



Cyberspace Fruit Inspection

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. (Matthew 12:33)

The ability to examine the individual members of Christianity and measure them by biblical standards in our time is unprecedented. We not only reveal ourselves in far more detail to those closest to us in our constant daily text messages, emails and video calls, but on a never previously imagined scale to all manner of acquaintances and even strangers through social media and various outlets provided by the Internet. Saved and sinner alike can now easily come to an informed conclusion as to who is a spiritually "bad" vs. "good" tree. It is no longer just the popular and successful who find themselves under the public cyber-microscope, but every online believer regardless of stature. And it's not exactly looking like a thick and plentiful, healthy orchard of Christianity, is it?

*But **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

This, of course, is probably the verse which a mental knee-jerk reaction immediately brought to mind, the definitive list of individual behaviors defining biblical good fruit. To be sure, they are important and revealing, but consider the greater context in which they are presented by the verses which immediately follow:

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5:24-25)

They are not provided as just a laundry list of individual behaviors, but a collection of characteristics of a **lifestyle**. We're not merely supposed to think, "OK, I need to be loving" or "I really need to reign it in" for individual situations, but we're supposed to be actively pursuing a new life that has crucified the flesh and is devoted to Spirit-filled sanctification to such a degree that these are **all** natural by-products of our new lifestyle in Christ. (We know this because it identifies the list collectively by the singular "**fruit**" and not by the plural "fruits".) They are not slowly adopted one at a time or individually chosen as

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selections from a menu, but result **in total** from the dual concerted efforts of proactively having “*crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*”—in other words, actively rejecting the old behavior and ways of the world, and at the same time seeking to “*walk by the Spirit*”. This is the soil the “good” tree is supposed to be planted in and nourished so as to produce such fruit. And the result is that the tree produces a harvest of fruit corresponding to **all** the attributes listed in Galatians 5:22-23, not just some of them. Trees don’t produce different kind of fruit on its branches, but just one kind; all of these attributes combine into the singular product a “good” tree provides.

This is one of the aims of Christ’s beatitudes in the opening of the Sermon of the Mount, which provide a number of examples which characterize a **lifestyle** which will exude qualified, spiritual good fruit: “*the poor in spirit*”, “*those who mourn*”, “*the gentle*”, “*those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*”, “*the merciful*”, “*the pure in heart*”, and “*the peacemakers*”. (Mt. 5:3-9) Everything following in Jesus’ sermon encourages a total embrace of a lifestyle, the complete immersion in and devotion to putting His Word and ways into practice. But in addition, there are other examples of biblical fruit which Scripture offers will be present which not only expand on the list in Galatians, but the dual concerted effort to daily crucify the flesh and walk in the Spirit. One of the things they all have in common is a legitimate and lasting change in behavior deriving from a daily practicing faith in God’s Word and ways.

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, **the fruit of lips** that give thanks to His name. (Hebrews 13:15)*

One of the hallmarks of a mature faith is when no conscious thought is given to the fact that very little time or effort is spent extoling one’s self, but has become naturally consumed with pointing to Christ. Along the way in their spiritual journey, such have fully adopted John the Baptist’s position, “*He must increase, but I must decrease*”. (Jn. 3:30) And we know for sure that such behavior is a clear indicator of the spiritual condition of one’s heart because of Christ’s direct reference to it:

*And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For **from within, out of the heart** of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.” (Mark 7:20-23)*

The topics and accompanying emotions which most define the content of our speech serve to expose the true spiritual condition of our heart. Those who “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise” are proving their embrace of a lifestyle which is producing what is expected from someone crucifying the flesh and walking in the Spirit. And this evidence of speech will soon become reinforced by following through with corresponding actions:

*so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, **bearing fruit in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God; (Colossians 1:10)*

Note again that biblical spiritual fruit is not just the result of a greater underlying lifestyle for those who “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”, but doing so with the aim “to **please Him** in all respects”. In other words, no longer seeking to please one’s self or even to please others, but genuinely caring that our every step, choice and even thought is intent on not merely meeting the minimum requirements of simple obedience, but becoming a personal effort to please **Him**.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (John 14:15)

A heart in appropriate submission does not just “talk the talk”, but “walks the walk” and produces good works not in order to **get** saved, but because we **are** saved and engenders an ever-deepening love and respect for Christ personally. To the outside observer, both our speech and action point away from our self and consistently to Him. And it is then no surprise that our influence and personal testimony in this regard to others results in the very important fruit of winning souls for Christ:

*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may **obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.** (Romans 1:13)*

*The **fruit of the righteous** is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls. (Proverbs 11:30)*

It’s not just “a tree of life” where our personal salvation is concerned, but for those who witness and can attest to our own authentic fruit producing tree. We win souls not because of cleverly devised or well-worded arguments, but becoming a biblically qualified member of “the righteous”—that is, someone who is well into the process of crucifying the flesh while walking in the Spirit, someone actually putting God’s Word and ways into practice from the heart so that it authentically alters our speech and deeds. To be a

qualified “good tree” we need to become a visible, walking-talking example of that which results from seeking to please Jesus rather than our self. We have to be the recognizable difference between our former worldly self and a new creation as a result of being transformed by Christ.

*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for **the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth**), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:6-10)*

The evidence of “*the fruit of the Light*” is a lifestyle pursuit of “*all goodness and righteousness and truth*”. Not seeking **any** kind of “good”, but that which is **biblically** “good”; not seeking **any** kind of “righteousness”, but that of Christ alone; not seeking **any** kind of “truth”, but the truth of His Word alone. It is only the pursuit of such according to their biblical definitions by which we “*learn what is **pleasing** to the Lord*” and enjoy a lifestyle producing visible spiritual fruit. Such can never be confused with belonging to the world’s standard of darkness, but as those who clearly “*walk as children of Light*”. Such literally “walk the walk”.

*But now having been **freed from sin and enslaved to God**, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. (Romans 6:22)*

It needs to be noted that I did not take each of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians one at a time and then provide individual examples of chastisement for not achieving each of them. I am not making an appeal along the lines of, “Hey, everyone, let’s start ‘**acting**’ more like Christians”, but rather, let’s actually begin **living** authentic Christianity. Let’s actually reveal our true Master and conduct ourselves from a changed heart rather than just promote yet another façade of Christian values. This is not about acting “like a Christian should”, but authentically and simply like a truly saved, regenerate soul in Christ.

And if you think you can rest on the honesty of, “Well, this is just who I am and I’m not pretending to be anything I’m not”, then please, **please, please** take that sincerely to God in the most profound prayer. This is not about what you’re not, but what you’re supposed to be; there is no value in, and definitely consequences for, continuing unchanged in heart, speech and deed, and reveals something fundamentally wrong either in clinging to aspects of the flesh, walking according to something other than the Spirit, or both. And

unless you move to the Internet void of Antarctic penguin colonies, every day of your life is going to continue to be an ongoing open book to everyone, not just to family and friends, but a host of strangers as well.

Professing Christians may be involved in religious activities and pretend to be saved, but if they are honestly born again, they will reveal these tangible fruit in their daily life, their daily walk, their actual chosen and practicing lifestyle. In modern terms for our cyber life, it will be visibly reflected in our texts, emails, and various online postings. This is not an appeal to **act** the part, but to authentically follow through to become that which we each originally set out to be at the moment we realized we needed Christ as our personal Savior. It's out there in the open for every cyber viewer to experience whether we like it or not.

In Him,

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