

## Minding your Fruit

In *Matthew 7:16* our Lord Jesus gives a test (a spiritual yardstick), that can be applied to all our actions – **“You shall know them by their fruits.”** Later in *verses 17 and 18* He goes on to make a more specific application regarding this kingdom principle, **“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but every bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.”**

What you should grasp from this simple truth is that the results (the *fruits*) of any individual's actions are a far better and more accurate indication of their personal motives, or heart's desires, than are appearances and verbal claims. Appearances are often deceptive and words can be cheap!

We can apply this benchmark to both spiritual and practical matters. So whenever you have encountered bad fruit, you must recognise that it was produced by a corrupt tree that's been rooted in bad soil. And in so doing, you can justly discern and deal with the bad tree. Note a bad tree cannot produce good fruit, and *visa versa*! However, there is also a need to go even further. You should be regularly testing the ground in order to identify the type of soil - because the type of soil affects the tree, in either the negative or positive.

Therefore we have three fundamentals to examine – **'the soil, the tree and the fruit'**.

But the first thing I would like us to understand is that the most important aspect of this spiritual principle is not necessarily what type of tree we are, but rather, whether we are producing good or bad fruit. You see, I might be a fig tree, and you may be an apple tree, but what's most important is whether you are producing good apples and I'm producing good figs.

Notice, the **fruit** we are producing informs everyone (a) what type of tree we are, (b) it reveals the quality and quantity of our fruit, and (c) it identifies the kind of soil our lives are rooted in. Turn with me to **Luke 6** and let's read *verses 43 to 45*...

In this passage, the Lord Jesus is telling us that our lives are to be centred on character. What we are is far more important than anything we will ever say or do. The final result of our actions will be determined by what we are in ourselves.

In *verse 44* the emphasis shifts from the fruit to the tree. **“Every tree is known by its own fruit.”** Stating that, you will not find figs on a thorn tree, or pick grapes from a bramble bush. The kind of fruit you are producing is conclusive proof of what type of tree you are. And, the quality of that fruit reflects the motives of your heart – exposing any hidden agendas.

However, what stands out in the Greek is that two different words are used – both translated **“good.”** In *verse 43* we find the word *'kalon'* appearing both times.

This word denotes something which is *'intrinsically good'* that which is essentially good in its composition and make-up. Quite simply, a good tree *'by nature'* is intrinsically good, and a bad or corrupt tree *'by nature'* is intrinsically bad. Just like a sinner *'by nature'* is involved in sin and is therefore, intrinsically corrupt; and a saint *'by nature'* is involved in righteousness, and so, is intrinsically holy.

*'Agathos'* the other Greek word translated **“good”** appears three times in *verse 45*. In scripture, it's often used when referring to the heart. But what makes this word so different is the aspect of it being *'beneficial in effect and character'*. Therefore, something is good because it produces tangible benefits.

With this in mind, let's read **verse 45** again... **"A good man (in the moral sense), out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good (things which have a beneficial effect on others), and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil (that which is corrupt and does not benefit anyone)."**

Now, let's examine the three components individually:

(1) **The Soil.** The soil is the human **heart** because we know that this is where the seed of God's Word is sown (*Matthew 13:1-9*). It is the spiritual "*pneumatikos*" side of man. But the heart also contains a soulish "*psichigos*" realm, where man devises wicked and evil schemes. **"Out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil (wickedness)."**

(2) **The Tree.** You are likened to a tree; therefore, the tree is a **person**. *Matthew 7:20* says, **"Therefore, by their fruits you will know them."** Who was Jesus referring to here? The religious leaders who pretend to be good guides, yet their motives are selfish and destructive. Therefore, they are considered to be "*bad trees*." So according to both passages of scripture, you can either be classified as a bad tree (bearing bad fruit) or a good tree (bearing good fruit). Where the good fruit is, that's where you will find the good tree. And where the good tree (*the good man or woman*) is, there you will find many good benefits growing out of the good treasure of their heart (*the good soil*).

(3) **The Fruit.** The fruit is "**works**," and your fruit is always a true reflection of what you have sown in our heart, because it exposes the *motives of the heart* (whether good or bad). This is why believers are expected to be fruit-watchers and not tree surgeons. No one knows the heart of a man but God Himself, yet many of us are too quick to go in aggressively and try to sort the man out. However, it's far godlier to wait and see what fruits are being produced.

So what is this spiritual process? The **soil** (*your heart*) effects the **tree** (*you personally*); the **tree** (*you personally*) produces **fruit** (*works / actions*). However, please note, this fruit can also be heard as well as seen... **"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."**

Fruit-watchers should always keep their ears open too. How often do we expose the motives of our hearts by what we speak out – a good or evil confession?

Only after you have accurately discerned and determined what soil you are planted in (*what you have deposited in your treasure chest*), will you be able to forecast what fruit is likely to be produced in your life. So fruit-watchers should also be heart-examiners. Let me give you an example. If you've been able to recognise what type of soil has turned a tree bad, you can treat that bad soil and make the tree good.

Probably the worst soil to grow any tree in is the soil of pride. Therefore, the only sure safeguard against error in our lives is to be rooted and grounded in the soil of humility. *Galatians 6:3* tells us that through pride we deceive ourselves. But *verse 4* says, **"Let each one examine his own work" (fruit)...**

Whenever we see bad fruit in our lives, we ought to seriously consider changing the nature of the soil we're rooted in. For instance:

(a) If you see the fruit of **fear**, you should condition your soil with lots of **love**. Because **"perfect love casts out all fear"** (1 John 4:18)

(b) If you are seeing the fruits of **doubt** and **unbelief**, then you should treat your spiritual soil with some **faith**. Faith is the exact opposite of doubt and unbelief.

(c) If you are producing the fruit of **selfish ambition**, then why not change the soil by adding a large measure of **self sacrifice**.

(d) If you notice the fruits of a **quick temper** becoming more evident in your life, you should quickly dig into the soil a little **gentleness** and **self-control**.

In fact, all of the nine “*fruits of the Holy Spirit*” can be used as soil, or as conditioners and preservatives which can positively change our lives. **Galatians 5:22, 23**; “**Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**” Can you see something really astonishing here? The Holy Spirit’s fruit becomes your soil, and in so doing, the tree is positively affected so that it can produce the very same fruits – the fruits of righteousness.

**Luke 8:15** in the Amplified reads... “**But as for that seed in the good soil, these are the people who, hearing the Word, hold to it fast in a just, noble, virtuous and worthy heart, and steadily bring forth fruit with patience.**” My own literal translation reads.... “*But the Word of God that fell on essentially good soil, are those people who (having heard the Word with a sincere attitude and loyal character), take hold of the Word, keep it and steadily bring forth fruit with patience – some thirty, some sixty and some a hundred fold.*”

Notice, when you take hold of the word, and keep it, you steadily increase your fruit – 30, 60 or 100 percent.