

The Gospel of Luke was written by a disciple who was trained as a physician. Luke, with keen insight, portrays Jesus as the good physician and shepherd of souls who seeks out those who desire healing, pardon, and restoration of body, mind, and spirit. Jesus came to free us from the worst oppression possible - slavery to sin, fear, and condemnation. Like a gentle and skilful doctor, the Lord Jesus exposes the cancer of sin, evil, and oppression in our lives so we can be set free and restored to wholeness. A key step to healing and restoration requires that we first submit to the physician who can heal us. The Lord Jesus is our great Physician because he heals the whole person - soul and body, mind and heart - and restores us to abundant life both now and for the age to come in his everlasting kingdom.

The Lord Jesus wants to heal and restore us to wholeness, not only for our own sake alone. He also wants us to be his instruments of healing, pardon, and restoration for others as well. What can hinder us from helping others draw near to Jesus the divine Physician? How easy it is to be suspicious of others, misjudge others and how difficult it is to be impartial in giving good judgment. Our judgment of others is usually "off the mark" because we can't see inside the other person, or we don't have access to all the facts and jump to conclusions that reflect more our sinful self than anything else or we are swayed by instinct and unreasoning reactions to people. It is easier to find fault in others than in oneself. For some it's a way of life. A critical and judgmental spirit crushes rather than heals, oppresses rather than restores, repels rather than attracts. "Thinking the best of other people" is necessary if we wish to grow in love. And kindness in judgment is nothing less than a sacred duty.

Jesus states a heavenly principle we can stake our lives on: what you give to others (and how you treat others) will return to you (Mark 4:24). The Lord knows our faults and he sees all, even the imperfections and sins of the heart which we cannot recognise in ourselves. Ask the Lord to flood your heart with his loving-kindness and mercy that you may only have room for charity, forbearance, and kindness towards your neighbour.

Why does Jesus set figs and grapes over against thorns and brambles (Luke 6:33-35)? The fig tree was the favourite of all trees for the people of Palestine. It symbolised fertility, peace, and prosperity. Grapes, likewise, produced wine, the symbol of joy. Thorns and brambles were only good for burning as fuel for the fire. Jesus connects soundness with good fruit. Something is sound when it is free from defect, decay, or disease and is healthy. Good fruit is the result of sound living - living according to moral truth and upright character. The prophet Isaiah warned against the dangers of falsehood: Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness (Isaiah 5:20). The fruits of falsehood produce an easy religion which takes the iron out of religion, the cross out of Christianity, and any teaching which eliminates the hard sayings of Jesus, and which push the judgments of God into the background and makes us think lightly of sin.

How do we avoid falsehood and bad fruit in our lives? By being true - true to God, his word, and the grace and help he gives us so we can turn away from evil and wrongdoing. And that takes character! Those who are true to God know that their strength lies not in themselves but in God who supplies everything we need to live as his disciples. The Lord strengthens us with the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit - with faith, hope and love, justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance. And we grow in godly character through exercising the gifts and strength which God supplies. Do you want

to bear good fruit in your daily life? Allow the Holy Spirit to train you in godliness and the wisdom to distinguish good fruit from bad fruit.

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