

## **A Tale of Two Disciples**

### **Part One**

Luke 6:43-45

**Rick Peterson**

It is popular these days to use the word “radical” in relation to the Christian life. Christian leaders speak of radical grace, radical faith, and yes, radical discipleship. But there really is no such thing as radical discipleship. One is either a disciple or one is not. If one is interested only in being a church member, then I suppose discipleship sounds radical. But in the kingdom of God, discipleship defines the normal Christian way of life. What is more, discipleship is not optional. If you are born of the Spirit, and if you confess Christ as Lord of your life—you are a disciple. And our Lord’s teaching found in Luke 6:20-49 is basic, foundational instruction in how to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. His teaching is not designed only for the spiritual elite or ascended masters, but for each and every one who names the name of Christ.

So then, Jesus is not calling you to radical living, but to a lifestyle that is normative for the follower of Christ. But let’s also be clear, this teaching is not about religious perfectionism; rather, this teaching is designed to produce mature sons and daughters of God, living in conformity to the moral character of Christ—the One Master. Jesus calls us to share in his very life, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This means every disciple is becoming by grace what Jesus is by nature. And this is important to you because the teachings of our Lord are designed to provide practical application to that wondrous grace in which we stand—and in which we grow!

### **The Way of the Anti-Disciple**

In this text, our Lord is teaching by use of contrasts. First, he says there are good trees and there are bad trees, each of which are known by its own fruit. This is a simple illustration given to an agrarian people who would have readily grasped his point. One does not look to thorns for figs, nor does one look to a bramble bush for grapes. Nothing could be simpler in meaning. And note also, it does not matter what you may call the tree, it remains what it is, and

it bears the fruit it bears. One can call a thorn bush a fig tree, but it nonetheless remains a thorn bush. And if you seek to find nourishment from a thorn bush, you will instead be wounded, for after all, it is a thorn bush. The same is true of a bramble bush. You can call it a grape vine, but if you look to a bramble bush for grapes, you will be bitterly disappointed. In each case, it is not the fault of the thorns or brambles that one is wounded and disappointed, each is simply producing that they produce by nature. The fault lies with the one who names it something it is not and expects it to produce something it is incapable of producing.

The application here is found in the contrast between true disciples and what I will call today, the anti-disciple. What is an anti-disciple? An anti-disciple is someone who confesses Christ but bears nothing of his character. The anti-disciple is first introduced under the “woes” of verses 24-26. People may assume the anti-disciple is a Christian because they attend church, use Christian terminology, and employ Christian symbols. We may call such a person a Christian because of these things, but the fruit of their lives tell us something different. There is an old saying, “If someone shows you who they are—believe them!” And this principle applies here, if someone proves themselves to be a thorn bush, don’t call them a Christian.

But for some reason we do not do that in the church. A person may be chronically mean-spirited, sarcastic, critical, harsh, bitter, even sexually immoral, and toxic to be around, but we will call them a Christian. Why is this? It is because it means so little to be called a Christian. After decades of consumer-based evangelism and slick marketing, evangelical churches are filled with religious consumers, and not disciples. The Christian character is therefore likened to thorns and brambles, and not the life-giving fruit which flows from the Vine which is Christ (John 15:1-8).

In recent years, I have grown only more and more astonished at the number of professing Christians whose personal lives are characterized by strife, addiction, codependence, abuse, adultery, pornography, gluttony, and so on. It is heartbreaking to witness. And this is not the exception, it is the rule. Apparently “easy-believism,” with its utter lack of discipleship, is not so easy after all. When you plant thorns and brambles, guess what? You get thorns and brambles. The good news is the Lord remains faithful, and it is therefore possible for those who believe to be good trees.

### **The Way of the Disciple**

So far, we have learned that the disciple of Jesus also bears fruit—good fruit. They are blessed says Jesus, because they do not find their consolation in riches, but in the immeasurable riches of Christ and his kingdom. The disciple is not attached to satisfying his or her base instincts. And a disciple of Jesus is familiar with the sorrow of living in a fallen world, including their own continual need for forgiveness and growth in holiness. And what is most surprising, the disciple of Jesus rejoices in being so identified with the Son of Man, that he or she endures the same hatred from the world as he himself did. But the disciple of Jesus overcomes his or her enemies through the power of love as they do good and bless their persecutors. In doing so, the disciple proves his or herself to be among the sons of the Most High by showing continued mercy and kindness, even to the unthankful and evil. Within the church, the disciple does not assume the role of judge, nor does he or she condemn others; instead, the disciple is ready to forgive, and ready also to freely give of their time and resources. Disciples are givers, not just financially, but of their lives for the sake of others.

And the disciple does this because he or she is a good tree. Now make note, the disciple is not a bad tree working to become a good tree, but has been made a good tree by nature. Something miraculous has changed inwardly so that the disciple is now a good tree by nature. There is no third hybrid tree here—no “good-bad” tree. Luther’s doctrine of “Justified and Sinner” doesn’t find biblical warrant here. The good fruit described above is as natural for the good tree as is the fruit of the bad tree. Both simply bear out what comes by nature.

### **A Matter of the Heart**

At the heart of the matter is always this matter of the heart. Our Lord leaves the references to trees, and now turns to the contrast between a good heart and an evil heart. Just as a tree brings forth fruit in accord with its nature, so also a person brings out of the treasure of their own heart either good or evil. Once again, this is simple teaching. A good heart brings forth good, and an evil heart brings forth evil.

The pressing question is this: How does the condition of one's heart come to be? What makes an evil heart and what makes a good heart? Surely it is not mere random selection. The answer is an evil heart is a fallen heart, and a good heart comes about only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Adam was created with a good heart, but embraced evil by choosing to seek autonomy from his Creator. Israel, too, was chosen by God, but the incurable wound of chronic rebellion caused them to break the Sinai covenant (Jeremiah 11 and 30:12). But God promised a new covenant, not like the old covenant, but a covenant in which God himself would act to produce in his people a new heart (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-32). In Christ, this new covenant is fulfilled; indeed, Christ himself is the new covenant (Isaiah 42:6-9). And in Christ, the new Adam, the moral likeness of God is restored to human nature and made good once again. In short, the disciple of Jesus becomes by grace what Jesus is by nature. And as we are hearing in our Lord's teaching, it is from the abundance of one's heart from which one speaks, either good or evil.

### **The Heart and Mouth Connection**

Notice the first word in today's text is "For." This means our Lord is continuing the thought began in v.41 and 42, which reads,

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Note how verse 42 refers to what is being spoken: "Brother, let me remove the speck in your eye." And then note the final line of today's text, "For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." There is a connection here between the condition of one's heart and how one engages others, especially other Christians. In this case, the person in verses 41 and 42 is quick to help another with a speck in their eye, while ignoring the plank in their own. This the practice of a hypocrite says Jesus, and he says it quite emphatically at that. An anti-disciple is a hypocrite of the first order.

And It is a hypocrisy that stems from the spiritual blindness described in verse 39. The practice of focusing on another's fault and avoiding one's own faults is the practice of a spiritually blind hypocrite, and, we learn from today's text, this all stems from an evil heart. Instead of looking to Jesus for deliverance from the plank in his own eye, the hypocrite usurps the role of Jesus in another's life. The "evil treasure" of his or her heart, the hypocrite finds pride in, or treasures, being able to "call it like it is" in another's life, while doing nothing to change their own character.

This type of spiritual blindness and hypocrisy characterized the religion of the scribes and Pharisees. They loved to point out another's faults, but were blind to their own (John 9:40-41). Jesus repeatedly condemned their hypocrisy (Matthew 23), and I don't believe he thinks any different today. The people of God in Christ Jesus are not to be of the Pharisaical type, but to be like Jesus in thought, word, and in deed. This is why Jesus said in verse 40, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who perfectly trained will be like his teacher." Those with genuine spiritual sight work on their own faults in order to be more like Jesus.

### **Summary**

The normative Christian life is the way of the disciple. It is not radical to be a disciple, it is the path every Christian is to follow, for it is the path every Christian is equipped by the Spirit of Christ to walk. It is glorious to realize that those born of the Spirit are made good trees, and have been given a new heart, the treasure of which is Christ himself. In stark contrast, is the one who professes Christ but bears thorns and brambles, and not the nourishing fruit of the Spirit. The anti-disciple may use Christian terminology and symbols, and be involved in the local church, but the test is what comes out of one's mouth, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." How one engages others is the best evidence of the condition of one's heart. **Amen.**

© Rick Peterson.2019.

