
Heart Trouble

Matthew 12:33-37; Luke 6:43-45

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Introduction Christians believe in respectable sins. We are ok with some sins that are so common among us that we often dismiss any critique of them. Jerry Bridges, in his book *Respectable Sins*, has placed his finger on the problem. The sins he calls respectable are sins that we as believers might tend to ignore since they are socially acceptable, or perhaps we don't take them seriously because they are so frequently committed throughout our day. I started thinking of these sins from the aspect of sin flowing out of our mouths, and it is interesting that many of the respectable sins that Jerry writes about end up, at least potentially, being expressed verbally. For example, some of the sins that he writes about are anxiety and frustration, discontentment, unthankfulness, pride, selfishness, lack of self-control, impatience and irritability, anger, judging others, envy, jealousy, and additionally what he calls sins of the tongue. Think about how many of those sins typically are expressed verbally. The reason that so many sins express themselves so easily through our words is because words expose the heart, and our words flow out of what we love and treasure.

We are going to look at two similar passages, with two different contexts, and with different but similar meanings. Both passages will help us see the strong connection between our heart and our words, and the difference between how believers and unbelievers are affected. When Jesus was on earth, he addressed both believers and unbelievers on the reality of what comes out of our mouth and what it can tell us about what we treasure. Although Jesus' teaching concerning these words has a broad application over all that we say and do, these two passages focus on our words in the context of hypocrisy, condemnation and judging others.

Before we get to the passages I want to look at, let's look at a similar passage in Matthew 7:15-20 to set the stage.

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Jesus is warning the disciples about false teachers who will come to try to deceive them by looking like sheep but are ravenous wolves. But according to this passage, false teachers can be identified by the fruit they bear; the way they behave. And just as we can identify trees by their fruit, we can identify people by their actions.

A tree and its fruit (Matthew 12:33-37)

In Matthew 12:33-37, Jesus has just denounced the towns he had been in who had refused to repent and turn to God, despite his many miracles and teachings. And around this time the Pharisees begin to challenge Jesus concerning his actions on the Sabbath. First, the disciples were pulling and eating grain as they walked through a field on the Sabbath, later Jesus heals a man with a deformed hand on the Sabbath (both considered Law-breaking deeds by the

Pharisees). It seems the story reaches a crescendo when the Pharisees hear of Jesus healing a man who was demon possessed and then accuse him of casting out demons because he was the “Prince of Demons”. So, not only are the Pharisees accusing Jesus of breaking the Levitical Law, but now they are accusing Jesus of being Satan’s Prince. Jesus then warned the Pharisees of God’s certain unforgiveness and condemnation if they blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees had already begun considering how they could kill Jesus, and it is within this context that Jesus speaks directly to the Pharisees as the disciples listen in,

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 speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.* ³⁵*The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.* ³⁶*I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,* ³⁷*for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* (Matthew 12:33-37)

Fruit identification (v. 33)

If a tree is good, it will bear good fruit. If a tree is bad it will bear fruit. Only living, healthy plants can bear good fruit. A tree that is diseased and dying cannot bear good fruit. This is how the New Living Translation says it, *A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad.*

Jesus is immediately going to the heart of the Pharisees and exposing them for who they really are. The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus by his words and actions; placing themselves on the side of righteousness and Jesus on the side of evil, by accusing him of being the Prince of Demons, thus justifying a plan to take Jesus’ life.

Speaking good with evil? (v. 34)

Jesus is directly calling the Pharisees out, by calling them a brood of snakes! Jesus knows the intentions and their heart. The Pharisees worked hard to maintain the appearance of righteousness among the people, but Jesus reminds those listening that just as a tree is identified by the fruit it produces, so are the Pharisees recognized by the evil fruit that comes out of their mouths.

Jesus rhetorically asked the Pharisees, “How can you speak good, when you are evil?” The Pharisees were hypocrites, and they were judging Jesus as if they were God and they were the righteous ones. Jesus accused the Pharisees of trying to speak good, while their hearts were evil. as they fought to preserve their own power and authority, by trying to break the authority of Jesus. The Pharisees were content to place themselves directly against Christ and all that he came to accomplish.

From the overflow of the heart (v. 34-35)

The mouth speaks from whatever overflows out of the heart. Whatever the treasure is in the heart determines what we say. They were simply speaking and acting on the evil that was overflowing from their hearts.

Jesus elaborates on the biblical reality of the formation and foundation of speech. A good person speaks good things out of the good treasure in his heart and the evil person speaks evil out of the evil treasure in his heart. Notice, Jesus very clearly uses the word “treasure”

to describe where our words originate. Words originate from the treasure that is in our hearts. What we say comes directly from the overflow of what we treasure, love and idolize.

The unbelieving Pharisees simply spoke of what they craved...power, prestige, legalistic righteousness, and ultimately hate and murder.

Every idle word (v. 36-37)

Jesus told the Pharisees that on Judgment Day they would give an account for every idle and careless word they spoke. By their words they would be justified or by their words they would be condemned. It's no wonder that words carry so much weight at the Judgment, since words reflect the reality of what we truly love. If words are important enough to be judged, then words need to be taken seriously.

Sadly, in the context of Matthew's account of this story, Jesus ultimately contrasts the unrepentance of the Pharisees to the repentance of Nineveh. When Jonah called on the people to repent and turn to God, they did. The Pharisees simply continued to harden their heart and stance against Jesus to the very end.

A tree and its fruit (Luke 6:43-45)

The second passage we want to look at is in Luke 6:43-45.

This time Jesus is talking to his disciples after healing multitudes of people who simply touched Jesus and were healed. Jesus begins teaching the disciples the Beatitudes and telling them to love their enemies and not to judge and condemn others, but to be generous and loving, being careful to not judge another brother's sin while completely ignoring their own.

This is what God's word says in Luke 6:43-45

⁴³“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Judging fruit (v. 43-44)

A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. Each tree is known by its fruit. The immediate context of being a hypocrite and judging fellow believers is what connects the reader to the previous teachings. In the English Standard Version, the translators chose to use the linking word, "for", to start these verses as a continuation from Christ's teaching describing someone pointing out the "speck" (of sin) in their brother's eye, while ignoring the "log" (of sin) in their own eye. In other words, hypocrisy and judging others are bad fruit in this context. Although it doesn't explicitly talk about judging your brother verbally, the context links, heart treasure, condemnation, judging and hypocrisy all together in thoughts and words.

This time Jesus is addressing followers of Christ, but the principles are the same as they were towards the Pharisees. A tree is identified by its fruit and fruit is identified from words and actions. A tree must produce the type of fruit that comes from that species of

tree. The description here is that figs are never gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from bramble bushes.

We might think, well, duh! But as believers, we also tend to easily dismiss bad fruit in our own life, like those “respectable sins” in Jerry Bridges book. But the implication is that believers should bear good fruit, because in Christ that is the kind of tree we are! How can we bear bad fruit, since we are made to bear good fruit in Christ? Therefore, judging our brother and the hypocrisy that accompanies it that should not exist together with the good fruit in a believer’s life. You should be producing the fruit common to the tree you represent.

The treasury of the heart (v. 45)

Christ teaches the same truth in this passage as he did in Matthew concerning our heart treasure. What you say flows from the treasure in your heart. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. I like the word the New Living Translation uses here to describe the “treasury” in our heart. A treasury is full of treasures, and typically locked and the key or password hidden. But our words flow from our “treasury” and allow others to see what we treasure. Judging others and the hypocrisy that goes along with it has no place in a believers' treasury.

Jesus follows this section with the importance of building a good foundation by doing what Jesus commands in his word. If you do what Jesus says in his word you will be like a mighty house built on a strong rock foundation, and you will bear good fruit.

Similarities and Differences

It’s important for us to look at the similarities and contrasts of these two passages to get the full perspective and application of these passages to our personal lives.

Similarities-Comparisons

Both passages teach that a tree is known by its fruit, illustrating that a person is known by the fruit their life produces, (actions and words).

Both passages teach what we say overflows from the treasures in our heart.

Both passages teach that our words expose what we treasure in our hearts.

Both passages in their respective contexts are addressing the problem of judging, condemnation and hypocrisy. The Pharisees believed they were good and righteous, and condemned Christ, while their hearts were evil. Believer’s words expose their true heart treasures that can take the place of Christ, and overflow into words against another.

Differences - Contrasts

These two passages are addressing two different groups of people. Matthew is addressing the Pharisees and unbelievers, while Luke is addressing believers; those following of Christ.

These passages are addressing two separate situations and two separate issues. The Matthew passage is addressing the Pharisees who were trying to trap Jesus and find a way to destroy him. They were in fact, speaking against the Holy Spirit by accusing Jesus of

being a part of Satan, and directly setting themselves against Christ. Luke is teaching disciples in the context of loving their enemies, loving one another, giving to one another, versus judging and condemning brothers and sisters in Christ.

Both passages are speaking of two different situations involving hypocrisy. The Pharisees had evil thoughts and intentions while pretending to be righteous, as they set themselves directly against Christ through their words and actions. Believers are being warned about the kind of hypocrisy that will judge a brother's sin, while ignoring the sin in their own life.

There are two separate consequences in each of these stories. The Matthew passage talks about unbelievers being judged on Judgment Day for every idle word that they speak, while the Luke passage warns believers about the bad fruit of hypocrisy by judging and condemning the actions of their fellow brothers and sisters.

What should we hear?

If you look at these passages, there is a real sense of at least being aware of the fruit in others. There is a real sense of the reality of knowing who a good tree is and who is a bad tree, or who is a believer versus who is an unbeliever, or a false teacher, as a wolf in sheep's clothing.

We all bear either good fruit or bad depending on the kind of person we are. Our words reveal what we love and treasure.

Unbelievers will be judged by their idle, careless words at the Final Judgment, while believers, have Christ's righteousness to cover over their sinful words.

We should bear good fruit and the words that come out of my mouth should reflect the fruit that comes from a redeemed life in Christ.

Judging others happens in the heart but flows into words. Judging and condemning others with our words, comes from us wanting to be God over others, and thinking we are better or more righteous than those we are judging.

If you struggle with your mouth, confess your sin and consider the kind of fruit you are displaying. If you are a believer, consider the fruit you bear through your speech, ask God's forgiveness for bearing bad fruit, and meditate on specific scripture to change your heart treasures along with your ungodly speech.

Conclusion

In *Respectable Sins*, Jerry Bridges has a whole section devoted to Judgmentalism, which may help us think more clearly about this sin. Here are some thoughts from that chapter.

We can be tempted to judge and condemn others based on our personal convictions that we elevate to biblical truth. It doesn't matter which side of a disputable issue we are on, since we can become judgmental toward anyone whose opinions are different from ours, and then we hide our judgmentalism under the cloak of Christian convictions.

When we judge others whose preferences and practices are different from ours, we are putting ourselves in the role of God, which God has reserved for Himself.

Even when we judge in accordance with Scripture, and making a judgment based solely on God's word, we can sin if we judge from an attitude of self-righteousness or if we judge others

harshly. We sin if we condemn the obviously flagrant sins of others without at the same time acknowledging that we ourselves are still sinners before God.

Judging others based on doctrinal differences is an area where we need to be careful not to judge in an ungodly manner, or to be self-righteousness and arrogant. Good, accurate biblical doctrine is vital, but one is saved through faith in Christ, not following a certain doctrine. *“Because we do believe so strongly in the importance of sound doctrine, we can easily become hypercritical of those with whom we disagree. We should express our disagreements, but we should do so in a way that does not degenerate into character assassination.”* (Bridges, Jerry. *Respectable Sins* (pp. 142-143). The Navigators. Kindle Edition.

Most of us can slip into the sin of judgmentalism from time to time. But there are those among us who practice it continually. These people have what I call a critical spirit. They look for and find fault with everyone and everything. (Bridges, Jerry. *Respectable Sins* (p. 143). The Navigators. Kindle Edition.)

Some of our acceptable sins, such as selfishness, impatience, and anger, are often expressed more freely at home among our family members than in public, especially the Christian public. This is especially true when it comes to our words and attitude of condemnation towards our family.

Listen to your own words and judge your own fruit. We should listen to our words when we speak and consider the treasure behind what we are saying. We can use the knowledge of our heart treasure and idols and repent and use scripture to change our wrong thinking and misplaced treasures and idols.

While I was on vacation last week in Florida, we were in church and the pastor mentioned something that made me think about this sermon. He said that judging is only judging when you are comparing someone else to yourself, and the intent is to make yourself look better than the other person (even if it is just in your own eyes).

When you truly understand that Christ’s righteousness covers over your sin, and that is your only hope, then you also will understand that there is no reason or purpose to judge someone else’s sin. Your personal righteousness means nothing, only Christ’s righteousness can make us right before the Father. If you have Christ’s righteousness on your behalf, then your words will not condemn you nor acquit you, only Christ can do that, but the fruit you bear each day should reflect Christ as your ultimate treasure.