

Staff Work

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Heart-Orientation

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Heart-Orientation

Abstract

"When we are filled by the Spirit of God, our core orientation changes."

Posting about fruit-filled living from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/heart-orientation/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#)

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Daily Scripture Readings

[Psalm 21](#)

[Genesis 15:1-18](#)

[Matthew 12:33-37](#)

At one time, my parents-in-law had an apple tree that bore no fruit. My father-in-law checked it frequently, but, season after season, the fruit failed to appear. Every year, with growing intensity, my mother-in-law advocated that the fruitless tree be cut down. Finally, my father-in-law resorted to quoting Scripture at the offending tree. “Behold!” he loudly announced to the tree one spring evening, “The ax is already at the root of the tree, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10).

A fruit tree that doesn't bear fruit, like the one that belonged to my in-laws, is worthless. Its lack of fruit indicates that something is wrong with the entire tree. Similarly, Jesus uses the harsh words in today's lectionary passage to reveal that the Pharisee's heart-orientation is wrong at the core. They have set themselves in opposition to God. The passage comes in the middle of an argument about the root source of Jesus' power. Just prior to these verses, the Pharisees have accused Jesus of using the power of the devil, or Beelzebub, to cast out demons. And immediately after this section, they ask him for a miraculous sign to prove the source of his power.

I understand that the fruit of a tree is a way of determining the quality of its source. But, verse 34 made me pause. In this verse, Jesus says, “How can you who are evil say anything good?” If we are honest with ourselves, we all realize that we are sinful in our hearts. The Heidelberg Catechism even states, “I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor” (Q & A 5). Using words as a metaphor for observable fruit makes this orientation more tangible. Harmful words come easily and often; careless or vindictive words frequently tear down those around us. In verse 37, Jesus announces that we will be called to give an account at judgment day for every empty, fruitless, or demeaning word we have spoken. If we believe that our words reveal what is in our hearts, this is a harsh standard that few of us will pass. It seems that there is very little hope. “But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil?” asks the Heidelberg Catechism. The answer is “Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God” (Q & A 8).

Unless. Unless the Spirit makes the difference. When we are filled by the Spirit of God, our core orientation changes. We are able to claim the grace of Jesus, who came to earth to stand in our place and take the judgment that ought to be ours. As we change, we begin to bear fruit that is shown through words of love and kindness to those around us.

The morning after my father-in-law quoted Scripture to his fruitless apple tree, as he prepared to make good on his threat, he noticed a blossom. The first year thereafter, it bore a single, large, and extremely juicy apple. In the years after that, it continued to produce good crops of apples. This Advent season, let us pray for a Christ-like heart-orientation that is displayed through fruitful words which build others up.