

## A Tree is Known by its Fruit

Jesus taught, “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for **the tree is known by his fruit**. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for **out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh**” (Mat 12:33-34). And James reiterated the same, “**Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing**. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter? **Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs?**” (Jas 3:10-12). As a tree is known by the fruit it bears, hearts are discerned by what comes out of mouths.

Before having created man, God’s design of trees “the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind” (Gen 1:11), alluded to the heart and mouth correlation He would later establish in man. Moreover, the initial commandment to man was “But of **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, thou shalt not eat of it” (Gen 2:17). After eating of the forbidden fruit, the reaction of the first man and woman was to hide, “and Adam and his wife **hid themselves** from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8). An evil heart hides itself—it cloaks itself in hypocrisy to portray a false image of itself. And there’s no gray area or overlap. Our hearts are either abundantly good or abundantly evil, “Either make the tree good ... or else make the tree corrupt ... out of the abundance of the heart.”

Warning us about wolves in sheep’s clothing, Christ taught, “**Ye shall know them by their fruits**. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. **A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.**” (Mat 7:16-20). And the fruit that makes them known are the words spoken from their hearts. They’re very skilled at clothing themselves—saying the right things to hide behind a false image. And anyone knowingly disagreeing with the Son of God’s teaching about His Father and about Himself, expose themselves as corrupt fruit that can only come from a corrupt heart. They’re known by their fruit.

Dictionary.com defines *guile* as “insidious cunning in attaining a goal; crafty or artful deception; duplicity.” It’s any manner of speaking intended to miscommunicate, mislead, or misrepresent the truth or the facts. It’s simply various forms of lying.

Jesus said that all lying is from the devil, “When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for **he is a liar, and the father of it**” (Jhn 8:44), and that all liars will be in the lake of fire, “all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Rev 21:8), “and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (Rev 22:15). Peter taught in his first letter: “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all **guile**, and hypocrisies, and envies, and **all evil speakings**” (2:1); “Who did no sin, neither was **guile found in his mouth**” (2:22); “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him **refrain his tongue from evil**, and his lips that they **speak no guile**” (3:10). The Lord Jesus Christ never spoke any guile, and so this is required of His servants.

Various forms of evil speaking are the devil’s tactics. A short list of only some: lying, accusing, slandering, mocking, misrepresenting, fault finding, blame-shifting, deflecting, and downplaying. But make no mistake about it, those that use the devil’s tactics are being used by the devil. By resorting to his tactics, people are yielding to him and obeying him as lord and master, “to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey” (Rom 6:16). Since “No man can serve two masters” (Mat 6:24), if we’re not obeying the Lord Jesus Christ, we’re obeying the devil.

Though we might try to hide our true selves, our hearts are susceptible to divulging within stressful or emotional situations. For example, after a husband and wife have cooled down from an argument, sometimes one or both will admit to having said things they didn’t mean. Actually, just the opposite is true—it’s during a heated exchange that we’re prone to saying exactly what we mean! Also, our hearts can be given away when talking about ourselves. It’s self-defeating to tell people “I don’t care what people think about me.” And why the need to inform people “God knows my heart” when they already know that? Our mouths betray our hearts—justifying and defending ourselves is the fruit of an evil and impure heart. But staying quiet, “he opened not his mouth” (Isa 53:7), indicates trust in God to defend us.

The condition of our hearts corresponds to the location of our treasure, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mat 6:21; Luk 12:34). Treasure in heaven is pleasing God in heaven while treasure on earth is pleasing people on the earth. We can’t please both. If pleasing God is what we value most, our hearts will have pure motives for everything we say and do—we’ll produce good fruit.