

April 17, 2016

FRUIT

Matthew 7:15-20

Jesus doesn't seem to know a whole lot about botany. Good trees *can* bear a few bad fruits; and bad trees *can* bear a few good fruits. He is right, however, when He states that grapes cannot be gathered from thorns, or, figs from thistles. But we can also agree that a tree is known by its fruits. Of course, Jesus is not really talking about botany. He is speaking about human behavior. Still, from experience, most of us can probably agree that sometimes, good people produce bad fruit, and sometimes, bad people produce some good fruit. Remember... "There's so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it hardly behooves any of us to talk about the rest of us!" (Edward Wallis Hoch)

It may seem curious that Jesus has said, "*Do not judge...*" and, He has said it is hypocritical to want to remove the speck in our neighbor's eye without dealing with the log in our own; and then He says something that sounds very judgmental and critical as He basically calls the bad people unredeemable: *No bad tree bears good fruit!* Ever? But realize... He is talking about false prophets. Liars.

We all know, from experience that life is a mixed blessing. We are all a bit of a mixture of good and evil. Even Christians are, at one and the same time, saved and sinful. God isn't finished with any of us yet. We all have some growing to do and some fruit to produce. And we all need to ripen!

Note, however, that it is relevant that we *do* produce fruit! It is not enough just to be a good tree. Jesus says that the tree is known by its fruit. Likewise, it is not enough just to have faith. Faith without works is dead! (James 2:17) A tree that produces no fruit is like faith without works, and... like lukewarm water. What happens to the lukewarm Christian? Jesus will spit them out! (Revelation 3:16) And the challenge before all of us is that sometimes even a good Christian can show a bad example; produce some bad fruit! Even good Christians can sometimes be only lukewarm! I think, for example, of the person who is as leader in the Church, who for one reason or another, finds fault in either the pastor or in some other member, and chooses to stay away from worship rather than to become reconciled and fulfill their purpose in life – to glorify God – which is primarily accomplished in worship. Even the best of us can do the wrong thing, sometimes. And I said, several weeks ago, that it is a sin to find fault without both wanting to remove that fault and trying to see beyond that fault.

As an aside, here, let me just say that when you *can* find fault, legitimately, try to be constructive, rather than just critical. And never let yourself be critical anonymously. That's like a sniper shooting from a hiding place. When you don't know where it's coming from, you imagine that it's coming from everywhere!

False prophets come in sheep's clothing. They look nice and gentle outwardly. But inwardly they are ravenous wolves. Integrity happens when our outward bearing matches our inner character. False prophets have little integrity. False prophets often have a very worldly focus, and yet, they mask in it a guise of Christianity. In the Gospel of Luke, the parallel passage talks of how "*the good person, out of the good treasure in their heart, produces good; while the evil person, out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the hearty that the mouth speaks.*" (Luke 6:45) The heart, the inward nature. What fills your heart? Could Jesus be saying that our hearts have either good treasure or evil treasure? Or, are we filled with both? Earlier in Matthew (6:19-21), Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.*" But it is also true that where your heart is can determine your treasure. When we focus on earthly or negative things, they become what fills our hearts. If, for example, you harbor resentment toward another, you have laid up some evil in your heart. The fruit it will produce is evil. If you find fault in others, it generates a negative attitude in your heart. The fruit it

will produce is evil – negativity. If apathy or indifference is laid up within us, irresponsibility and recklessness become the fruits we would produce.

An attitude is an action waiting to happen. A fruit waiting to ripen. And our attitudes are dispositions of the heart. And there is a wonderful proverb that says: “**As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.**” (Proverbs 23:7 KJV) We are what we think. A wolf cannot really think lamb-thoughts. It can only fake it, like a false prophet. At least, we could say that what we think shapes who we are. “*Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks!*” But remember, Jesus is not just talking about the words we say. Always remember that actions can speak louder than words.

What lies do you listen to? What false prophets do you hear? And... what do you think about. Paul gives us several ideas as to what we should be thinking:

Romans 12:7 – *Take thought for what is noble in the sight of all!*

Romans 12:2 – *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Romans 12:3 – *Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

Philippians 2:4-8 – *In humility, regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.*

Philippians 4:8 – *Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise...think about these things!*

Galatians 5:22a – *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control!*

More than anything, think love!

False prophets would want you to think of other things, like greed, lust, and the faults of others.

Just be careful how you hear what some people are saying. Some will say anything to get your attention.

Beware!