

Good Fruit from a Good heart
Luke 6:43-45
10-5-2025

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” (Luke 6:43–45)

During a trial in a small town, the primary witness was a proper, well dressed, elderly lady. She was poised, well spoken, and polite as she was sworn in with her hand on the Bible and the standard admonition to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help her God.

The prosecuting attorney approached the woman and asked, “Mrs. Jones, do you know me?”

She responded, “Why yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I’ve known you since you were a young boy and frankly, you’ve been a big disappointment to me. You lie, cheat on your wife, manipulate people and talk badly about them behind their backs. You think you are a hot shot rising star when you haven’t the sense to realize you will never amount to anything more than a two-bit, paper pushing shyster. Yes, I know you quite well.”

The lawyer was stunned into silence. He was so embarrassed by what she said that he couldn’t even think for a few minutes. Then he slowly backed away, afraid to even look at the faces of the judge and jurors, not to mention the court reporter who documented every word she had said.

Finally, not knowing what else to do, he then pointed across the room and asked, “Mrs. Jones, do you know the defense attorney?”

She again replied, “Why yes, I do. I’ve known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster also. He’s lazy, bigoted, and has a bad drinking problem. The man can’t build or keep a normal relationship with anyone, and his law practice is

one of the worst in the entire state. Not to mention he cheated on his wife with three different women. Yes, I know him.”

The defense attorney almost fainted and was seen slipping downward in his chair, looking at the floor like he wanted to crawl under the table. Laughter mixed with gasps filled the courtroom and it was on the verge of chaos.

The judge then pounded his gavel and brought the courtroom to silence. He then called both attorneys to the bench and in a very quiet voice only they could hear, said, “If either of you morons asks her if she knows me, you’re going to jail.

Sometimes, despite what is said, we really don’t want the truth to come out do we?

Half truths and even outright lies can be so much easier to bear.

It can be virtually impossible sometimes to find out what some people really think or believe.

Instead say what we think people want to hear, what we think we should say, or what may help us save face.

Whether internationally, nationally, or locally, each news cycle seems to only further confirm that there is a tremendous crisis of character and integrity in the world today which can be overwhelming.

This came out so clearly a number of years ago in book titled, The Day America told the Truth.

It was based on extensive groundbreaking research conducted by James Patterson and Peter Kim.

The authors were aware of all the surveys coming out measuring public opinion and perceptions.

But they wondered if people were answering these surveys based on what they really thought or if they were answering according to how they thought they should answer.

So they set up their survey in such a way that it would guarantee all the respondents total anonymity.

There was no way anyone would ever be able to find out what they had said. In a society which considers itself moral and ethical, their findings were quite startling.

Despite what most will say in public, some of the things they found were:

- that only 13% of Americans really believe the 10 Commandments are still binding today.
- 91% admitted to lying regularly, including 86% admitted to lying to their parents and 75% to their friends.
- When completely anonymous, a majority of workers admitted to goofing off at work an average of 7 hours, almost 1 whole day, per week.
- Half admitted to calling in sick when they are fine.
- And when asked what they would be willing to do for \$10 million dollars, 25% said they would be willing to abandon their families, 23% said they would be willing to become a prostitute for a week, and 7% admitted they would be willing to murder a stranger for \$10 million.

Something else they found that was interesting was that if only men were surveyed, the numbers would have all been much worse. Women, they said, behave much better ethically than men. On every question, women in the workplace held a higher moral standard than men did. Less than half as many women as men believed that the only way to get ahead is to cheat. They were much less willing to compromise their values to succeed, and more willing to quit their jobs as a matter of principle if they learned that their employer was engaging in illegal activity. And if valuable company property was stolen, six times out of seven the thief would be a man.

The findings reported in the Day America Told the Truth were certainly shocking to many, but they weren't really all that new.

Around the same time as this, a Gallup survey of American business executives commissioned by the Wall Street Journal found:

80% confessed to driving while drunk.

78% admitted using company property for personal use.

35% cheated on their taxes

And 75% admitted to stealing company property.

All findings at much higher rates than the average population.

It led Gallup to conclude that a resident of Beverly Hills is more likely to have used illegal drugs, committed a crime, or had extramarital affairs than an impoverished resident of the South Bronx.

And there was also a study put out by Psychology Today which found that more people say they have cheated on their spouses than on their taxes or expense accounts at work. And while 89% agreed that it would be immoral to scratch another person's car in the parking lot then drive away without leaving a note, yet nearly half said that they would.

Examples abound of coaches, politicians, business executives, job applicants, journalists and academics, even Pulitzer Prize winners, committing plagiarism and covering it up.

These types of things reveal an alarming crisis of integrity and character in America

But then, at least on one level, should it really surprise us if lost people act lost?

Listen again to Jesus words, ““No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” (Luke 6:43–45)

What makes it even more disturbing is that it's not just society at large but within the church as well. In their book, *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp*, authors Doug Sherman and William Hendricks cite findings that show there is very little difference between the ethical practices of the religious and non-religious

Christians, they say, are just about as likely to falsify their tax returns, commit plagiarism, bribe to obtain a building permit, ignore construction

specs, commit phone theft, exaggerate a product, tell people what they want to hear, and selectively obey laws.

Is the gospel really reaching beyond people's lips and into their hearts to transform their lives and become the good tree which bears good fruit which Jesus spoke about.

For despite all the talk about it, there seem to be an alarming crisis of character and integrity today.

It's like Yale law professor Stephan Carter wrote in his book, Integrity, integrity is like the weather: Everybody talks about it, but nobody knows what to do about it.

Websters dictionary defines integrity as the quality or state of being complete or undivided.

In other words what you see or hear on the outside is just as true on the inside
Integrity is when our words and our actions match up with our interior life
Are we whole or are living divided lives?

While people may talk about it and lament over it, only God can really do anything about it

Only He can change hearts and make us whole and complete, good trees that bear good fruit for it is fruit of His Spirit that is needed.

Fruit that is not the result of our work, but a product of who we really are, and only He can make the tree good

As He said in Ezekiel 11:19, I will give my people an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them).

only Jesus and the gospel are the power of God for the salvation of all who believe

Salvation is not just about forgiveness but forgiveness is a product of salvation
Nor is salvation primarily about going to heaven, for that too is a product not a work of salvation that we earn.

Salvation and the Christian life are fundamentally about change, transformation, becoming good trees that bear good fruit

Fruit which is the natural product of a healthy and faithful life

- **Fruit which in Galatians 5:22-23 Paul defines as things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**
- **in Ephesians 5:9 he adds to the list; goodness, righteousness and truth or honesty**
- **and James 3:17 connects good fruit with such things as purity, peace-loving, considerate, what the NIV interprets as submissive actually refers to a willingness to listen, merciful and sincere**

how great our need for such good fruit instead of all the hatred and acrimony filling social media and the airwaves and is too often found in the church of Jesus as well

We use words like discipleship, spiritual growth, maturity to refer to this process of becoming and these words are all about transformation.

Becoming people of integrity where what the world sees in our words and actions is just what Jesus has made us in our hearts, whole and complete and one.

We become people who reflect the glory of God who lives in and through us.

A very important 2nd century church leader named Irenaeus pointed out that the glory of God is a person who is fully alive, which can only happen by reflecting his character and nature

For it is only Christ in us which is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27)

Being a follower of Jesus is not just about behavior modification

or to borrow a term from Dallas Willard, it's not primarily about sin avoidance, but inner transformation and character formation

Becoming the type of people who naturally bring up the good things which are stored up in our hearts where Christ dwells

As Jesus said in Matthew 12:33 *““Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.”*

Transformation is not a secondary issue but central to the gospel, what type of people are we becoming and what are we being recognized for?
God saves us for his kingdom and his glory not our own

Consider just a few of the statements from the Bible which make this point

- ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)***
- ***“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)***
- ***“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)***
- ***“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” (Romans 8:29)***
- ***“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.” (Galatians 6:15)***
- ***“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22–24)***
- ***“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” (Colossians 3:9–10)***

Jesus said our words and our actions are merely a reflection of our hearts and who we truly are on the inside

Twice in Matthew 7 Jesus said We will be recognized by the fruit we bear not the words we say. For he declared that on judgement day many will use the right

words and say Lord, Lord, did we not do many things in your name and he will declare I never knew you,

This is where so much of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders came from

They wanted to control people's behavior, Jesus wants to change our hearts

There always seems to be this tension between those who want to define the spiritual life by trying to control behavior and sin, versus Jesus who seeks to transform our lives and make us into the type of people who reflect God's heart and character and so naturally behave well who out of the overflow or abundance of their hearts, their mouths speak

What type of tree we are will be seen by what type of fruit, good or bad, we are producing

For a tree will be known by its fruit

Billy Graham once said, when wealth is lost, nothing is lost. When health is lost, something is lost. When character is lost, all is lost.

And this is what the Christian life is truly all about, what type of people we are becoming, people of integrity and character so that who and what the world sees on the outside is indeed who and what we are on the inside.

In his poem on integrity, Edgar Guest wrote:

**I have to live with myself, and so I want to be fit for myself to know.
I want to be able, as days go by, always to look myself straight in the eye.
I don't want to stand with the setting sun, and hate myself for the things I
have done.
I don't want to keep on a closet shelf, a lot of secrets about myself.
And fool myself as I come and go, into thinking that nobody else will
know.
The kind of man that I really am, I don't want to dress up myself in sham.
I want to go out with my head erect; I want to deserve all men's respect.
But here is the struggle for fame and self, I want to be able to like myself.**

I don't want to look at myself and know, That I'm bluster, and bluff, and empty show.

I can never hide myself from me, I see what others may never see.

I know what others may never know, I can never fool myself and so,

Whatever happens I want to be, self-respecting and conscious free.