

Examining your Inner Life
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A few weeks ago I learned that another prominent, nationally-known pastor was removed from his position as Lead Pastor of the church he served. The elders of this church wrote an open letter to the congregation that explaining what had happened. While there was no adultery, there was a long list of problems and sins that persisted for years. The sins included “lack of self control,” “abandonment of genuine Biblical community,” and “manipulation and lying” among many other sins.

Whenever I read or hear stuff like this I have a number of emotional reactions. First of all, it makes me sad. These kinds of things hurt. People are hurt; men and women, boys and girls within this local congregation are struggling with anger, confusion and feelings of betrayal. And the cause of Christ is hurt, too. The Enemy won a battle. While we know (and rejoice that) Jesus wins the war, it’s sad to see casualties along the way and the mission hurt. All this pain makes me sad.

I also feel afraid. I get afraid for myself and for our church. Your pastors, your leaders, your worship team volunteers, your SS teachers, your Titus 2 mentors... every one of us are susceptible to the same temptations. We are susceptible to losing self-control, abandoning Biblical community and pridefully going it alone; none of us are above manipulating and lying to each other (and so much more). Every single one of us can hurt one another and the mission. That scares me. I’m aware of the role pastors play in the life of a congregation and I’m afraid of causing pain and dishonoring God.

Why? Why does stuff like this happen? And could have the leaders intervened sooner? Why didn’t this pastor ask for help? And how did this happen? How does it happen that a man who preached the good news of Jesus miss it for himself? When we consider what we’ve been talking about recently in Luke 6 and the call to love and to avoid judging we might ask, “How did the leaders know it was time to intervene? Why did they feel in their judgment the behavior had to stop now and not later?”

Our passage today, I think, helps us process why we all do what we do. So, if you’re interested in learning what Jesus has to say about why we do what we do even when we know better, turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 6:43-45 (READ).

Look at the very first word in vs. 43; it’s the word *for*. That lets us know that Jesus is not beginning a new section, he’s adding more to what he’s already said. Look for those keywords, FBC; pay attention to how the scripture writers string their arguments and thoughts together. The Bible is not just a bunch of random, fortune cookie, facebook-styled inspirational quotes. The Bible is a detailed story of God’s plan to bring his children home. And the story all fits together. These kinds of words help us understand how.

So, this section is teaching that the fruit of one's life due to the internal makeup of that person (we'll talk more about that in a minute) is connected or related to Jesus' emphasis on love. If you remember, starting in vs. 27 Jesus has been teaching the people to love others the way God loves others. But this love is a radical, sacrificial love. It's the kind of love that goes above and beyond what anyone might expect. That's how God loved us; he went above and beyond. Here's how God went above and beyond: we are sinners. We were hostile to God. We hated God's way and God's truth. We were hell-bent on our own way. But God still loves us. He still shows us mercy; he still gives us grace. Even though we are his enemies he still loves us. It's just incredible!

Here's the point of focus of the connection: if you love people the way God loves you, it's because that's the kind of person God has made you. And if you don't love people, if you're rude and judgmental, if you are impatient and critical, it's because that's the kind of person you are. That's the point of the text, right? Vs. 43 says, "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit." He goes on in vs. 44 with a simple analogy, "For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush." Apples don't come from spruce trees; oranges don't come from maples. This is real common sense stuff, right? Jesus, of course, isn't concerned about fruit trees; this is for us. So, he's saying the only people who interact with others in kind, merciful and forgiving ways are people who are in fact kind, merciful and forgiving on the inside. It's who they are. That's the key; we do what we do because of what's true and real on the inside.

Listen to how Dallas Willard says it in his book *Renovation of the Heart* (pg. 39). Willard goes on to say that we're tempted to sidestep this reality; rather than facing what's true about our hearts we might say, "I just blew it" as if blowing it is somehow an exception to Jesus' rule. And yes, while there are many factors at work when we act including being caught off guard, but if I blow it it's because I'm the kind of person who blows it. It still speaks to my heart, my heart. You've heard me say thousands of times before; the typical defense of, "I did a bad thing, but I'm a good person," is completely unbiblical. If I cheat, it's because that's the kind of person I am. If I lie, it's because I'm a liar. I do what I do because of who I am.

This doesn't mean it's an all or nothing deal. What I mean is: people aren't only evil or only good. As we live in between worlds, as we live in the *already saved, but not yet complete*, our actions are mixed because we are still waiting to be sanctified and matured by God. The point Jesus is making isn't that we're either all good or all bad; the point is found at the end of vs. 45; out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. That which is abounding on the inside, that which is most dominating the interior of your life is what will come out.

Let's make it a tad more complicated. Let's say over time God has worked on your soul in a variety of ways where you're known as kind, you're happy to serve. By and large, you are a healthy, loving presence in many of the relational circles of your life. But when it comes to money, everything different. You're a different person. You're constantly struggling with fear of

not having enough. You're not very generous. Every time the pastor preaches on giving, you get resentful rather than thankful for God's word. People are startled by how rude you become at church meetings when the subject of money comes up. What's going on? How can you be a certain way over here and then someone different over there? Well, we're complicated people, aren't we? While God has done good work in a lot of areas, there still more work to do. There's still more growth needed; there's more that needs to change on the inside. That's where the problems start; in here. But there's good news: that's what God changes through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. He makes people new. But not just new; he renews people. Over and over again.

Now, how does this help us? Why is Jesus telling us this? Let me show you two ways this helps us. First, look at vs. 43 and the first sentence of vs. 44 (READ). The key word is *known*; for each tree is *known* by its own fruit. Looking at the fruit of our lives (the outside actions) is an excellent way of getting a vision, a picture of what's going on inside of our hearts. Observing our behavior is a great way to examine our hearts. Why? Because there is a direct connection between my heart, my insides and what I do. Everything I do is because of what's going on inside of me. At the core, the reason I do what I do is because of what's on the inside.

Take Willard's example of "blowing up" we talked about earlier. First, make the observation: I tend to blow up when.... Then ask, "Why do I do that? Why am I the kind of person who blows up when...?" What's true about me, what's true about my heart and my soul that responds to hard news or tense situations with explosive anger or rude words? I want to remain calm; I want to treat people with respect in all circumstances; I want to remain in self-control all the time.

Looking at the behavior doesn't change the insides, does it? It doesn't fix the problem. But it does help me know a problem is present. And as GI Joe used to tell me on Saturday mornings, knowing is half the battle.

What GI Joe didn't mention was it's hard to be this honest about ourselves. That's why Willard says that this consistency between your heart and your actions is the one of the things you are most inclined to deceive about yourself. It's why people say, "I did a bad thing, but I'm really a good person." It's just so hard to admit, to face this reality.

This teaching from Jesus is also helpful because it enables me correctly locate the solution to my problem. Apple trees can't produce cherries. Figs aren't gathered from thornbushes. Try as hard as you want to try, you still can't produce fruit contrary to your heart. You can't. This isn't about willpower; this isn't about effort. You can't wake up tomorrow morning discouraged that you keep looking at porn and say, "I'm deciding to stop looking at porn" and it work. You might have short term success; you may even be able to substitute one idol for another, but nothing's changed on the inside. There's still a heart problem that hasn't been fixed. That means the fruit of your life will be the same.

We've had a variety of parenting classes here at FBC over the years. One of the biggest mistakes in parenting is having the wrong goals; one wrong goal is working to merely get kids to behave. Don't you want that though? Oh, how tempting it is to simply work to get my kids to behave. To do what they are supposed to do. And that's possible; you can actually do that for a while. It's a little easier to achieve with some kids; a little harder with others. But if your goal is simply to get your kids to conform, to behave you'll miss the heart. You can work so hard in parenting while missing what really matters; parenting, attending, teaching and instructing the heart of your child. Godly parenting goes to the heart. It addresses the why so that there's lasting change. Why are they lying? Why does my son cheat? Why is she so afraid? We are so tempted to misdiagnose the problem. We might say, "Well, her friends are so mean." "Getting into college is so competitive." "Her teachers are too unrealistic." We're so tempted to locate the problem out there when Jesus says it's in here. It's a heart problem.

We can't fix our own heart problem. But God can. In fact, that's what he's promised to do. God says this in Jer. 31:33, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

God kept that promise to give us a new heart when he sent Jesus Christ, his one and only son, to die on a cross for you and for me. And now, every one of us who believes in the name of Jesus, day by day, who trusts in him, God's Holy Spirit lives inside of us and changes our heart. And as our hearts get changed day by day by gazing upon Jesus, as we look upon him in his Word, the interior of our lives change as well. And when our hearts change our lives and behaviors change, too.

You know, when I think about these things I'm tempted towards despair. Am I really this rebellious and broken? Is my problem really a heart problem? If I lie, it's actually because I'm a liar? Ouch! But do you know why that's discouraging? It's discouraging because it's an admission that I can't rescue myself. I can't be my own savior. That the problem is too big for me to handle. It hurts my pride. But I still can be rescued. I still can be saved. My problem isn't too big for another; and that other is Jesus. If you and I would simply give up on trying to be good enough and trust that Jesus we will be saved. FBC, let's do that. Despair in saving yourself; rejoice that Jesus has come to save you inside and out.