

## GOOD MAN, GOOD FRUIT

**Matthew 12:33–37 (1995 NASB95) — 33** “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. **34** You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. **35** The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. **36** But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. **37** For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

**INTRODUCTION.** ..... THE SABBATH CONTROVERSY

Matthew 12:1-14. .... THE SON OF MAN IS LORD OF THE  
SABBATH. Matthew 12:8. .... CONSPIRING TO DESTROY JESUS.  
Matthew 12:14. .... JESUS FULFILLS OLD TESTAMENT  
SCRIPTURE; HE IS THE MESSIAH. Matthew 12:15-21.  
..... ACCUSATION AGAINST JESUS: HE IS EMPOWERED BY  
SATAN. Matthew 12:24. .... BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY  
SPIRIT IS UNFORGIVABLE. Matthew 12:31-32.

## THE PRINCIPLE

Jesus begins by demanding consistency from the Pharisees.

**Matthew 12:33 (1995 NASB95) — 33** “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.”

Good trees produce good fruit; bad trees produce bad fruit. That’s easy enough to understand.

“Good” here does not mean pleasing or desirable; it means morally good, objectively good, something that is actually beneficial. Likewise, “bad” doesn’t simply mean something we don’t prefer – apples are good, kale is bad – but rotten, worthless, unwholesome, foul. Of course, Jesus is not talking about trees and fruit, but people and their lives. That which is good is good in God’s sight, and has a godly effect. That which is bad is evil in God’s sight, and has a corrupting, harmful effect.

## THE GOOD MAN

It should be clear to us that Jesus is not talking about different kinds of people, but Himself and the Pharisees, and indeed, the rest of humanity. Jesus alone is the good man; the rest of mankind is evil.

### **Jesus’ character is good, and therefore His WORKS are good.**

- Jesus multiplied bread and fish, and fed thousands.
- He calmed a storm at sea, not to save the lives of His disciples – He was not going to die at sea, and so they would be preserved regardless of the storm – but as an act of kindness toward those frightened men.
- He cast out demons, which like their master came only to “steal, kill, and destroy.” (John 10:10).
- Jesus healed those with obvious afflictions – the blind, deaf, crippled, leprous – as well as those with hidden afflictions – the woman with the hemorrhage, undoubtedly people with cancers and other internal diseases.
- Jesus even raised the dead, rescuing people from the grave, and restoring them to their families.

**And of course, Jesus' character is good, and therefore His WORDS are good.**

- They are words of eternal life (John 6:68).
- They are words that give this life a life a solid foundation, and deliverance from the judgment to come (Matthew 7:24-25).
- They are words of power, by which He did many of His miracles (see John 8:8, 13).
- They are eternal words (Matthew 24:35).
- They were gracious words (Luke 4:22),
- blessing words (Luke 11:28),
- greater words than any others ever spoken (John 5:46-47),
- words that free us from death (John 8:51),
- words that cleanse from sin and corruption (John 15:3).

## **THE EVIL MAN**

Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, so we'll focus on them. Their character was evil, and therefore their works and their words were evil.

Listen to what Jesus says to them:

**Matthew 12:34 (1995 NASB95) — 34** “You brood of vipers, how can YOU, being EVIL, speak what is EVIL? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”

The holy Son of God knew these men inside and out. He knew every word they spoke, every act they carried out, and every thought they entertained. And He

rightly, with surgical precision, declared them to be evil. In spite of that, they dared to stand in judgment on Him, the holy, sinless, pure, perfect Son of God, God in human flesh. No man has ever beheld the face of God, but Jesus is eternally in face to face relationship with God the Father.

Their evil is most clearly seen in their opposition to the beloved Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, the Anointed One.

- They criticized Him for eating with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:11).
- They accused Him of working by the power of Satan (Matthew 9:34).
- They put Him in a position to heal on the Sabbath, and then when He did accused Him of breaking the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10).
- They repeatedly conspired together on how best to destroy Jesus (Matthew 12:14; 22:15).
- They sinfully demanded a sign of His authority, while having no intention of actually believing any such sign (Matthew 12:38).
- They repeatedly accused Jesus and His disciples of breaking the Law (Matthew 15:2).
- They put Jesus to the test, trying to trip Him up so they would have grounds to publicly denounce Him (Matthew 16:1; 19:3).
- They eventually forced their will upon the people, and managed to have Jesus executed by the Romans.

But their evil is also seen in their dealings and attitudes toward people.

They denied any sort of compassion to sinners.

They boasted in their own superiority to others (Luke 18:11).

They burdened the people of Israel with their traditions (Matthew 23:4).

They sought their own fame and glory (Matthew 23:5-7).

They actively kept people away from the true Kingdom of God (Matthew 23:13).

They worked hard to appear righteous, but practiced all sorts of sin and injustice (Matthew 23:23).

They were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matthew 23:28).

They set up one woman to be caught in the act of adultery, and then dragged her – and not the man – before Jesus, demanding that He implement the death penalty (John 8).

## **DON'T PICK UP STONES JUST YET**

Can any of us say that we, in and of ourselves, in and of our own fallen nature, are any better than the Pharisees?

Can anyone here say that if **THEY** had been there in Israel, that **THEY** would have trusted Jesus fully? Even the faithful disciples were not better than the Pharisees. Those men did not choose Jesus, Jesus says; He chose them (John 15:16). And He didn't choose them because they were the best of the best of the best, but because the Father gave those men to Him (John 17:6).

If we believe that **WE** are better than the **PHARISEES**, that **WE** would never have rejected Jesus, that **WE** would have been faithful, we only prove that we ourselves **ARE** Pharisees! Listen to what Jesus says:

**Matthew 12:34 (1995 NASB95)** — ... the mouth speaks out of that which fills the

heart.

We speak and act according to our nature, and our natures as falling men and women is no different than anyone else's, including the Pharisees.

## THE HEART OF THE ISSUE IS THE HEART

**Matthew 12:35 (1995 NASB95) — 35** “The good man brings out of his good treasure [his heart, his nature] what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure [his heart, his nature] what is evil.”

Is MY nature better than that of the Pharisees? Is YOURS?

We see that Jesus speaks in absolutes. A good man has a good nature and lives a life of good. An evil man has an evil nature and lives a life of evil. This is black and white. There are no shades of gray. There is no yin-yang to this, with each person having a mixture of good and evil. The question is not whether your good outweighs your bad.

From our point of view, of course, everyone has good and bad. The worst criminal in the world might love his mother and be nice to his dogs. Even the worst person on earth was created in the image of God, and has some positive attribute. That's how we measure things.

But our God is holy, holy, holy. Jesus Christ is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, [and therefore] exalted above the heavens. (Hebrews 7:26). The Lord speaks in absolutes. The Bible says,

**James 2:10 (1995 NASB95) — 10** For whoever **keeps the whole Law** and yet **stumbles in one point**, he has become **guilty of all [the Law]**.

Paul writes,

**Galatians 5:3 (1995 NASB95) — 3** And I testify again to every man who **receives circumcision** [one small part of the Law, an act that is only carried out one time], that he is under obligation to keep **the whole Law**.

The Lord will not count up our good and bad, and judge us based on the outcome. He will not weigh our good and bad on scales, and judge us on the result. The person who has committed just one sin in their lifetime is under the penalty of God's eternal judgment.

Why? Because of what God commands and expects of humanity. Jesus came to show us what God is like; He also came to show us what we should have been like. He is, as we just saw, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners. That is what Adam was before his sin. That is what mankind should be like now.

## THE ABSOLUTE NATURE OF JUDGMENT

**Matthew 12:36–37 (1995 NASB95) — 36** “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. **37** For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

If the Pharisees had had any spiritual sense or wisdom, they would have fallen to the ground in terror when Jesus spoke these words. Every *careless* word will be accounted for. Forget the deliberate insults, forget the nastiness we do, forget the way we accuse people in the secrecy of our hearts, thinking no one knows. Every

*careless* word, every *idle* word, will fall under the judgment of God. That judgment will be perfect and exact and objective. God's judgment is not arbitrary, or impulsive, or emotional. No one will be judged because they hurt God's feelings.

Matthew 25 describes the judgment seat of Christ. It says that He will separate humanity into two groups. Those He calls "sheep" will be placed on His right. Those He calls "goats" will be placed on the left. That separation is not the judgment; it shows the basis for judgment. People will arrive at the judgment seat of Christ as either sheep or goats, as either children of God or children of wrath.

Jesus will say to the sheep, the people of God,

**Matthew 25:34 (1995 NASB95) — 34** Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Jesus will say to the goats, the wicked who are under God's judgment,

**Matthew 25:41 (1995 NASB95) — 41** Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.

Here's the thing. No human being is born a sheep, children of God by nature. We are all born goats, born as rebels and spiritual criminals, children of wrath by nature (Ephesians 2:3). We enter heaven as goats, as fallen human beings. But neither can we change ourselves:

**Jeremiah 13:23 (1995 NASB95) — 23** "Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil."

Sinners must be born again as sheep, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, adopted



into the family of God as His children, through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work.

God planned all along to save sinners. Jesus says that the sheep inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. But hell was never God's original intention for mankind. Hell was created for the devil and his angels. The reality that men and women will be condemned there only means that they have been loyal to Satan, and follow him in his rebellion.

Where there is no hope for Satan and his demons, there is hope for sinners.

## **ANSWERING OBJECTIONS**

People often object to God's judgment.

They'll say, "Many non-Christians are better people than Christians!" That's true, no question. This objection assumes that we can see someone's heart; we can't. It also assumes that God will judge like we do; He doesn't. But God doesn't judge by our values or opinions. He judges with righteous judgment. He doesn't condemn His enemies and save His friends. We are ALL born as enemies of God. Sinners don't become His children because they deserve it, but because He has freely shown them mercy.

Or people might say, "Judgment isn't fair, because people can't help their own nature." But this objection is hypocritical. We hold criminals accountable for their actions. If someone molests a child, they should spent a long, long time in prison.

What if they themselves were molested? We are sorry about that, but it doesn't excuse their crime. We are slaves to our nature, of course, but we also have a conscience, and that conscience tells us that we are in desperate need for salvation. The fact that we will not pursue forgiveness from God on our own is an indication of just how rebellious and hostile we really are to Him.

Other people might say, "Eternal judgment isn't fair; God is love." Yes, that's true; God IS love. And who do we think God loves more than anyone else? His own Son, of course. So, if God loves His own Son perfectly and completely, and a sinful human being insults and abuses and rejects God's Son, would it be loving for God to simply ignore that abuse? Besides, while it is true that God is love, God is also just and holy and righteous. The Bible says that God hates all workers of iniquity (Psalm 5:5), those who love violence (Psalm 11:5), those who devise evil thoughts, liars, and those who spread strife (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Finally, someone might say – and I truly hope they will – "But if all this is true, then who can be saved?" Yes! Exactly! Who can be saved? With man it is impossible, Jesus says, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). We cannot save ourselves, can we? No. Not only can we not undo our past, we can't even stop our own spiritual decline.

There is one hope for fallen man: the salvation that comes through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work. Through faith in Jesus Christ, goats can be reborn as sheep. Through Jesus Christ, God gives us the gift we don't deserve: the New Covenant. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we become new creations (Second Corinthians 5:17).