

BEARING FRUIT?

How's your fall harvest going? Are actual results as good as they appear? Like judging contests at the fair, it's not always looks that tell the tale of quality. Jesus uses this as an example in Luke 6:43-44, as He continues His teaching about rightly judging ourselves and others.

Jesus says, *"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush."* We expect good fruit from edible plants, but nothing from a weed.

GOOD OR BAD FRUIT - Christ uses the language of distinction, judging the contrast between what's expected from disciples in His kingdom versus people in the world at large. Luke 6:20 to the end of the chapter explores the radical identity of followers of Christ, what we're to be like and not like. Just as plants are known by what they produce, so it is with your life in Christ.

Jesus' disciples are to be known for becoming like Him. The spirit of discipleship is to love our neighbors as ourselves, even our enemies. The context of His comments are the hardships of being a follower of Christ. It's a startling contrast to the world's ideas that most people follow.

WISE DISCERNMENT - "Jesus calls disciples to a lifestyle of judgment," notes RK Hughes, "discerning, subtle moral judgment. We are to exercise moral discernment, making necessary Biblical judgments." He makes this clear by giving horticultural and then human examples.

Just as the fruit of a good tree is good, so the fruit of the human heart. The fruit of being a disciple is judging with wise discernment, not being naive or condemnatory. But didn't Jesus say in verse 37, *"judge not and you will not be judged"*? Again, this refers to condemnatory judging, as though you stand in the place of God, because Christ clearly calls for the judging of discernment.

YOU GO FIRST - Christian judgments must begin with ourselves, taking logs out of our own eyes so that we can see ourselves and others clearly in light of the Scriptures. "Culture defines good and evil not by standards God provides, but by doing statistical analysis of people's behavioral patterns," observes RC Sproul, "then concluding what is normal, human, and therefore good." This is a false morality because it makes human behavior the standard.

"If one cannot make moral judgments, there can be no morality," relates RK Hughes. "Rather, Jesus prohibits judgmentalism." Here are its characteristics: "Blind" to your own sins but quick to see fault in others. "Self-righteous" and self-superior, as though you are called to straighten out others. "Self-exculpating" as though condemning others somehow excuses you.

"Intrinsically hypocritical" overlooks how you tend to do what you condemn in others. "Trivializing" sins you are likely to commit while majoring on inconsequential things in others. "Merciless" as you read evil into innocent actions and impugn the motives of others (which you can't know).

JUDGMENTALISM - These aspects of being judgmental "are the opposite of a magnanimous big-souled follower of Christ," says Hughes, "who is continually judging but is perpetually non-judgmental." Discernment is not condemnatory, and "a person of judgmentalism is certainly not a true disciple of Christ, and may not be Christian at all," adds Hughes.

The parallel passage in Matthew 7:14-20 applies this good-bad fruit distinction to false teachers, and says trees that bear bad fruit will be cut down for firewood. Clearly Jesus' disciples must rightly judge the words and the lives around them to discern God's way. Jesus says you will know wolves in sheep's clothing because of their bad fruit. We must be discerning.

SCRIPTURAL STANDARD - On what do we base discernment? We test all things against the written-down standard of the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the Holy Bible. As God says in Colossians 2:6-8, *"as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established, as you were taught... See to it no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human traditions, and not according to Christ."*

Pharisees and false teachers seek to set their own standard, and many people want to control things according to their personal priorities, not God's. They may even see themselves as God's special agents, sent to straighten things out. But Jesus' disciples are sent by Him, to be like Him, in all His grace and truth. So be careful how you live and be careful what you say! □