a good start for Christians.

3. Fourth soil: It takes time to produce a crop - Matthew 13:23.

Matthew 13:23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

B. Second, there is the test of obedience.

John 15:10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

C. Third, there is the test of endurance.

1. Second soil - Matthew 13:20-21.

Matthew 13:20-21 ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

2. **2 Timothy 2:3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.**

D. Fourth, there is the test of production.

1. Fourth soil: Produces an abundant crop - Matthew 13:23.

Matthew 13:23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

2. John 15:1-2.

John 15:1-2 ¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

CONCLUSION

A. There really are only two possible responses you can make to Jesus. He confirms this Himself (Matthew 12:30).

Matthew 12:30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

B. What is your response to Jesus?