

There's a Hole in the Bucket 11-14-04

Matthew 12:33-37

³³ "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶ But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

³³ "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit."
Jesus said something similar in Matthew 7:20. "You will recognize a tree by its fruit."
Good people do good things. Evil people do evil things. (Proverbs 10:20-21) Jesus had just healed a man in a hopeless condition and delivered him from a demon. (Matthew 12:22) Is that bad or good fruit? And how is it that anyone would refuse to recognize it as good? If His works were good, then how could He be in league with Satan as they claimed?

It works the other way as well. Someone who calls evil good must be a bad tree. His fruit is deception and slander. (James 3:12) By declaring this eternal truth, Jesus was helping the common person in His day, and us today, to discern the difference in people. I am amazed at how few people take this to heart. Because a person is charismatic and entertaining, or influential, we will excuse their blatant sin and call them good. We have examples in the news this week. At the same time, we will call a person evil even when their life is filled with good fruit. I am not gifted with a great deal of discernment, but I can understand this simple truth that Jesus taught. It is a very practical way to help us know the heart of those we come in contact with. What is the fruit of their life? What are the words that come from their lips?

He went on to say,

³⁴ "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

Jesus was saying, "You bunch of poisonous baby snakes! Your heart is evil, so your words are evil." The Pharisees would often travel in little packs. "Just like the snake that hatches a bunch of baby snakes," Jesus was saying, "You slither around in little groups ready to spew your poison." I've heard that baby snakes that are venomous are equal to or more poisonous than the mature of their kind. It is God's way of protecting them when they are small and vulnerable.

My mother was working for Dr. G. when a man came in who had been bitten on both index fingers by a baby rattler. He heard a baby rattler one night and thought he could just pick it up and move it. He received anti-venom that night. She said the next morning when he came to the office he looked like death warmed over.

Commented [notes1]: ²⁰The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.

²¹ The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.
Proverbs 10:20-21 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²²Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.
Matthew 12:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹²My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.
James 3:12 (NIV)

Fortunately he survived. Jesus was saying these little groups of Pharisees slithered around like a batch of baby snakes looking for some innocent victim to inject with their doctrines of death. (Psalms 140:3)

Commented [notes4]: ³ They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips.
Psalms 140:3 (NIV)

They had just said Jesus was in league with Lucifer. After all the wonderful works of Jesus that should have convinced the hardest of hearts, these little snakes still came up with ways to confuse and poison the people. Listen to what Jesus said about them during the week before they killed him. ¹³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ¹⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.... ³³ "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Matthew 23:13-15, 33 (NIV)

Look at verse 34 again. "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Your mouth is a bucket, and your heart is the well. (Luke 6:45) You may have heard the song about Liza who had a hole in her bucket. We all have a hole in our bucket. (Ecclesiastes 10:12) Even if we try not to spill out what is in the well of our heart, the hole in our bucket tends to leak it out on others. If your heart is proud and selfish, then critical, complaining, destructive speech will flow from your lips. These hypocrites in this passage couldn't help but speak evil. Even when they tried not to let the water out of their bucket (mouth), they find there is a hole in the bucket. It leaks out all over everything making a great mess. Whether we want them to or not, our words reveal what is in our heart. (Proverbs 6:2-3)

Commented [notes5]: ⁴⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.
Luke 6:45 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹² Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips.
Ecclesiastes 10:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ² if you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth, ³ then do this, my son, to free yourself, since you have fallen into your neighbor's hands: Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor!
Proverbs 6:2-3 (NIV)

When it comes to speaking evil, are any of us guiltless? James said that no man can tame the tongue. (James 3:7-8) If we put that with what Jesus taught here, we see that no man continually walks in the Spirit. Until we see the Lord, we will be growing in grace and surrendering more of our heart to the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18) It is true that He gives us a new heart when we come to Him, (Ezekiel 36:26) but we must keep yielding it to that new life. (Galatians 5:16)

Commented [notes8]: ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.
James 3:7-8 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV)

The extent to which our words are destructive and complaining, we see an exact reflection of the evil in the well of our heart. If you don't see some room for improvement, ask your spouse how you're doing? When someone would tell DL Moody they were entirely sanctified, Moody would ask, "Then you don't mind if I confirm that with your wife do you?" There is a reality check. The bucket tends to leak the most when we are around our spouse. Better yet, sit down with Jesus in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the things you have said and the effect they had on others. Then you will see where your heart is! The Holy Spirit can be more revealing than your spouse, because He sees the motivation behind your words. You can fool people, but you can't fool Him. Are your words full of praise and encouragement? (Philippians 4:8)

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.
Galatians 5:16 (NIV)

In the previous passage Jesus told them they either gathered or scattered. Our words will either gather people to Jesus, or they will scatter people. We have some

Commented [notes12]: ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.
Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

wonderful encouragers in this congregation. You know where their heart is. (Hebrews 3:13) They are gatherers not scatterers, but we all have a long way to go. We need to be aware of how our words affect others, whether they draw people to Christ, or repel them. Will you let the Holy Spirit speak to you about this?

Commented [notes13]: ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

When we see the many places we fail, what are we to do? We should take our hearts to the Lord and ask for an extreme makeover. (Ezekiel 11:19) I've heard that there is a TV program that takes people who think they are plain and unattractive and, through the wonders of cosmetic surgery and self-esteem coaches, turn the ugly duckling into a beautiful swan. But that won't change the heart. It might make one more confident, but the bucket is still going to pour out what is in the well. You can get a degree, change your wardrobe, and fix your nose, but only the Great Physician can change a heart. He specializes in heart makeovers. (2 Corinthians 5:17) He wants to fill your heart with His Holy Spirit so your mouth will overflow with praise and encouragement. Imagine what your language will be like when you surrender every part of your heart to Him. The fruits of the Spirit will describe it. Your words will be full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23) There is a yardstick for where our heart is at this moment. Take your current expressions, and line them up with the yardstick of Galatians 5:22-23. That will be about as convicting as anything you'll ever do. We ought to do it on a regular basis because it will give us a true picture of the condition of our heart. You need a stethoscope to listen to the physical condition of your heart. You need Galatians 5:22-23 to check your spiritual condition as you listen to your words. (Ephesians 4:29)

Commented [notes14]: ¹⁹ I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 11:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)

This is the thing that convicted Isaiah when he stood in God's presence. ⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Isaiah 6:5 (NIV) We don't think our words are so bad until we see the LORD, and you can see Him in the fruits of the Spirit, for they describe His divine nature.

Commented [notes17]: ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

What are we to do when we see our words don't line up with the fruits of the Spirit? Don't wallow in condemnation! (Romans 8:1) That is where the enemy of your soul wants you. Make every fall a fall forward. (A favorite one liner of John Maxwell) Learn from conviction what to do differently next time. Did you rush to speak when accused? Take time to pray next time. Were your words unwise and fruitless? Study Jesus' answers, and learn from Him. Was it gossip that just leaked out from the hole in your bucket? Realize that it was in your heart first.

Commented [notes18]: ¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1 (NIV)

Without realizing it, we want people to think we are special because we have some inside knowledge on a person's life. That is really the need to be accepted, and shows we haven't discovered how accepted we are in Jesus. Let your speech reveal your heart to you. Then you can take it to the Lord and grow in those areas.

³⁵ *The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.*
The good tree produces good fruit. Why is that? It is of good ancestry. It came from

a line of good fruit producing trees. When you come to Christ, you enter a new family, the family of faith. In fact, the Apostle Paul said you are grafted into a good tree. (Romans 11:17-18)

The other thing that produces good fruit is the soil. Jesus said fruit depends on what kind of soil your heart consists of. (Matthew 13:8) We are back to the issue of the heart. He said some hearts are so hard that nothing can take root. (Matthew 13:19) Others are shallow and so roots can't go down. When things get hot, they shrivel and die. (Matthew 13:20-21) Some grow up, but the concerns of life act as weeds to keep it from bearing fruit. (Matthew 13:22) But the good soil, or the good heart, is the one that allows the roots of faith to go deep and draws up nourishment to produce fruit. The roots are down into the water of the Word, always staying green even when there is a draught. (Psalms 1:2-3)

From these Bible illustrations we can see the good things stored up in the good man are the Word of God and faith that comes with a new life in Christ. Are your roots deep into the Word? Have you stored up good things in the depths of your heart? It will be evidenced by the words you speak. If you recognize you need to change, you can begin that change by storing up good things. Memorize God's word. Learn these eternal principles that Jesus taught, but most of all, develop your relationship with the Holy Spirit. That will start you on your way to an extreme heart makeover.

One more Biblical idea for bearing good fruit is that we must grow into the light. (1 Thessalonians 5:5) When we grow fruit trees, we prune them so that each branch has its place in the sun. Each branch must grow in the right direction. Where is your life aimed, toward light or darkness? There is something about light that causes fruit buds to form. (Ephesians 5:8) Stay in the light!

The evil man has things stored up too, but what he stores up are evil things. We will fix our heart upon something, and if it isn't good then it is evil. As we focus on worldly pleasure of one sort or another, our bucket usually leaks some of that on others, and they see what is stored up in our hearts. (Proverbs 15:28)

In case we didn't get the seriousness of the issue, Jesus adds,
³⁶ "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."
Sobering statement! The word for "careless" or "idle" (KJV) can also be translated "negative", "unfruitful" or "ineffective". That brings it home, doesn't it? Some people have nothing but negative comments to make. You can tell them the very best of news, but their heart is full of negativity so the bucket can only bring up negative responses. Our words should build up, not tear down.

We can fool ourselves as to what our words are like. I have seen people absolutely insist that they didn't say what was reported to have been said. Then someone brought out a tape recorder and sure enough. It has been shown that over time we have a tendency to rewrite our past. We grow to believe things were different than they actually were. It is interesting how we can even lie to ourselves and believe it.

Commented [notes19]: ¹⁷If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸ do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. Romans 11:17-18 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Matthew 13:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. Matthew 13:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. Matthew 13:20-21 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. Matthew 13:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Psalms 1:2-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 1 Thessalonians 5:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: ⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light Ephesians 5:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: ²⁸ The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil. Proverbs 15:28 (NIV)

(Jeremiah 17:9) That is how depraved the old nature is, and it is manifested via the mouth more than by any other expression.

Commented [notes28]: ⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

Listen to how severely James puts it. *If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.* James 1:26 (NIV) If we think we are a spiritual people, but don't control our words, James says we are deceiving ourselves and our religion is worthless. That is quite a shocking statement. He can say that because, first and foremost, true religion should transform the heart and that will change our words. When the well has good water, even if the bucket leaks, it leaks good water.

Scientists say that sound waves never cease. Somewhere every word spoken by every man and women is still vibrating ever so slightly in the elements of this world. Jesus has a record of every word you have spoken. There is only one way to erase all the mistakes, all the words you wish never left your lips. You must bring them to Jesus and ask for forgiveness. (1 John 1:9) If they were against a person, you should go to that person too, if it is possible. Set the record straight with those who were privy. Make sure your conscious is clean between you and God. Only Jesus' sacrifice in your place can take care of all those words before God that, like loose arrows, were flung into space and damaged others without your knowledge.

Commented [notes29]: ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

Even on judgment day, our words will reveal the condition of our heart. Have your words been transformed since you came to Christ? I'm not just talking about swearing (Ephesians 5:4), though that is important too. I mean about putting others down, condemning others, speaking evil of your neighbor, passing on gossip and slander. (James 4:11) This election year I have heard way too many words that should never have been uttered and some of them came from my lips.

Commented [notes30]: ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: ¹¹ Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. James 4:11 (NIV)

May God help us and have mercy on us! May He create in us a new heart, an extreme makeover of the heart, and may our words be filled with the life of the Holy Spirit. Do yourself a favor and your friends too. The next time someone says, "I don't think this is gossip, but..." Quickly respond, "Sorry, I'd rather not hear it if you have the slightest doubt. If it is not edifying, no thank you." When you are tempted to speak against someone, remind yourself of this verse, "By my words I will be justified, and by my words I will be condemned."

Let us also be cautious of condemning something as not of God as these Pharisees did. The fruit will speak for itself. Let us concentrate on our heart being right (Psalms 51:10) so our fruit will be good and not grieve the Holy Spirit within us. (Ephesians 4:30) I often pray David's prayer and encourage you to memorize it too. *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.* Psalm 141:3 If our words are from the Holy Spirit, they will be seasoned with grace. (Colossians 4:6) Don't you find Jesus' words to you are always gracious, even when He corrects you?

Commented [notes32]: ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalms 51:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes33]: ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes34]: ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6 (NIV)

Here is my challenge to us all. Take some time to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the flavor of your words. Let Him convict you when you speak. Then look further into your heart, the source of those words, and let Him perform an extreme makeover.