

Luke 6:43-45

43 "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; 44 for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 45 The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

Jesus has taught the people some very important virtues. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you, give to everyone that asks, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, forgive everyone, do not judge, do not condemn, love others as he loves them. Afterwards, he teaches the people the sources of good and evil lives in the heart of the individual.

Looking at today's Scripture we see some metaphorical speaking; the personification of a fruit tree. Jesus takes things of the environment that are easy for people to relate to and uses them metaphorically to connect the lesson. This enhances understanding by giving people something tangible to work with. These are things that the people can relate to. Each tree is known by its fruit. Good trees produce good fruit and bad trees produce bad fruit. If you know just a little about gardening then you know a diseased tree does not produce good fruit. Now, think of people and you know that good people do good things, think positive thoughts about others, and do good things for others. Bad people do bad things, take advantage of, abuse, and hurt others. Bad people lie, cheat, steal, rob, and swindle. The person is known by the results of their actions and by what they say.

From my own personal experience I am not a good gardener. What I am successful in growing the deer, birds, bugs, and groundhogs appreciate, enjoy, and end up eating better than I do. I focus mostly on fruit, peach trees, pear trees, grapes, and tomatoes. Each one of these trees or plants is very specific and consistent in what it produces. Each tree or vine produces according to the quality of the tree or vine itself. The same goes with the character of the individual. In the hymn *They'll Know We Are Christians*, it says that we are one. We are united in the Spirit, we are one with the Lord, and we pray for togetherness. That's a lesson on the necessity of Christian unity. Then the hymn goes on to say that the way that other people will know that we are Christians is by our love. This is a very specific characteristic of the individual. We will be known by our love. Yes indeed, they will know that we are Christians by the character of the heart of the individual. People will know that we are indeed Christians by our love. The lesson that Jesus is teaching is about the character of the individual. It is the inner being of the person. It is the person's attitude, heart, and soul. The implication is that hypocritical behavior will be exposed by the results; by the fruit that the person produces.

I sometimes get the opportunity to engage in conversation with strangers and sometimes we get to share our faith, beliefs, and practices. Sometimes strangers will open up and talk with me. In a recent conversation the individual found out that I am a pastor and in the conversation she said "I don't know what to believe." So I asked about her faith, and church attendance. So then she corrected herself and said that she knows what she believes about Jesus, God, and salvation. She does not know what to believe about

other people. Then she went on to explain that her and her husband have been going to different churches over the past year, they go to church to listen, but end up seeing the people act one way in church and another way in public. This is a person that is judging others. She sees the church as being full of hypocrites and is unable to see the hypocrisy of her own position. She has a critical heart, instead of acceptance and love, she condemns and this condemning attitude is interfering with her relationship with the Lord. She justifies her position based on her judgment of others. This person obviously is not one with the Lord. She is looking horizontally instead of vertically. By that I mean that she is looking outward at the people in front of her instead of looking inwardly at her own heart and soul and looking up to the Lord.

I did not have the time to correct misguided theology. A lot of people let a lot of different things come between them and their relationship with the Lord. It is never about the other person. It is never about what other people think, do, or say. It is always about you and your relationship with the Lord. Don't let people be a wedge between you and your ministry. So many things can come between us and God. Probably the most common thing that gets between the individual and God is the individual's attitude. What comes from the heart is a matter of your inner being. It is a matter of who you are. It is a matter of your character. You respond to others according to who you are. It comes from the heart.