

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 9 June 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Evil Root, Evil Fruit

Matthew 12:33-37

In the 40 years in which I've known Christ as my Saviour, I've seen people come to Christ from many walks of life. I've seen poor, middle-class, and rich people come to Christ for salvation. I've seen people of widely different professions and religions come to know the Christ of Calvary. I've seen selfish drug-addicts, and sweet, little old ladies, come to Christ. However, what I am about to relate to you is the testimony of a man who was *a pastor* before he got saved! Listen to this testimony of **Dr. Don Schooler**:

“In my first two churches, I preached all that I knew—honesty, faith (not knowing what it meant), good habits, church attendance, honour, and a continual exhortation to be ‘good,’ to serve God. *I talked about the fruits without knowing the roots.* My wife's religion consisted of a belief in God, worship of beauty, a social and personal ethic, aesthetics, lovely music, sunsets, and nature appreciation. I believed in conversion, [and] *preached* it...but did not *know* it.”

Dr. Schooler went on to say that their marriage was beginning to get difficult, because it seemed that his wife believed one thing, and he believed another. So, they decided [imagine this!] to study the *Bible*! Yes, my friends! They began to study the Bible together, without any helps; and as they did so, they found, to their shock, that they were *both* wrong! They found that they both were lost, and on their way to hell, because they had not placed their trust in Jesus Christ. They had been trusting in *their own* attempts to produce fruits of righteousness; however, they found, in the Bible, that this is impossible. This is how Schooler ended his testimony:

“The light broke upon me. I wept like a child, calling out to my wife: ‘I have missed it. Utterly missed it.’ All those years I had preached only ethics, social and personal, *but not the Gospel.* The Gospel is the living Christ, who has come to dwell in me. He has liberated me. He assured me that my sins [are] forgiven. It (salvation) [is] not centred in human striving; it [is] centred in Christ.”

There are multitudes of people in this world who are trying to produce the fruit of righteousness without knowing the **Root of the Lord Jesus Christ**; and the reality is that they are not producing true righteousness at all. They *can't* produce true righteousness (not the kind that actually pleases God), because they are not connected to the Author of all goodness. The *fruit* isn't the real problem; the problem is the *root* which produces the fruit. What each one of us needs is to become an entirely *new* tree—a tree in which Jesus Christ is the Root, and the Giver of spiritual life!

This morning, we will be talking about the real source of the words that come out of our mouths—whether they be good words, or bad words. The title of this message is ***Evil Root, Evil Fruit.***

Read Matthew 12:33-37.

I. Corrupt trees (v. 33)

If you were here last week, you'll remember that the Pharisees had just accused Jesus of casting out a devil from a man through the power of Beelzebub (Satan). In response to this accusation, Jesus warned the Pharisees that ***“blasphemy against the Holy Ghost”*** (which *they* had just committed, by attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan) cannot be forgiven. Why *can't* blasphemy against the Holy Ghost be forgiven? Because the Holy Spirit is the Member of the Godhead who convicts us of our sin, and shows us that we need to come to Christ for salvation. To blaspheme against the Spirit, and to call His convicting work in your heart “evil,” is to reject the gift of salvation that He is offering you!

The Pharisees had spoken corrupt words against the Holy Ghost; and Jesus was now exposing the real source of their blasphemy. Their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was just one of a *myriad* of evil words that came out of their mouths; and all these evil words sprang from the “root” of their sinful hearts. Jesus compared their words to evil fruit, which springs forth from an evil tree. It's not just the “fruit” that is corrupt: it is the whole “tree” that is corrupt! The kind of *fruit* that comes out of your mouth depends on the kind of *root* from which it sprang.

In **Psalm 1**, King David gave this description of a person who knows the LORD: ***“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 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.”*** A saved person—a righteous person—is like a good tree, which spreads life in its environment. One can expect a believer's mouth to utter words of grace and kindness. One can expect a believer's mouth to utter *God's* words, which he has hidden deep in his heart. One can expect a *believer's* mouth to glorify Jesus Christ, and to woo others to Him. Why? Because it is really the Holy Spirit of God who is putting those godly words in his mouth, through the *new* heart that He has created within him.

In contrast, one can expect corrupt words to come forth from the mouth of a person who does not know the Lord. Now, this doesn't mean that every word that a lost person utters is bitter, cruel, nasty, or vitriolic: but it does mean that there is no fruit *toward God* in his words. Even when a lost person speaks “good” things, those good things are not spoken for God's glory, because he doesn't even know God. So it was with the Pharisees. *They* could speak “good” words. *They* had human love, and could say kind words to their family or friends; but they did not truly love or know *God*. *They* could say many *theologically correct things* about God, since they knew the Scriptures extremely well; but it was all in their *heads*, not their hearts. *They* did not know God, because they, like everyone else in this world, were sinners; and they were rejecting God's Son, Jesus Christ—the only One who could save them from their sin. *They* did not have a new nature, as a believer has: they had only the *old, sinful* nature with which they were born. From *that* heart—that old, sinful heart—came evil words. The Bible says in **Jeremiah 17:9** that ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”*** Our hearts, in their natural state, are filled with evil, and *will produce* evil words and actions.

Read Mark 7:14-23.

The Pharisees spoke blasphemous words, because that's what was in their hearts. That's who they really were. They may have said "good" words from time to time; but they could not bring themselves to call Jesus "Lord." The Bible says that there were even some of the Pharisees who "believed" that Jesus is the Messiah, but who would not confess Him before men, for fear of losing their position. Their hearts were too filled with pride to bow to Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:3.

In the first part of this verse, Paul says that "*No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed.*" In other words, the Holy Spirit will *never* lead a person to curse the name of Jesus; and anyone who *does* curse Jesus' name shows that he is in Satan's family. That part of the verse is easy enough to understand! However, what does Paul mean when he says that "*no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*"? Is he saying that anyone and everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" is saved? No, that is not what Paul is saying! Jesus said very clearly, in **Matthew 7:21**, that not everyone who calls Him "**Lord, Lord,**" will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. To call Jesus "Lord" with your *lips* means absolutely nothing if you have never surrendered your heart to Him. An unsaved person may utter the *words*, "Jesus is Lord"; but His confession is false, because Christ is *not* the Lord of his heart at all.

In contrast, when a child of God calls Jesus "Lord," it is a *true* confession; and the Holy Spirit is behind it. The Holy Spirit is bearing witness with that believer's spirit that Christ has come into his life, and has taken His rightful position as "Lord." Jesus said in **John 16:14** that the Holy Spirit glorifies *Him*. That is why a true Christian will always call Jesus "Lord." Lost people can *disingenuously* call Jesus "Lord"; but only a child of God can, by the Holy Spirit, *genuinely* call Him "Lord." Is He the Lord of *your* life? Do *you* know Him?

II. Venomous snakes (v. 34)

(Read Matthew 12:34 again.) Not only did Jesus compare the Pharisees to corrupt trees: He also compared them to vipers! Jesus couldn't have been any clearer about the real spiritual condition of the Pharisees, could He? How can a venomous snake produce anything other than venom? It can't! Likewise, the Pharisees couldn't produce anything other than spiritual poison, because their hearts were evil. In fact, *no* sinner can produce anything other than spiritual poison! In our natural state, the poison of asps is under our lips. This is who we are!

Many people believe that man is basically good—that we are all born with a “clean slate,” and that we are not really sinners by nature. However, the Bible says very differently. The Bible says that we are inherently evil, like our father Adam; and therefore, we speak and do evil. **First Samuel 24:13** says, *“Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked.”* In **Isaiah 32:6**, the LORD said, *“The vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD.”* **Psalm 58:3** says that *“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”*

There are all kinds of spiritual venom that our hearts can produce. One of them is **gossip**. **Proverbs 18:8** says, *“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”* Anyone who has ever been lied about, or who has had a hurtful truth, which should not have been repeated, told about him, is familiar with that physical feeling of a “wound” right in the pit of the stomach, or around the heart! Gossip literally hurts our bodies! Gossip usually is cloaked in nice-sounding words such as: “Have you heard?” “Did you know?” “They tell me...” “Keep this to yourself.” “I don’t believe it’s true, *but* I heard that...” “I wouldn’t tell you, except I know that it won’t go any further.” Of course, the “Christian” version is, “I want to tell you this so that you can pray.” Sometimes this is done sincerely; but oftentimes, it is not. Our carnal impulse is to suck up the juicy “morsels” from someone else’s life—just as a spider injects its toxic digestive juices into its victim (thus turning its insides into soup), and then literally sucks the life out of its victim. Just as there is still a “shell” of the insect’s body left after the meal, which outwardly looks alive, but is dead, so gossip can suck the “life” out of a person, and leave him (or her) a wounded “shell”!

What other spiritual poison do we produce? **Innuendo**. This means “implying something,” but not saying it outright. It means to “leave someone with a false impression,” thus telling a *de facto* lie! An awkward silence, a raised eyebrow, a strange look—all these things can communicate falsehoods, without even speaking a word! **Flattery** is another spiritual poison, as well. If *gossip* be saying something behind someone’s back that you wouldn’t say to his face, then *flattery* is saying something to a person’s face what you wouldn’t say behind his back (in other words, “kind” things that you don’t really mean). It is easy to fall into the trap of “praising” someone, when you really just want something from him. God hates flattery; and He has plenty to say about it. **Proverbs 26:28** says, *“A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.”*

Another spiritual poison is **criticism**. Now, please don’t misunderstand: there are times when grave sin in someone’s life needs to be addressed in a spirit of humility. However, a zeal for righteousness can easily turn into *self*-righteousness and judgmentalism. The sin of criticism is also akin to the sin of **diminishing others** (“cutting people down”). **James 4:11** says, *“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.”* This commandment forbids *any speech* that can destroy

someone—whether it be true or false! You see, we tend to think that it’s all right to convey negative information about someone, as long as it’s *true*. However, this is not the case. Passing on damaging information that doesn’t *need* to be passed on is evil. Obviously, we’re not talking about withholding information from the appropriate authorities when a moral or legal crime is taking place; we’re talking about passing on damaging information about others, when you are not part of the problem or the solution. Some people think that, while it’s *not* O.K. to talk about someone behind his back, it *is* O.K. to cut that person down to his face! They think they have a “duty” to make that person aware of his shortcomings. Oftentimes, that person is very aware of his shortcomings; but the assault from the self-appointed correction officer makes him want to give up.

Brethren, we must avoid all these things! As Christians, we should be in the business of *edifying* (building up), and not tearing down. We should praise others’ virtues, and not minimise them. Even if it be a small thing, praise it! When someone says to his (or her) spouse, “You *always* do this-or-that wrong thing,” how is the spouse going to react? With resentment, of course! He (or she) will remember those few times when he *didn’t* do the wrong thing, and will vehemently defend himself! So it is in *any* relationship. Ongoing and serious wrongs need to be addressed in the right way, and at the right time, with a soft, humble tone; but in the meantime, we should look for ways to build people up. Edifying words can go a long way in someone’s life! On the other hand, cutting words destroy.

The Pharisees were a generation of vipers. But what of *us*, today? Are *we* like them? Is it only *really* bad people who are like vipers? Well, let’s see what Jesus said next.

III. Evil treasures (v. 35)

(Read Matthew 12:35 again.) So far, Jesus has compared the Pharisees to evil trees, and to venomous snakes. However, Jesus wasn’t finished. Jesus says that the Pharisees’ hearts were also like a vault of “*evil treasure*”! The Pharisees were wicked men; and Jesus didn’t whitewash their sin! The reality, though, is that *we all* have evil hearts, which are filled with evil treasure! Jesus even said to *His own* disciples, “*If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask him.*” Jesus made it clear: we are *all* evil!

Read Romans 3:9-20.

Folks, this ugly portrait is the true condition of our hearts. The inner nature with which we were born is incurably evil. We *all* have tongues with the poison of asps! Yet, if this be so, why did Jesus say that a “*good*” man brings forth “*good*” things from the “*good*” treasure of his heart? If our hearts be evil, how can there be any talk about anyone’s having a “good” heart? The answer is: God gives sinners a *new* heart when they repent and place their faith in Jesus the Messiah! In **Ezekiel 36**, the LORD says, “*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*” If you are saved, you will continue to have the old, sinful nature for as long as you are in this mortal body. Yet, you also have a *new* nature, which is generated by the Holy Spirit; and as long as you are daily and hourly surrendering to the Holy Spirit, you have the power to “put off” the old nature, as though it were a filthy garment, and to “put on” the clean, spotless garment of the new nature!

Read Ephesians 4:22-32.

Every believer has a *new* heart, which is generated by the Holy Spirit of God. Even saints in Old Testament times, who didn’t have the Holy Spirit living *inside* them, nevertheless had “new” hearts, because the Holy Spirit was near them, and with them. On the night before Jesus’ crucifixion, Jesus commanded His disciples (who were not even indwelt by the Holy Spirit yet), to “abide” in Him, just as a branch draws its life from the vine!

Read John 15:1-5.

Who is the “Vine” from whom Christians must draw spiritual strength and nourishment, so that they can produce spiritual fruit? It is Jesus Christ. And who is the One whom Christ has sent, in His Father’s name, to do His work in our lives? It is the **Holy Spirit**—the third member of the Godhead. He produces the fruit of righteousness in our lives!

Read Galatians 5:22-23.

I wish we had time to talk about all nine qualities that make up “*the fruit of the Spirit*”; but I *would* like to talk about the first three qualities—“love, joy, and peace.” First, consider what Paul says about **love**. The “*love*” that Paul is talking about is translated from the Greek word *agape*, which refers to the highest, noblest, most self-sacrificial love possible—the *perfect* love that God possesses! The noblest kind of love that our sinful flesh can produce is a love that is still tainted by sin and self. Fleshly love gives to others, as long as there is at least *some* kind of gratitude or appreciation shown in return; but pure, selfless, sacrificial love is the love that the Holy Spirit of God imparts. I remember a conversation that I once had with an atheist.

In that conversation, he told me that he finds it insane to believe that trusting in Jesus could have any benefit or relevance to one's family. In response, I quoted from **I Corinthians 13**.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a.

After I had finished reading these verses, I asked my atheist friend, "Do you mean to tell me that you *don't* think that *this* kind of love could rescue marriages that are on the rocks, and bind up broken families?" His answer was that he didn't believe that that kind of pure love is possible to begin with! You know what, though? From a human perspective, your man was right! True, selfless love *is* impossible. Our flesh can't produce it. Without the renewing, regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, true love for *God* is impossible, as well. True love (both toward God and man) can be produced *only* by the Holy Spirit in a person's life!

The second thing that the Holy Spirit produces in a Christian's life is **joy**. And how does God define "joy"? Well, there is an acrostic for "joy" which I learned when I was a child; and I think it expresses God's definition of "joy" pretty well. "JOY" stands for "Jesus, Others, and You." In other words, true joy comes when you put **Jesus** in first place, **others** second, and **yourself** last. By the way, an unsaved person *can* aspire to live for "others first, and then myself." God even acknowledges this fact. In **Romans 5:7** the Lord says, "***For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.***" Yet, even when a lost person puts "others first, and then self," there is still one letter missing—the "J"! *Jesus* is missing entirely in the life of an unbeliever. Jesus is not in a lost person's thoughts as he lives his daily life, because he doesn't *know* Jesus. However, when a sinner repents of his sin and places his trust in Jesus Christ, Jesus enters into that person's life; and from that moment on, the believer is able to have true joy in Jesus! As Paul said, it is a "***joy unspeakable, and full of glory.***"

The third part of the fruit of the Spirit is **peace**. Jesus is the Prince of Peace; and He came to bring us His peace. On the night Jesus was born, the angels announced this peace when they sang, "***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men.***" The lost world, of course, scoffs at these words. The best kind of peace that lost men can envision is a forced, political peace. But true, inner peace in the heart? To those who don't know Christ, such a peace is a delusive dream. But to those who know Christ, it is reality! Jesus said, "***Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.***"

Those who are "in Christ" are able to bring forth good things from the good treasure of the *new* heart that Christ has given them. Those who do not know Christ, on the other hand, *cannot* bring forth such treasure. Tragically, they are storing up not only *sinful* treasure, but also the "treasure" of God's wrath. This brings us to our last point this morning.

IV. Damning words (vv. 36-37)

(Read Matthew 12:36-37 again.) It is important to remember that in this passage, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees; and the Pharisees were lost men. When Jesus said that by their words they would be **“condemned,”** He was talking about *eternal* condemnation, in the Lake of Fire! When these men stand before the Lord Jesus Christ at the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the world, they will be judged according to the poisonous words that came out of their mouths. If even the **“idle”** words of men—the careless, thoughtless words that trip out of our mouths when we’re not thinking—will be judged, how much more severely will these men be judged for the *intentionally blasphemous* words that they spoke? Their corrupt words were the product of their corrupt hearts; and they will be judged for both their corrupt hearts, *and* their corrupt words! So will *every* soul who rejected the Lord Jesus Christ; and as the sentence is passed, they will hear the awful words, **“Depart from me, ye that work iniquity, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; I never knew you!”**

Now, does this passage have any relevance to those of us who are saved? After all, we will never face *eternal* condemnation in the Lake of Fire, because judicially, God sees us as though we had the perfect righteousness of His Son. **Romans 8:1** says, **“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”** Does this mean, then, that we can skip over this passage? No, it doesn’t. We, too, will stand before the Lord one day, and give an account for all we have done. Now, we will be judged on a totally different basis, and for a different purpose, than the lost will be judged. We will be judged to receive reward for what we *did* do for Christ. According to **1 Corinthians 3:11-15**, the things we did for the flesh will be burned up like chaff; but we ourselves will be saved, and enter Heaven, since our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus. Nonetheless, we *will* have to give an answer to the Lord; and we will be profoundly ashamed for what we did to please our flesh. Also, there is “condemnation,” or “chastisement,” in *this* life, when we live in disobedience to the Lord. That is why we *must* guard our hearts, and allow the Spirit to control every word that comes out of our mouths.

Read Ephesians 5:1-10.

In these verses, Paul warns us to shun ungodly speech. First, he warns us to avoid **“foolish talking.”** The phrase **“foolish talking”** means “buffoonery, or silly talk.” It is translated from the Greek word *morologia*, from which we get the word “moron”! Now, please don’t misunderstand: Christians don’t have to go around with long, stony faces! Paul is simply saying that Christians should not engage in foolish, empty, pointless talk. Christians should be happy, joyful people; but we don’t have to imitate the foolish, empty talk of the world in order to be joyful. Our joy should come from our relationship with God. Foolish talking is like spiritual cotton candy: it leaves us spiritually malnourished. In fact, it can be dangerous. For one thing, it nurtures in us an appetite for buffoonery, and pulls our hearts away from the desire to hear God’s Word. It also tends to lead toward sinful topics. When our conversation is already going with the current of our flesh, our flesh will naturally lead us on to corrupt

speech. Folks, we shouldn't joke about sin! To the Christian, there should be no such thing as "adult" jokes. Can the Holy Spirit hear your conversation, and approve? If not, get rid of it!

Now, Paul also warns against "**jesting**." The Greek word for "**jesting**" can mean "joking around" in the sense of having a clean, innocent laugh; and there is nothing wrong with that. However, in the bad sense, it can mean to use witty speech in order to dig at someone, or embarrass him. This is what is called "sarcasm"; and it should be shunned like the plague! When you start to use sarcasm, it bleeds over into your everyday talk; and you begin to become a "**scorner**." Christian, don't be a scorner! Instead, use your lips for the "**giving of thanks**"! Thanks to God should roll off the Christian's tongue naturally! Our speech should be edifying, and should reek with the grace and kindness of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Does *your* tongue bring glory to God, Christian? You have all power to live righteously, through the new heart that Christ has created within you; but is *that* heart in control today? If not, allow the Spirit of God to mortify your sinful heart; and then dip down into the "**good treasure**" of your new heart! Before I close, I would also ask: Have *you* been given a new heart? In other words, "Are you saved?" Perhaps you realise, deep inside, that no matter how hard you try to be good, you keep drawing up spiritual and moral poison; and you would be horrified if others could see what is in your heart. Perhaps you are also beginning to realise how ugly your heart must look to God! If so, I am here to tell you that Jesus can give you a *new* heart! Repent of your sin, trust in the saving work that Jesus did for you on the cross, and let Him come into your life. He will then make you a new creation in Him!