

Letters From My Father
Week 30
2 Timothy 3:10-17
“The Fruit of the Good Tree”

Introduction

Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you'll recognize them by their fruit. **Matthew 7:15-20**

I love to study The Word of God! It always has just what I need to prepare me for every single one of life's circumstances. One of my favorite things about The Scriptures is the way that they so often use comparison and contrast to teach valuable life lessons. What do I mean by this? Simply, that *The Bible* will often show something that is wicked or foolish, juxtaposed against what is righteous and wise. For example, **Psalm 1** (one of my personal favorites) shows us the contrast and comparison of a person who is blessed by living according to The Word of God, as opposed to those who go their own way.

How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! Instead, his delight is in The LORD'S instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. **Psalm 1:1-3**

(Now for the contrast)

The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand up in the judgement, nor the sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For The LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin. **Psalm 1:4-6**

See what I mean? *The Bible* is filled with just such examples as this. They are given in order to teach us the different paths that we must choose. We see the way of the wicked compared to the way of the just. And we (if we choose wisely) will choose the way of life over the way of death (**Deuteronomy 30:19-20**). In the **Third Chapter of 2 Timothy**, we see Paul using this same method in order to distinguish between those who have the disease of self-consumption or self-love, and those who are being led by The Spirit of God. The first portion of the chapter focuses upon the wicked, until Paul uses the words, “*But you..*”, in **verse 10** to remind Timothy that he is to be nothing like the unregenerate. Rather, Paul instructs him to be a godly man. And then he lists some of the traits that every godly man must possess.

As we conclude this chapter, we are shown the difference between the wicked and the righteous. For you see, lost people, act lost, and conversely, saved people act like they have been changed! So let us now look to the characteristics of those who are as **Psalm 1** would say “Happy” or “Blessed” depending upon your preferred *Bible* translation. The wicked are self-consumed, and their selfishness betrays their diseased hearts. But the righteous will be easily recognized for they lead us into paths of righteousness by setting an *Example* for us to follow. They are known by their *Endurance* in the faith in all circumstances. For they have been thoroughly *Equipped* by The Word of God to enable them to do good works.

Example (vs. 10)***But you have followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love...*****2 Timothy 3:10a**

“*But you*,” Paul immediately contrasts Timothy’s standing alongside those who are consumed with self. Paul admonished Timothy to stay away from such people and to continue in the paths of righteousness. And he reminded Timothy of the example that he had been given to follow. I have heard many critics of Scripture point to passages like these where Paul points to his own walk with The LORD as an example to follow. These naysayers will pass judgment upon the apostle and condemn him for being self-righteous. But nothing could be further from the truth.

After Paul’s conversion upon the Damascus Road (**Acts 9**), he who had been so consumed with eradicating the Church was totally transformed. After he met Jesus, he was consumed only with Jesus! And his life was living proof. So he could say with complete sincerity:

Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.**1 Corinthians 11:1**

There is nothing self-serving in this testimony. Paul was sold out for Christ, and you could tell it by the way he lived his everyday life.

He admonished his “***young son in the faith***,” Timothy, to simply follow the example that he had set for him. The two of them had been inseparable for many years, so Timothy knew full well Paul’s devotion, both to Timothy and to Christ. “*You have followed my teaching.*” How many times had this young man witnessed Paul preaching the message of Christ and His cross, mercy, grace, and love? I would venture to say, that no one other than the disciples, who were personally instructed by Christ Himself, ever had a better teacher, mentor, and friend, than Timothy had in Paul.

Not only had Timothy heard over and over again the doctrines which Paul taught, he also knew of his “*conduct*” (*agoge* in the Greek, pronounced ag-o-gay’), which means “way of life”. Paul didn’t just preach. He practiced what he preached. And if anyone ever knew that firsthand, it would have been Timothy, who spent many days and nights traveling around the region as they shared the message of God’s kingdom. If Paul had been a hypocrite, Timothy would have seen it. But Paul lived what he believed. And that, my friends, is the genuine fruit of those who are abiding in Christ (**John 15**).

And in addition to Paul’s message and manner of life, Timothy knew Paul’s motivation, his purpose (*prothesis* in the Greek). The word means “*a setting forth*”, much in the way a sacrifice was presented to God. For Paul, to be set apart for Christ was his reason for living. Paul had only one goal in life, and that was to be a living sacrifice. He had long forsaken any personal ambition or notions of personal glory, he only lived to bring glory to God. This was his purpose.

Paul follows up these three examples by reminding Timothy of his faith, patience, and love. These things not only enabled him to believe in Christ, but to remain steadfast in whatever circumstance he found himself. The words that he used respectively are *pistis*, meaning *conviction in one’s belief in God*, and *makrothymia*, meaning *patient endurance, not avenging personal wrongs*, and *agape*, *the love that comes from knowing God*; enabling one to love God, love one’s neighbors, and even love those who persecute you. It is the living proof that Christ lives within someone, if they have agape love.

By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love (agape) one another.**John 13:35** (elucidation added)

A tree that bears these *good fruits*, as Jesus spoke of in **John 15**, is the genuine article. Paul was a living example of what every Christian is to become. Not only do we preach, but we live out our faith and preaching so that all who see us, see Christ in us. This world doesn’t need any more hypocrites. What it needs are good trees bearing good fruit. These are ever increasingly in short supply. We the Church need to set the example for others to follow, as we are being led by The Spirit.

Endurance (vs. 10b-13)

...and endurance, along with the persecutions and sufferings that came to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured — and yet The LORD rescued me from them all. In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Evil people and imposters will become worse, deceiving and being deceived.
2 Timothy 3:10b-13

Now, we come to the part of Christianity where the “rubber meets the road” as it were, *endurance*. Paul had suffered mightily for his faith; beaten, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked, and chased out of city after city by angry mobs. He elaborated on his many brushes with death in his second letter to the Corinthians (**2 Corinthians 11:16-32**). If one word summed up Paul’s commitment to Christ it was his *endurance* (*hypophero* pronounced hoop-of-er’-o) meaning *to bear patiently*. Paul proved his love for Christ, by never giving up, in spite of hardship. This is the “fruit” of a genuine Believer.

I’ve been in the ministry for quite a long time now, and quite frankly, I have seen a ton of so-called Believers come and go. And to be honest, I have noticed that many of those who seem to be so “on fire” for Christ in the beginning are the very ones who flame out the quickest. They are like “bottle rockets” of the faith. They start off with a lot of promise, but end up flaming out as quickly as they once ignited. Sadly, this is proof that although they claimed to have faith, it was not saving faith. Jesus spoke of these people in his parable of the sower. He called them those whose **“seeds that fell upon rocky ground.”**

And the one sown on rocky ground — this is the one who hears The Word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of The Word, immediately he falls away.

Matthew 13:20-21

I cannot even begin to tell you how many people I have seen exactly like this. They make a profession of faith, and they seem so excited, almost *overly* emotional. And you would think they are destined to go out and set the world afire for the gospel. They immediately jump into every small group, and every ministry they can in the church. Their zeal seems nearly out of control. And then, it happens. They fade away, eventually disappearing into oblivion, where even the National Guard couldn’t find them! Their spirituality can be measured much like we estimate the power of a sports car. They go from *Pentecostal to pagan* in 3.5 seconds! How is this even possible? Answer: They were never genuinely saved in the first place.

Genuine salvation is proven by endurance. *The Bible* speaks repeatedly of **“those who endure to the end will be saved.”** (**Matthew 24:13; Revelation 2:10**). But do not be deceived, it is not even you who does the “enduring”. If you have been regenerated by The Spirit, it is Christ Himself Who will see to it that you endure.

I am sure of this, that He Who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
Philippians 1:6

So you see, those who have a genuine saving faith will be kept safe until the very end, because they have been sealed by The Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 1:13**). Those who are not sealed by The Spirit will not endure. For you can neither save yourself, nor keep yourself saved. Saving Faith will produce endurance. And endurance is the proof positive of whether a heart has been refined and purified as opposed to mere gold-plated lip service to Christ.

Just as a bad tree bears bad fruit and a good tree bears good fruit, those who are connected to Christ will endure to the end. This also is the fruit of a genuine Believer. So how is your endurance? Will The LORD be able to count on you, when the trials and persecutions of this world come your way? Paul warned Timothy that these things would only increase as the time drew near for Christ’s return. He described those who would come against us as evil imposters (*goes pronounced go’-ace meaning*

“wailers” in the Greek). What a perfect description of those who cry out so violently against the people of faith in our time. These wailers will not stop complaining until they eradicate our faith from the face of the earth. But they will be sadly disappointed, when their day of reckoning has come. The kingdom of God will prevail. And those who endure to the end shall be saved.

Equipped (vs. 14-17)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:14-17

So where does Paul direct Timothy so that he will be able to live as a shining example, enduring all things for the cause of Christ? He directs him back to *The Bible*. For it is by the continual feasting upon God’s Word that we have the necessary instructions to live productive, fruit bearing lives. The word that Paul uses for “continue” in his charge, “***continue in what you have learned and firmly believed,***” is *Meno* in the Greek, and it is exactly the same word that Christ used in ***John 15***, when He told His disciples to “*meno*” or “*remain*” in Him in order to bear fruit.

Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me. John 15:4

We remain in Christ by continual prayer along with careful study and meditation upon His Word. These things allow The Spirit to transform our lives, so that we are productive. They equip us, so that we can bring glory to God. Apart from abiding in Christ and in His Word, we can have no lasting impact upon this world. In short, no abiding, no fruit. Paul knew this reality all too well. That is why he directed Timothy back to The Scriptures as a guide for living this Christian life. Paul knew that he would not be around much longer, when he wrote to Timothy this last time, but he also knew that The Word of God lives forever. So he was assured that he was leaving his beloved son in “good hands”, so long as he remained in The Word.

The Scriptures (all of them) are inspired by God Himself, they are living and active, and sharp as a two edged sword (***Hebrews 4:12***). God has given us all that we need for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (***vs. 16***). In his *New Testament Commentary on 2 Timothy*, Warren Wiersbe writes:

The Scriptures are profitable. They are profitable for doctrine (what is right), for reproof (what is not right), for correction (how to get right), and for instruction in righteousness (how to stay right). A Christian who studies The Bible and applies what he learns will grow in holiness and avoid many pitfalls in this world.

I cannot say it any better than that! To be able to live as an example and to endure the persecutions and trials of this world, we must be thoroughly equipped for every good work by The Word of God! There are no shortcuts to holiness. We must allow The Spirit to use the living Word of God to sanctify us. Just as newborn babies hunger for milk, the genuine Believer craves The Word. This is also the fruit of the good trees. Or as the Psalmist has said:

Instead, his delight is in The LORD’S instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Psalm 1:2-3

TRUTH!!!