

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Actions Speak Louder Than Words

by Dan Trygg

“You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So you'll recognize them by their fruit. ²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

Matthew 7:16-21

“Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” James 2:18

Proverbs 20:6 says, “Many a person *proclaims* his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy person?” People are quick to *talk* about what they believe, but few are willing to really *walk* in a way that is consistent with what they *say* they believe. They *say* they believe in God, or *profess* to have trusted in Christ, but *you could hardly tell it by the way they live*. Their day-to-day manner of living is virtually no different than the lives of those who do not know Christ. What about you? If someone were to follow you around, would they conclude you were a serious follower of Jesus Christ? How would they be able to tell? Would they conclude you were a Christian because of music on your radio, ...or the jewelry you wear, ...or because you go to church? Are you a “Christian by association”, or are you really the genuine thing? Would people conclude that you must be a Christian, because you go to the Christian meetings, and hang out with Christian people? Or, **do you claim to be a Christian because you believe the right theological thoughts (Jas. 2:19), or said some words** someone prompted you to repeat after him? Are you a Christian because you have a “Christian world view”, or have a good understanding of the Bible? Do you read and study the Bible? Do you talk to God throughout the day, or do you set aside times to pray?

You know, there are a lot of people who think they are Christians, and don't do *any* of these things! They are still firmly convinced that they will be going to heaven, and that they are living lives that are “pretty good”. *The ability of the human mind to justify oneself is truly amazing!* As I am writing, I am thinking of a whole gamut of individuals. **There is the “new Christian”, or “flash-in-the pan” Christian, who has made a profession of faith, but has done virtually nothing to grow since that initial decision.** They do not read the Bible, or go to church. They do not set aside time to pray. They do not seek out fellowship with other believers, or work on developing their faith. They may be excited about hearing about a God who loves them, but they are doing very little to show Him they appreciate what He has done for them. People who know them may be surprised to find out that they claim to be a Christian. That certainly would not be obvious to someone who meets them. **Then, there is the person who has been a believer for a few years. They may have had some initial excitement and motivation to grow, but that has now waned, and they have become dull and lazy.** They have established some basic habits and patterns for *learning* more, but they are not *doing* more. In fact, in some cases they are actually doing *less*. They may be somewhat self-satisfied, because they know a few things, but they are living *their own lives*, instead of living to serve God. Their relationship with God is just a religious compartment of their lives. Often, their faith is only in their minds and imaginations. They read and think about things of God, but they are not actually involved much themselves. They may *say* they are servants of God, but they only serve Him within certain convenient limits. They invest only minimally in their spiritual “duties”. They give only a token amount, not at all what they should, or could afford. They do what they feel they “need to”, but they do not “go overboard”. Really, their religious service is to appease their own self-conscience, or to attempt to get God to serve *them*. People who know them might know they are “religious”, but are not impressed by the faith they live out. **Finally, there are those who invest steadily in their spiritual lives.** They study the Bible, and often read religious books. They give themselves to prayer, and attend church meetings. They are highly invested in church-related ministry, and give regularly and often sacrificially to religious causes. They are often actively involved in service activities. They talk religious talk, and often refer to God or religious subjects. Their lives seem to be centered around God or church activities. Anyone who knows them would recognize that God is a big part of their lives. Of the three groups mentioned, these are most visibly living for God, and most easily identifiable as “religious”.

Of course, it is not enough to be religious. In fact, the point of Matthew 7 is to learn to differentiate the spiritually genuine from those who are counterfeit. In many ways they look the same, or are very similar. Many of the outward actions appear to be identical, but there is a noticeable difference in attitude, focus and in the fruit of their lives. **The counterfeit and unhealthy can make a good show of religious fervor and dedication, but they cannot hide the evidence of their true character.** As Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits.” Those who are the

false prophets may sound and look genuine at first, but eventually their true colors will show. **Those who are counterfeit tend to be self-centered, proud, arrogant, divisive, and controlling.** Jesus had a lot to say about false teachers in His critique of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. They promoted themselves to a place of prominence. Much of what they taught was good, but *they did not practice what they preached*. They piled on heavy loads of duty, responsibility and religious rituals onto their followers, but did nothing to help them. They dressed and acted to draw attention to themselves. They loved to be given honor and recognition by others, and to be greeted with titles of respect by people. Jesus said that they did not enter the Kingdom of God themselves, and they prevented or diverted others from entering it. What does *that* mean? The Kingdom of God is the reign or rule of God. To not enter the Kingdom is to turn away, or be diverted away, from doing the will of God. Paul added that they shut people out so that these people would seek *them* for access to God's Kingdom (Gal. 4:17). They preyed upon widows, and weak-willed, wounded people, manipulating them and devouring their resources (Lk. 20:47; II Tim. 3:6,7). They were "peddlers of the Word", people motivated by money, not by sincere hearts (II Cor. 2:17). False teachers tried to commend themselves by human credentials, in order to intimidate and control others, and take advantage of them. Sometimes, they even got downright abusive (II Cor. 11:18-20)! They were very zealous, and went to great lengths to make converts, but the people they recruited were as bad, or worse, than them (Matt. 23:15). They were legalistic nitpickers regarding religious rituals and duties, but missed the larger principles and heart attitude behind these rituals. Instead of being gracious, loving and accepting, they were judgmental, exclusivistic and "holier-than-thou" toward others. They had a veneer of religiosity, but were full of self-indulgence, greed, lawlessness and hypocrisy inside.

Then there are those who are fleshly Christians, believers who live by their own self-understanding and self-effort. They are called "fleshly" because they are energized and influenced more by the impulses of emotion and physical desires than by the Holy Spirit. Even though they may claim to be Christians, their lives are characterized by emotional disruption, relationship division, selfishness and sensuality (Gal. 5:19,20). **Others get hijacked by politics, special interests or "get rich quick" schemes.** Their time, attention and resources are invested in *these* areas, and they tend to reproduce what they invest themselves in. Whether their concerns are legitimate, or based upon theory and speculation, *are they representing Jesus well by their actions?* **The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. It would seem to me that these are people who have lost sight of the main thing** (II Pet. 1:2-11). Whether they are living for pleasure and self-indulgence, or they are trying to promote something they think is valuable, they are *not* putting first things first, ...and the focus and fruit of their lives is *not* Jesus.

As we think through these various examples, **it is clear that what Jesus said is true, "You will know them by their fruits."** This applies not only to the false prophets, but to all of us. **The outworking of what our lives produce reveals clearly where our hearts and focus are.** The apostle Paul put it this way, "The sins of some people are conspicuous, pointing to judgment, but the sins of others appear later."²⁵ So also good deeds are conspicuous; and even when they are not, they cannot remain hidden" (1 Timothy 5:24-25). Whether we are producing good fruit, or bad fruit, it will eventually become evident. **Jesus said that many people who called Him, "Lord!" will not enter heaven.** Even religious people, ...people who made a great show of their beliefs, and did *great things*, even seemingly *spiritual things*..., will be rejected. **Why? Because they did not do the will of the Father.** You see, the fact that people are all over the board, as far as the direction and fruit of their life, does not mean that it is up for grabs, or that it doesn't really matter. **Jesus said that there is one critical issue we have to decide about: Are we willing to do the will of God? Are we willing to live out God's agenda for our lives, or are we going to dictate to God what we are going to do for Him?** Jesus said, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50), but to those who are unwilling to do His Father's will, He said, "I never knew you! Depart from Me, you ones working out lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:23) **In the end, when we stand before God on judgment day, He will not be concerned about what we thought, or what we intended to do. He will demand an accounting for what we did.** We will have to give an answer for the choices we made. He will ask us, "Did you *do* what I wanted you to do? Did you live to honor and please Me?"

Actions speak louder than words. James said, "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." What was he driving at? **People say all kind of things about what they believe. The proof of what is really going on inside of them is "What do they do?"**

Ok. **So, what about you?** Did you see yourself in the scenarios described above? **Where are you at? Do you want to do the Father's will?** Do you understand how much He loves you, and what He has done for you? Do you want Him? Do you want to know Him and be His? What is the difference between the person who directly rebels against God, and defiantly pursues the sins of the flesh, ...and the person who *says* he will serve God, but never invests in his spiritual life, never develops a conscious relationship with God, and chooses a quiet, respectable life lived *unto himself*? *Neither* person did the will of God!! What about you? **Are you going to devote yourself to discovering and doing the will of God from your heart? What do the actions and fruits of your life say?**