

The Test of Fruit

Hebrews 6:4-12

We are so blessed by the mothers in our church. Mothers can come in all kinds of ways, not always just physical mothers, but spiritual mothers as well. I want to say thank you to the moms in our church! What you do for your children, who you are, though not always seen by all, is always seen by God, and He is pleased and honored by how well you take care of your children, how you seek to love them, and show the Lord to them! Husbands and fathers, let us seek to honor our wives and the mothers of our children always, not just on Mother's Day.

Muppet Christmas Carol wax fruit scene.

Gonzo and Rizzo are at Scrooge's nephew's house with the ghost of Christmas present. Rizzo, ever hungry and eating, strolls up to Gonzo with some wax grapes...

Gonzo: Say, do you know that fruit is wax?

Rizzo: Oh yeah, I wondered about the texture...

I like this scene, not just because it is silly, but because it really gets at the heart of the next section of Hebrews where the Writer is continuing to bring to a point some hard and difficult words, some warnings, about not falling away from the faith. The main idea is that the fruit of our lives will demonstrate whose we are: either we will bear false fruit, and so show our unregenerate hearts, or good fruit, showing the true fruit of a saving faith in Christ.

Big Idea: The fruit of our lives is the evidence of whose we are.

Hebrews 6:4-12

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the

love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

False Fruit

One of the most difficult and challenging passages in the NT. Not only what is said can be difficult to understand, but how to interpret what is said in light of everything else can be tricky, and if done poorly, can lead us into false teaching, or at the very least bring insecurity into our faith.

We don't shy away from hard teachings in the Bible, God put them there for a reason: it is always best to interpret hard passages in light of everything else that has already been said and will be said.

Hypothetical

Is this a hypothetical situation that the Writer is referring to? Absolutely not!

Real people, real possibility of apostatizing! If it was merely hypothetical, then it would be absurd to stick it in here since it is not a parable, but an actual warning against falling away from Christ and His Church.

Actual

Goes against all the other teaching in the Scriptures regarding the work of God to elect, save, and preserve His people over their lives. When we have a difficult, or unclear, passage in the Bible, we always hold it up to the light of the clear and explicit passages of the Bible! Scripture illuminates Scripture.

Scripture teaches that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ... – Philippians 1:6

Scripture teaches that nothing in life can ever separate true believers from the love of God in Christ... – Romans 8:38-39

Scripture teaches that the golden chain of God's purpose is not thinning out toward the end, but that they very same people who are foreknown, foreordained, called, and justified, are also glorified... – Romans 8:29-30

Scripture teaches that believers are kept by the power of God through faith unto final salvation and for an incorruptible inheritance... – 1 Peter 1:4-5

Scriptures teaches that true believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption... – Ephesians 4:30

Scripture teaches that apostates were never true members of Christ because otherwise they would not have fallen away... – 1 John 2:19

Scripture teaches that the new life in Christ is eternal. What kind of eternal life would that be which could be brought to an end in our own life-span?

Jesus taught that it is impossible to lead the elect astray... – Matthew 24:24

Jesus teaches that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day... – John 6:40

Jesus teaches that I know my sheep and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand... – John 10:27-28

Thus, what we see in the many explicit teachings of the Scriptures, is that true saving faith is one which always leads to eternal life, and will never be taken away! The person who has a genuine saving faith is part of the elect invisible Church of Christ and will never be able to apostatize. So, the Writer is not discussing the possibility of losing one's salvation, but again giving the sobering reminder to take seriously the things of God and the gift of God in the person of His Son!

Apparent

Once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God, and powers of the age to come... – Hebrews 6:4

All of these words describe a person who was acquainted with the gospel, with the church, with the sacraments, with the Scriptures, yet who ultimately rejected it!

The difference between Peter and Judas. Both of them denied and betrayed Jesus, but only one repented with tears and came back to Christ. Coming back to Christ is the evidence of genuine faith and knowledge of the forgiveness of God. Judas only had worldly sorrow, for he did not seek out forgiveness, but took matters into his own hands to punish himself for his crime. It was the evidence that there was not genuine faith.

We are all like Peter or Judas. We all have denied and betrayed Christ. Yet, who will you turn to so seek out forgiveness?

This brings us to why the Writer discusses the test of fruit in people's lives. Hence, the connection to the Muppet Christmas Carol wax fruit vs. real fruit

Summarize the teaching about the four soils...

The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. – Mark 4:3-20

Summarize the teaching of the parable of the wheat and the weeds in the master's field...

Both of these parables are useful for helping us understand the warning that the Writer is giving: don't be like the first 3 soils which either rejects the word out right, or it eventually dies, be like the 4th soil which actually bears the good fruit of the Spirit.

The second lesson in this: in the Church there will be those who are the good wheat, and those who are weeds, yet both will be present until the time of judgment comes. At the time of judgement the fruit of each person's life will be seen and exposed before God and man, and the wheat will be brought into the Master's house and the weeds will be burned up!

Participating in the people of God and the sacraments of the church without real faith

Another allusion to the wilderness generation who experienced all of these things, yet they all died in unbelief! It is possible to be a part of the visible church without being part of the invisible, true church of God

For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened... – Hebrews 4:2

The wilderness generation is still in view at this point in Hebrews.

Good Fruit

The Writer had been using the third person in vs. 4-6, and now switches back to the first and second person in vs. 9. This, again, reminds us that the Writer is giving a strong warning to keep the true believers strongly dependent upon the grace and power of of God in preserving us in Him. In contrast to the false fruit which was being discussed, the Writer, anticipating the listener's anxiety, moves to encourage them in the faith. He starts by reassuring them that they are true believers and that has been demonstrated admirably.

Inner Life

Inner repentance from sin

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. – 2 Corinthians 7:9-10

Inner assurance of our standing as adopted children

you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father! The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ... – Romans 8:15-17

Inner fruit of the Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... – Galatians 5:22-23

Outer life

Works of love

Service to the saints

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. – Hebrews 10:32-35

Find ways to serve people! How we serve the church is a direct correlation to our faith and maturity in Christ.

Not just acts of mercy, but serving in ministries of the church, being present in the lives of the saints, giving of ourselves to others, intentionally seeking out Christian fellowship. Being there for one another in the hard times.

Persevering lifestyle

The final exhortation is one in which the Writer is encouraging the individuals in the church to strive to have the same kind of earnestness of faith and works of love, and the full assurance of hope that is ours in Christ

Having people in our lives who are further down the road than us in the faith gives us strength and encouragement to keep going. This is part of why it is vital to be a part of the local church, multi-generational, can see those who are ahead and know that it is possible to keep going.

Who are those examples in your life? We can see the who congregation of the saints and find so much comfort in knowing that what we are experiencing now is not unique or strange, but all of God's people have experienced what we do, and have continued on in the faith

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man... – 1 Corinthians 10:13

What is the promise that God gives to us?

That if there is any genuine love for Christ in us, it is a work which God began in us, and He began that work in us because He elected us for His own glory. Those whom He chooses He never unchooses, but will continue to grow and sanctify throughout their lives. He will never leave His chosen elected people, they are the Ones whom His Son died for and rose again to new life to give them new life!

The perseverance of the saints is tied to the unconditional election of the Father, and the effectual calling, or irresistible grace, that draws us and keeps us close to Christ!

These are the promises that God given to us to encourage us to keep going, to seek Him in bearing good fruit as evidence of the gift of faith which He has give to all of His children, a gift which can never be revoked, or taken away, or lost. A gift which keeps us close to the Father and in the family of God!

Let's pray.