

GOOD YIELD?

When a combine harvests corn, the operator doesn't expect to get apples or pumpkins, because he's working in a cornfield. In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus uses horticultural and human examples as He teaches about a disciple's lifestyle of judging, not condemnatory but discerning.

Just as we judge the fruit of a plant as good or bad, so we discern the human heart. We see the fruit of a life in both words and deeds. We look at ourselves before we tackle others.

YOUR TONGUE - gives a taste of what's in your heart. In Luke 6:45 Jesus says, "*The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*" Uh-oh.

They put lids on coffee cups, because what's inside spills out when jostled. When you get bumped, how does your tongue reveal what's in your heart? "Every tree is known by its fruit. And a man's life shows the state of his heart, through his mouth," observes JC Ryle. "Conduct is the grand test of character, and words are one symptom of the condition of the heart."

INSIDE OUT - in Matthew 15:18, Jesus says, "*What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*" In Matthew 12:33-37 He says, "*a tree is known by its fruit. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*" Read it again.

That's a frightening prospect for those who expect to earn their way to heaven. Every thought, word, and deed. "The inner disposition determines the kind of fruit that comes from one's life," notes RK Hughes. "One can attempt an external veneer of goodness, but the truth will become known through one's words and deeds." What a caution to our propensity to condemn others.

DISCERNMENT - How can we judge with discernment rather than condemnation? Hughes offers these thoughtful considerations: "Humbly" by being aware of and owning your own sinfulness and frailty. "Prayerfully" by first confessing your own sins, and praying for those you judge. "Biblically" according to the revelation and principles of God's written Word. "Lovingly" because judgmentalism is rooted in ill will, but discerning judgment is an act of love.

"Mercifully" by not giving what the other deserves, but following the very character of God.

"Exemplarily" by being an example of Jesus in all that you say, think, do and convey to others.

"Privately" as you aim to resolve conflict and restore relationship between yourself and others.

"Gently" as you constructively be part of the solution yourself, giving Christ's agape love, being mindful of God's righteous judgment of your every thought, word, and deed.

GOOD FRUIT - The good fruit of Christ in your life contrasts with the bad fruit of the world. James 1:26 says "*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, that person's religion is worthless.*" James 3 speaks of "*the blazing power of the tongue: with it we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse people made in the likeness of God. These ought not to be so! But where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and evil. But wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*"

James continues, "*And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*"

How can we practice these truths? "Repentance for our own sins is prerequisite to correcting others," notes RC Sproul, "because it is the disposition of our hearts that needs attention, not external or superficial things." You yield the fruit of the Spirit by the power of the Holy Spirit.

BE TRANSFORMED - Fruit does not corrupt itself. Corrupt fruit comes from the corrupt core of a bad tree, observes Sproul. If we see bad fruit in our lives, what can we do? Seek God with all your heart, because you do not have the ability in yourself to change your nature. Only God can do that. And His promise is that all those in Christ, who receive Him as Lord and Savior, will become more and more like Him as they trust and obey His Word of truth and grace.

How? The regeneration of the Holy Spirit produces repentance and faith. And the Holy Spirit empowers the new spiritual life of Christ to be lived out through you, as you trust and obey the Scriptures (2Timothy 3:14-17). All by His power at work within you. Trust and obey! ☐