

# Wherefore By Their Fruits You Shall Know Them

- Mathew 7:20

"Beware of **false prophets**, which come to you in **sheep's clothing**, but inwardly they are **ravening wolves**. 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. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." - Matt. 7:15-20

How can we tell the ravening wolves from the peaceable sheep? What are their fruits? What does it mean, "grapes of thorns or figs of thistles"?

I have heard many people say, "By their fruits we shall know them, whether they be good or evil". Then the speaker will turn their focus on judging either the actions, situation or results. We often make judgments according to what we feel or believe is right saying, "the fruit is Bad" or "the fruit is Good" because it is agreeable or disagreeable to me. It seems that often we have translated the fruits to mean actions and ask, "What are they doing?" to determine whether a person is in the right or not. Generally, we use this logic to justify ourselves in doing or not doing whatever we are judging. The question is, "Is that the correct interpretation and application of this scripture's message?"

One recent example of this came when I was speaking to a friend about Warren Jeffs, the Prophet/Leader of the Fundamental Latter-Day Saint Church who said, "By their fruits we shall know them, and being in jail seems to be very bad fruit! I mean if the leader of your church is in jail, then, there's something wrong with the message of the church."

At first glance, this seems to make sense. However, further considering the implications of these statements, we must conclude that all people who end up in jail were not worth following because they had "Bad Fruit". The following list of spiritual leaders who found themselves in jail produces surprising results:

- Joseph Smith – Imprisoned multiple times
- Various early LDS Leaders – Had warrants for arrest and fled to Mexico
- John the Baptist – eventually beheaded by the king while in jail
- Jesus Christ – Sentenced to Death by the leaders of the people
- Various Biblical and Book of Mormon prophets and missionaries

**We cannot know the righteous by their Situations, so Situations are not the Fruits by which we can know them...**

I have heard people being judged by all sorts of “Fruits”, all of which could easily condemn the righteous. Although, there are many ways people use this scripture, the fruit is generally translated to be undesirable situations, unaccepted actions or different beliefs. Another example I have heard is the following:

- “My uncle lost his wife and children in divorce because of his beliefs, so the fruit was bad, and I don’t want it for me and my family.”

Again, using “The law of Universal Application”, we could apply this same judgment to all those who joined the church and lost their families we say they did the right thing and will be blessed. My own mother joined the church knowing that she would be no longer welcome by her family. Only members of this church would call this “good fruit” and her family would call it “Bad Fruit”. The results are based on perception and that is based upon what we already.

**We cannot know the righteous by the Results, so Results are not the Fruits by which we can know them...**

Can we judge by looking at actions? Are actions the fruit by which we shall know them? As we consider actions as being the fruits, we quickly become aware of righteous doing things that would be generally accepted as being wicked. For example, Abraham intending to kill Isaac (Gen. 22), Nephi killing Laban (1Ne. 4), God commanding his people to commit genocide (1Sam. 15:3, ), and the list goes on.

On the other side of the coin, we can see that doing things that are generally accepted as being good, like praying or giving gifts, are condemned as being evil by the prophet Moroni when our intention is not in alignment with our actions, (Moro. 7). Inherently good actions can then be evil, and inherently bad actions can be good.

**We cannot know the righteous by their Actions, so Actions are not the Fruits by which we can know them...**

There are many stories in the scriptures which illustrate this problem, but none are more clear than the story of Job. Job had it all, good health, wonderful family, incredible wealth and a life many would envy. When he lost his health, his wife told him to “curse God and die”. After losing his, family and wealth, his friends determined that Job had displeased God and was being punished for sinning. These friends were looking at the situation and determined that Job had done something to displease God. They were judging Job by the situation he was in which they determined were bad fruits and a sign that God was displeased with Job. They did not know the mind of God who was well pleased with Job the whole time. Later, Job gained more than all he had lost. (See, The Book of Job)

Others like King Noah were very wicked but had all the riches, health and power anyone could want. He was also the head of the church, which did not make him righteous. (See, Mosiah 11)

## **We cannot know the righteous by Blessings or Curses, so Blessings and Curses are not the Fruits by which we can know them...**

It has been said that we should not judge people, but should judge actions, situations and beliefs to determine them to be good or evil. But we have just looked at each of these and found that none of them will always determine right or wrong. In so doing, we have also inadvertently shown that a written law is not God's will in every situation. Joseph Smith said,

“God said, "Thou shalt not kill;" at another time He said, "Thou shalt utterly destroy." **This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted--by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed.** Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. If we seek first the kingdom of God, all good things will be added. So with Solomon: first he asked wisdom, and God gave it him, and with it every desire of his heart, even things which might be considered abominable to all who understand the order of heaven only in part, but which in reality were right because God gave and sanctioned by special revelation.” – Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Five 1842-43, p.256

So, we live in a changing world. We even, as Mormons, pride ourselves on the fact that we accept current revelation which we need because old revelation may not apply in new situations. This is not the problem. The problem is discerning the fruits by which we will know the good from the bad. Now, having illustrated the confusion that we now face, I refer to Mormon who makes this interesting statement:

“For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night” – Moro. 7:15

Although this scripture says the way to judge is plain, it seems that this plain and simple truth has eluded us throughout history and even today. What are the real fruits by which we can know good from evil?

Let's look at a few of the fruits the scriptures point out, to get some ideas;

"But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance**: against such there is no law." - Gal. 5:22-23

"And it came to pass that I beheld a tree, whose **fruit** was desirable to make one **happy**. And it came to pass that I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof; and I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever

before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And **as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy;**" - Ne. 8:10-12

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the **peaceable fruit** of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." - Heb. 12:11

In all these scriptures, the fruits are NOT actions, situations or beliefs. The fruits are feelings or states of being. The fruit is within the person and relates to what they are experiencing. If we looked at these fruits while judging a person, we would say, is the person loving, peaceful, longsuffering, gentle, patient, and joyful. Because these feelings are good and invite and entice those who feel them to do good, they come from God. Mormon explains why this is so,

"Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil. Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually. But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God." - Moro. 7:10-13

I can almost hear some saying that those feelings do not invite and entice us to do good and love God. In fact, I have heard some say that the devil has a counterfeit for all of those feelings. If the devil can make you feel love or peace for example, then would it not invite you to do good? All the laws and teachings of the prophets are summed up in two points. Love God and love your neighbor, (Matt. 22:36-40). It is impossible to love and not fulfill all the laws of God because they are based on Love, (Rom. 13: 8, 10, Gal. 5: 14, James 2: 8). So if the devil can help us to Love, then he would be doing good, which he cannot do. Along with Love, Peace, longsuffering, patience and other good feelings, which help us to treat others with love, come from God and are of no use to the devil. God's goodness unites people with love in harmony and peace. Christ explained this when he taught, if you are not one, you are not mine.

This was illustrated when the apostles were disturbed by a man who was casting out devils. This man was not associated with Christ or the same group as the apostles, so the apostles, being disturbed, forbade him from continuing to cast out devils. When Christ heard this he responded, "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us." - Luke 9:49-50, Mark 9:38-41.

Just as these good fruits come from God, all negative feelings come from the devil and produce evil including separation, pride, selfishness, disunity, and war.

Below is a simple comparison of both good and bad fruits in no particular order:

Good Fruit	Bad Fruit
Love Gratitude Joy Excitement Hope Faith Satisfaction Patience Peace Acceptance/	Annoyance Worry Criticism/Blame Anger Revenge Hate Resentment Guilt Unrest Depression Fear

We all know when we have negative feelings and when we have positive feelings. Some may be stronger than others, but all feelings are either negative or positive. We cannot be under the influence of the positive and the negative at the same time. The positive will always dispel the negative, (1 Jn. 4:18, Moro. 8: 16).

All good feelings come from God and are uplifting, encouraging and enabling. A person cannot experience these feelings without doing good because these feelings are the fruits of goodness. And, as the sweet fruits of the trees have seeds, so do the fruits of goodness contain the seeds of goodness. Just as an apple contains seeds that can be planted to produce another apple tree, so the fruits of goodness contain the seeds which can produce good trees. And, as an apple seed will never produce a cactus, neither can Love, peace or any other good fruit be planted in our hearts and produce evil fruit.

Because these attributes are internal, they may be difficult to see in others. We also must remember that we are all still progressing toward the end goal and spend our time influenced by both sides of the spectrum at some point. So, to say a person is either good or bad would be incorrect as we all fluctuate between the two sides. We also experience degrees of each side. Sometimes we are full of intense love, and sometimes we are full of intense hate. Other times we might be pleasantly satisfied and at peace or mildly discouraged and generally sad.

In relation to this topic, we must consider our philosophies and beliefs which determine how we view or perceive the world and the actions of those around us. For example is our belief schema is full of doctrines which separate, criticize and judge others such as racist notions, our hearts will be full of hate, disdain and other negative feelings. We can then use this principle to determine if our current accepted beliefs are good and of God or not, as well as new teachings. And the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, (Moro. 7:15).

“Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.” - D&C 8:2

Remember that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness and temperance:” (Gal. 5:22-23) These are all

positive emotions which are felt in our heart. When the Spirit is present, we will always feel it positively in our heart even if it is only simple peace. We are told in our minds both by comprehending the answer we are being given and mentally recognizing the feelings in our heart.

**The Holy Ghost “dwells in our hearts” and will be accompanied by the positive feelings. That is the plain and simple way to know, EVERY TIME!!!**

All good things invite and entice us to do good, and so to have these good feelings or fruits. This was explained very clearly by Alma as he spoke of trying the words of others which he compared to seeds...

“Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.

And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness.

O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good.

And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, **by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.**” – Alma 32:28-43

So, what is this fruit which is most precious and pure above all? Why it is the **Love** of God, (1Ne. 10:10-18, 1Ne. 11:8-25). By these fruits, ye shall know them.

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