

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Inside-Out: Bad Tree Versus Good Tree

by Dan Trygg

“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ So every good (morally-good, beneficial) tree bears good (beautiful, praiseworthy, healthy) fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

Matthew 7:16-20

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad (sick, unwholesome, rotten, decayed, corrupt) and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil (wicked, degenerate, painful, harmful), speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵ The good person brings out of his or her good treasure what is good; and the evil person brings out of his or her evil treasure what is evil.”

Matthew 12:33-35

Last time, we introduced this series of messages that I have called “Inside-Out”. This refers to the reality that God has made us *new* in Christ. He has put within us a new heart, and a new spirit, *which makes it possible for us to walk in accordance with the commandments, values and teachings of God’s heart*, from the inner leadings of the Spirit.

According to Jeremiah 17:9, the problem with people is that their hearts are “deceitful (or, ‘crooked, walked-on, polluted, slippery, sly, uneven-and-bumpy-ground’) and desperately sick (woeful, wicked, incurable)”, ...beyond understanding.” **The heart is the well-spring of a person’s life** (Prov. 4:23). ***If the heart is polluted and wicked, then that will be expressed in their attitudes and behaviors.*** Basically, **what we are on the inside is what will be expressed on the outside.** If you took some time to meditate on the various definitions of the words for “deceitful” and “sick”, you can begin to appreciate the multi-dimensional nature and causes of human “brokenness”. The reality taught in the scriptures is that we are indeed twisted, distorted, and self-centered, ...and we are unable to escape the limitations of that reality by whatever means we may try. **We are what we are, ...and we do what we do because of what we are.**

This is a fundamental reality that we see in the world around us. *It is spoken of from the earliest pages of the Bible.* Plants grow, bear fruit and reproduce “according to their kind” (Gen. 1:11,12). **Birds, sea creatures, animals and creeping things also follow this same pattern.** They reproduce “according to their kind” (Gen. 1:21,24,25). **This principle is built right into the nature of things.**

Plants and animals never get it wrong, either. You will never see a dog hatching from a bird’s egg, nor a rabbit born from an elephant (...nor the other way around!). **We can only produce what we are.** We now understand that this is programmed into every cell of our bodies. Our DNA at conception determines the physical design and structure of what we can become. Our growth can be affected by our environment and our choices, or the choices of those around us, ...but *nothing* can push us outside of the built-in possibilities contained within our chromosomes.

This is such a clear and dependable principle of life that we have learned to depend upon it. We know that if we plant wheat seeds, we will get a harvest of wheat plants. This is totally dependable. **You will never get some surprise crop coming from known seeds.** If we *want* wheat, then we have to plant wheat seeds. **No amount of wishing, or no method of fertilizing or care of the crop will change its nature.** This was known thousands of years ago. For example, in the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30), when it became apparent that a high concentration of weeds were growing up among the wheat plants that had been sown, there was no wondering or confusion if somehow the wheat seeds were producing weed plants. There were only two possibilities: either, the farmer had purchased some very poor seed, seed that was contaminated with weed seeds, ...or, as the farmer realized, “An enemy has done this!” Why? Because **a seed can only sprout, grow and produce a mature plant and fruit that is consistent with its nature. It cannot become something it is not, ...nor can it produce something that is not its inner nature to produce.**

Jesus made use of this clearly known principle of life in a word picture in Matthew 7. He said that we would be able to recognize false prophets by “their fruits”. He made mention of the very principle I have been describing, “Do people gather grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?” **He was referring to the principle of nature, where we produce what is in accordance with our inner character, ...we produce what we are. We can cover it up for a time, but eventually our true nature will become evident.** A false prophet might appear to be genuine, at first, ...but over time their real nature will become evident by the things they do and say. The apostle Paul pointed this out to Timothy, “The sins of some people are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed” (1 Tim. 5:24-25). **Our nature will become evident by our words and deeds. We might be able to hide it for a time, but eventually, the reality of our character will become apparent in the things we say and do.**

This is not new. This is predictable. It is clearly evident to us all. People are sinners by nature, which becomes evident in the sinful choices they make. If the heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt, ...and if this is the wellspring of our lives, then our thoughts, attitudes and emotions will be sinful. We can try to hide it, or control it, but eventually that inner nature will be expressed in outer action. **This is dependably true, ...frustratingly true, if we are trying to model our lives after Jesus, ...or try to keep the moral law of God, ...or try to emulate the fruit of the Spirit.**

But then, Jesus introduces a whole new idea. He said, "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, ...or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad, ...for a tree will be known by its fruit." At first, this sounds the same, but if you listen closer, there is an entirely different idea. **What? Is it possible to 'make the tree good'? That seems to be exactly what He is suggesting here!** Now, in that context, He was being harassed by the Pharisees, who were opposing Him, and speaking slanderous things about Him. Of them He said, "You brood of vipers! How can you who are evil speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart." What He said of them was that they were unhealthy, sinful people, ...people whose hearts were like Jeremiah had described, "...deceitful and corrupt..". It was not surprising that they would speak out what was in their hearts. (Again, we should all be able to relate to that reality, ...it is the fruit of a sinful nature.) But, Jesus also referred to the corresponding reality that **a good person would speak out what was in their heart, too.** We will speak and express what we are inside. **The radical thought, however, was in the statement, "...make the tree good...". If that were possible, then the fruit of that person's life would be good! Basically, what needs to happen, is to be radically transformed inside, ...to be made new!**

Isn't that exactly what the New Testament is proclaiming? Isn't that message a crucial part of the gospel?

We "have been born again, not of seed (sporos) which is perishable (transitory, corruptible, subject to decay), but imperishable (eternal, incorruptible, not subject to decay), through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23).

"If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, the old things passed away (lit., 'went off to the side', and therefore have lost their force, or became invalid); behold, new things have come to be" (2 Cor. 5:17). The word for "new" in this verse is *kainos*, which refers to something that is "of a new kind; unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of; something that did not exist before."

"Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again (lit., 'from above')" (Jn. 3:6,7).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3).

"According to His will, He brought us forth (as in 'He birthed us') by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures" (Jas. 1:18).

"He saved us-- not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy, through the washing of regeneration ('rebirth') and renewal ('renovation, complete change for the better, ...making new again, but of something that did not exist before') by the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5).

"Every one having-been-begotten out from God does not do sin, because His seed (sperma) abides in him; and he is not able to sin, because out from God he has-been-begotten" (1 Jn. 3:9).

We have been "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10).

We can now "put off your former way of life, the old person that is corrupted by deceitful desires, be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new person, which according to God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:22-24).

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up, and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (Jn. 15:1-8).

That is a list of ten passages from the NT that describe how, **in Christ, we can be born from above, created new and better than before. We are a new creation, ...something exists that was not there before..., and we can learn to live out from that new inner-life. We are born from above, and made better than ever, by the Holy Spirit, ...born of both the spore-seed and the sperm-seed of God Himself.** Even though the old Adam-nature is not gone, it has been sidelined. We don't have to live by it anymore. We can choose to put it aside and live by the new life of the Spirit. **This new life within us will not lead us to sin, ...will enable us to do good works God prepares for us, ...and will produce the fruit of Christ as we abide in Him. In Christ, we become a "good tree that bears good fruit".**