

THE INTERCONTINENTAL CHURCH OF GOD

SPECIFIC BIBLE STUDIES - MATTHEW 7:15-20 GOOD AND EVIL TREES

SUBJECT: Matthew 7:15-20 Good and Evil Trees

QUESTIONS: Please explain the elements of these trees. How do these elements apply to determining the fruits of ministers and others? What is the meaning of "fruits" in these scriptures?

ANSWER:

Matt 7:15-20

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

KJV

Matthew 7:16

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

[Ye shall know them by their fruits] The Saviour gives the proper test of their character. People do not judge of a tree by its leaves, or bark, or flowers, but by the fruit which it bears. The flowers may be beautiful and fragrant, the foliage thick and green; but these are merely ornamental. It is the "fruit" that is of chief service to man; and he forms his opinion of the nature and value of the tree by that fruit. So of pretensions to religion. The profession may be fair; but the "conduct"-the fruit-is to determine the nature of the principles.

Matthew 7:17

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

[A corrupt tree] The word "corrupt" here does not signify, as our translation would seem to indicate, that the tree "had been" good, but had become "vitiating;" but that it was a tree of a useless character, of a nature that produced nothing beneficial.

(from Barnes' Notes)

Matthew 7:16

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

[Ye shall know them by their fruits.] Fruits, in the Scripture and Jewish phraseology, are taken for works of any kind. "A man's works," says one, "are the tongue of his heart, and tell honestly whether he is inwardly corrupt or pure." By these works you may distinguish (epignoosesthe (NT:1921)) these ravenous wolves from true shepherds. The judgment formed of a man by his general conduct is a safe one: if the judgment be not favorable to the person, that is his fault, as you have your opinion of him from his works, i.e. the confession of his own heart.

Matthew 7:17

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

[So every good tree] As the thorn can only produce thorns, not grapes; and the thistle, not figs, but prickles; so an unregenerate heart will produce fruits of degeneracy. As we perfectly know that a good tree will not produce bad fruit, and the bad tree will not, cannot produce good fruit, so we know that the profession of godliness, while the life

is ungodly, is imposture, hypocrisy, and deceit. A man cannot be a saint and a sinner at the same time. Let us remember, that as the good tree means a good heart, and the good fruit, a holy life, and that every heart is naturally vicious; so there is none but God who can pluck up the vicious tree, create a good heart, plant, cultivate, water, and make it continually fruitful in righteousness and true holiness.

Matthew 7:18

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

[A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit] Love to God and man is the root of the good tree; and from this principle all its fruit is found. To teach, as some have done, that a state of salvation may be consistent with the greatest crimes (such as murder and adultery in David), or that the righteous necessarily sin in all their best works, is really to make the good tree bring forth bad fruit, and to give the lie to the Author of eternal truth.

Matthew 7:19

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

[Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit] What a terrible sentence is this against Christless pastors, and Christless hearers! Every tree that produceth not good fruit, *ekkoptetai* (NT:1581), is to be now cut down; the act of excision is now taking place: the curse of the Lord is even now on the head and the heart of every false teacher and impenitent hearer.

Matthew 7:20

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

[Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.] This truth is often repeated, because our eternal interests depend so much upon it. Not to have good fruit is to have evil: there can be no innocent sterility in the invisible tree of the heart. He that brings forth no fruit, and he that brings forth bad fruit, are both only fit for the fire.

(from Adam Clarke's Commentary)

Matthew 7:15-20

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Those who enter upon the narrow way must beware of false prophets, who claim to guide believers but really practice deception. Sheep's clothing is not to be regarded as prophets' grab, but is an evident contrast to vicious wolves. God's people in all ages have needed to beware of deceptive leaders (Deut 13:1; Acts 20:29; 1 John 4:1; Rev 13:11-14). By their fruits. The doctrines produced by these false prophets, rather than the works they perform, since outward appearances may not cause suspicion. The test of the prophet is his conformity to Scripture (1 Cor 14:37; Deut 13:1-5). Corrupt tree. One that is decayed, worthless, and unusable. The worthlessness of such a tree calls for its swift removal from the orchard lest it infect the others

(from The Wycliffe Bible Commentary)

These last two quoted verses help to make Matthew 7 clear:

1 Cor 14:37

37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

KJV

Deut 13:1-5

13:1 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,

2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;

3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.

5 And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of

bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

KJV

Note: The fruit of the trees is equal to the shepherd adhering to the Word of God and the doctrines of the church. Notice the commentary for Deut 13:1-5

Deuteronomy 13:1

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,

The admonition of the closing verse of the last chapter introduces a new series of warnings intended to serve as a further safeguard against violation of these duties. The true modes and forms of worship have been laid down: the next step is to legislate against the authors and abettors of false ones.

Verse 1. [A prophet, or a dreamer of dreams] Compare Num 12:6. The "prophet" received his revelations by vision or direct oral communication (Num 24:16; 2 Sam 7:4; 2 Cor 12:2); "the dreamer of dreams" through the medium of a dream (1 Kings 3:5; Matt 2:13).

Deuteronomy 13:2

And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; The Lord had said, "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me." A prophet is here supposed who invites the people "to go after other gods." To such a one no credit is under any circumstances to be given, even should he show signs and wonders to authenticate his doctrine. The standing rule of faith and practice had been laid down once for all-that the people were to hold fast. The prophet who propounded another rule could only be an impostor. A different case is considered in Deut 18:18, etc.

Deuteronomy 13:5

And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

The context and parallel passages (compare Deut 17:7; Lev 20:2) indicate that there was to be a regular judicial procedure, and that the manner of the execution was to be by stoning. In this the community was to take its part in order to show its horror at the crime, and to clear itself of complicity therein.

(from Barnes' Notes)

Note: Strong admonition against those who would seek to turn others from the established truth and doctrine of God. This truth and doctrine are the key elements in the fruit being spoken of in Matthew 7. This is what you look for. The image of not just looking at the leaves, bark or flowers is effective. Often, some do just that and confuse themselves and others. We cannot judge shepherds or others by outward appearances. The fruit is the only sure test.

Matt 7:17

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

[A corrupt tree] The word "corrupt" here does not signify, as our translation would seem to indicate, that the tree "had been" good, but had become "vitiating;" but that it was a tree of a useless character, of a nature that produced nothing beneficial.

(from Barnes' Notes)

Matt 7:17

- 3779 Even so
- 3956 every
- 18 good
- 1186 tree
- 4160 bringeth forth
- 2570 good

- 2590 fruit;
- 1161 but
- 1186 a
- 4550 corrupt
- 1186 tree
- 4160 bringeth forth
- 4190 evil
- 2590 fruit.

(Interlinear Transliterated Bible) **NT:18---good (good tree)**
 agathos (ag-ath-os'); a primary word; "good" (in any sense, often as noun):

KJV - benefit, good (-s, things), well. Compare NT:2570.

NT:2570---good (good fruit)

kalos (kal-os'); of uncertain affinity; properly, beautiful, but chiefly (figuratively) good (literally or morally), i.e. valuable or virtuous (for appearance or use, and thus distinguished from NT:18, which is properly intrinsic):

KJV - X better, fair, good (-ly), honest, meet, well, worthy.

NT:4550---corrupt

sapros (sap-ros'); from NT:4595; rotten, i.e. worthless (literally or morally):

KJV - bad, corrupt. Compare NT:4190.

NT:4190---evil

poneros (pon-ay-ros'); from a derivative of NT:4192; hurtful, i.e. evil (properly, in effect or influence, and thus differing from NT:2556, which refers rather to essential character, as well as from NT:4550, which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figuratively, calamitous; also (passively) ill, i.e. diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. derelict, vicious, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners:

KJV - bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also NT:4191.

(Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary.)

So a good, beneficial tree brings forth good, valuable, virtuous fruit. A corrupt, rotten, worthless, bad tree brings forth hurtful, calamitous, diseased, vicious fruit rot with mischief, malice, sinful, fruit.

ASSOCIATED VERSES TO THE KEY VERSE: MATTHEW 7:17

1) Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit

Psalms 1:3

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Psalms 92:13-14

13 Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.

14 They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;

Isaiah 5:3-5

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.

4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?

5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:

Isaiah 61:3

3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Jeremiah 11:19

19 But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered.

Jeremiah 17:8

8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Luke 13:6-9

6 He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

Galatians 5:22-24

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

Ephesians 5:9

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

Philippians 1:11

11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:10

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

James 3:17-18

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

2) but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.**Matthew 12:33-35**

33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Jude 12

12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

3) Additional verses related to this verse:

Proverbs 10:16

16 The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.

1 Timothy 6:5

5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

James 2:18

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.