

## A Tree and Its Fruit

Some passages have a way of putting me in my place. They sit me back and make me do a double take at my own life. **Matthew 12:33** is one of those passages.

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 (ESV).

This goes along with Jesus' teaching about false prophets in **Matthew 7:17-20**.

So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits (ESV).

How am I doing in the Lord? These passages say I simply need to look at the fruit being borne in my life. What do I need to look for? **Galatians 5:22-23** explains.

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

Is this what I see in my life? Is it increasing in my life? Healthy trees bear this fruit. If I'm not bearing this fruit, I may be going to church every Sunday, but I'm not a healthy tree.

But please notice that this is the fruit of the Spirit. It is not the fruit of my own spiritual awesomeness. Thus, when I see this fruit lacking in my life, my response must not be, "Looks like I have to work on this fruit." My response should also not be, "Well, I've tried really hard to bear this fruit; guess I'm just not good enough. Might as well give up." Rather, my response needs to be, "I need to work on surrendering to the Spirit."

As the text says, "...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (**Galatians 5:16**, ESV). But the only way to walk by the Spirit is to crucify the flesh: "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (**Galatians 5:24**, ESV). Thus, the question is not how we can perform more of the fruit of the Spirit. The question is what are we following: our flesh or the Spirit? When we sow to the flesh, we reap destruction. Sowing to the flesh produces diseased trees and diseased fruit. When we sow to the Spirit, we reap life eternal. Sowing to the Spirit produces healthy trees and good fruit (cf. **Galatians 6:7-8**).

So, when I see that love or joy is not growing in my life, my response must not be, "Well, guess I need to work harder at love and joy." If that is my approach, I'll never really be more loving and joyful. Rather, my response must be, "Well, guess I need to cut off a little more of my flesh, and get a little more into the Spirit. He'll bear the fruit in me if I follow His lead."

What kind of fruit are you bearing?

--Edwin L. Crozier