

Can We Judge the Christianity of Donald Trump?

Donald Trump has challenged the Christianity of Ted Cruz while also raising questions about the nature of Ben Carson's faith. In the past, he also suggested that President Obama might be a Muslim rather than a Christian. Now, the pope has questioned the Christianity of Trump.

It appears that what goes around, comes around.

Trump's immediate response was to call Pope Francis's comments "disgraceful" and to state that, "No leader, especially a religious leader, should have the right to question another man's religion or faith."

So, Trump can question the faith of others but the Pope cannot question his?

In defense of Trump, Jerry Falwell, Jr., has stated that, "I have no doubts that he is a man of faith, that he's a Christian."

Welcome to the 2016 version of the presidential race, representing reality TV at its most unscripted and bizarre.

Two serious questions, though, are begging to be asked.

First, according to the Bible, do we have the right to judge someone's profession of faith, let alone the mandate to?

Second, if we are called to judge, what are the criteria?

On the one hand, the Bible tells us repeatedly that only God knows the heart and in that sense, only He knows who belongs to Him and who doesn't. At the same time, the Bible repeatedly calls us to examine what a professing Christian believes and to evaluate how that person lives, to judge the tree by its

fruit, as Jesus put it.

Using that criteria, we know, for example, that Richard Dawkins is not a Christian, since he denies the existence of God, the authority of Scripture, and the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Jesus. We also know that Osama bin Laden was not a Christian, since he was a radical Muslim and an unrepentant mass murderer.

In the same way, albeit in a much less extreme fashion, we know that our friendly next-door neighbors are not Christians when they demonstrate no understanding of their own sin, no recognition of their need for forgiveness, and no knowledge of who Jesus really is or why He died on the cross. And we can say this with certainty even if they attend church services every year at Easter and Christmas.

A Christian believes core Christian doctrines and lives a basic Christian lifestyle.

The Christian faith begins with an acknowledgement of our sin and a profession of faith in our Savior and is then evidenced by a godly life – not a perfect life, but a godly life. As Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21)

James (Jacob) echoed this saying, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18b).

In other words, talk is cheap. Let’s see how you live.

That’s why Paul could contrast the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:17-23), adding, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24).

That’s why Paul could also state plainly that no adulterer or

drunkard or practicing homosexual would enter God's kingdom (among other lifestyles; see 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5-7; Galatians 5:17-21), also noting, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

How does Donald Trump line up?

We know that in the past he boasted about his numerous adulterous affairs and that he built the first casino in America with its own strip club, actually featuring 36,000 square feet of adult entertainment. Yet he sees no need to ask for forgiveness for these past acts (which are just a small sampling of ungodly behavior) because he is "a very good person."

This is the opposite of Christianity, which begins with a recognition of guilt and an open confession of our need for forgiveness. As for Donald Trump, at no point in any interview that has ever been conducted with him has he offered the slightest understanding of the heart of the gospel.

That alone would indicate that Trump is a not a real Christian.

As for his conduct, while we have no idea how he lives in private, and while he presumably has many good qualities that are commendable, we do know that his public conduct is often deplorable, with his tweets and comments violating almost every standard of Christian decorum.

This is the standard Paul laid out for followers of Jesus: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29, NIV).

Trump's vitriolic, nasty, often vulgar, sometimes patently false attacks on others violate this verse from beginning to

end, both in spirit and in letter. And remember that it was Jesus who told us that it was out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

Jesus also "told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt [does this sound familiar to you at all?]

'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector [remember that in New Testament times, tax collectors were notoriously corrupt].

'The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get."

'But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted'" (Luke 18:9-14).

Which one sounds like Donald Trump, the Pharisee or the tax collector? And which is more characteristic of Mr. Trump, the person who exalts himself or the person who humbles himself?

Again, God is the ultimate judge, but He does tell us to judge the tree by its fruit, and that means that Donald Trump could really use our prayers.

You may still plan to vote for him to be president, even though he shows no true signs of being a genuine Christian (although it's clear he believes he is one). That's obviously your call entirely.

But let's not foolishly proclaim him to be a Christian when,

until recently, many of his ardent supporters acknowledged that he was not.

And just consider what a world changer Donald Trump could be if he really knew the Lord. Through prayer and God's mercy, it could happen.