

By Their Fruit

Fruit and Frustration

One of the most frustrating things for me is to deal with a person whose words are clearly in conflict with their actions. Imagine listening to a man telling you how much he loves his wife while he is beating her.

I know we all deal with this in many ways. And yet, as a society, we still fall for the trap of spending too much time listening to people's words and too little time reflecting on how they really act. Many (I would say "most", but not all) politicians are a really good example of this. Based on poll results and determining what will get them the most votes they are constantly "refining" (a.k.a. changing) their message in order to appeal to the largest audience. It becomes a contest to determine who can "spin" the best message and get elected. And yet, time after time, it is clear that their words frequently don't line up with their past actions and even their current lives. We even hear debates about whether character really matters for politicians. After all, it's all about what they can get done while in office that truly counts, right? **Seriously**?!!! Are we really having debates about whether character really matters or not? That this question is even asked is indicative of the moral depravity of our society.

A Life Example

Back in the days when I had horses, I went to a local Horse Expo. I was always looking for ways to improve my horsemanship. I also understood that much of the horse world is a business; it's all about money. The horses' benefit is typically secondary to the human's benefit. I tried my best to ignore that. It's like panning for gold – I look for the nuggets and throw out the mud.

One of the events was a colt starting competition. I have started several horses and have learned much about using true natural horsemanship methods to interact with horses. I am as interested in doing what's good for the horse as I am in what's good for me. So, I wanted to see some other trainers working with brand new, unstarted horses to see if I could learn anything that would be helpful to me.

Having said that, I know that competition is not a Kingdom value. As soon as people start comparing themselves to others and competing with others, the worst aspects of human nature are enticed to the surface. So, even though I knew I was going to see some trainers doing things that were more for their own good (trying to win the competition) than for the horses' good, I was willing to endure that part of the experience in order to try to improve my own skills.

I'm pleased to report that 6 out of the 8 trainers seemed to be truly interested in what was good for the horse. All 8 of the trainers were mic'ed at various times and would explain what they were doing as they worked with their horse. All 8 of them told us that they were using "natural horsemanship" methods and that what they were doing was best for the horse. However, anyone with any rudimentary knowledge of horses could tell you that, for two of the trainers, their words didn't match their actions. One trainer was so bad that he was getting boo's from the audience. I was so angry, I felt like going down to the round pen, taking the stick out of the trainer's hands and start hitting **him** with it. But, I knew it wouldn't do any good (in addition to getting me into trouble).

You see, people are great at lying to themselves. They can convince themselves they are doing the right thing and talk very eloquently about it while their actions are saying otherwise. There are actually men who say they love their wives while beating them.

What's Your Point?

"OK," you say, "these are pretty drastic examples. What's your point?" My point is that this delusional behavior is very common and most people are engaged in it, even though they don't recognize it. Christ told us to be aware of this:

By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree can't produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:16-20)

But here's the specific context that we need to be aware of. Christ was talking about people who claimed to be following him. Here's what he said next:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.' (Matthew 7:21-23)

Every one of us (myself included) must constantly be on guard against self delusion. It is all too easy to behave like **we want** and then claim that we are following Christ. Humans are very good at that kind of self-delusion.

Christ announced that there are few who would actually find eternal life (Matt 7:13,14). There are around 2 billion people in the world today who claim to be Christians. Jesus said that **claiming** to follow him doesn't mean anything. Our actions (fruit) are the proof. I wonder how many people, out of 2 billion, are actually in the "few" category that Christ talked about.

In order to look at the fruit (in ourselves or in others) we have to have the right standard about what “good fruit” looks like. The only place to turn to for that standard is to Christ himself. From the passage we looked at above we know that “good fruit” isn’t identified by prophesying or miracles or mighty works. We should not look to people who are known for these things. We should only look to Christ as our standard.

Christ said:

The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life. (John 6:63)

He is the only one we should be listening to and whose life we should be trying to emulate.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from the Bible come from the World English Bible translation (<https://worldenglishbible.org>).