

Matthew 12:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.

Analysis

'Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.' Jesus shifts from blasphemy teaching to principle: tree and fruit must match. You can't have good tree producing bad fruit or vice versa. The verb 'make' (ποιήσατε/poiēsate) means 'declare, consider, judge'—Jesus commands consistent judgment. If fruit is good (miracles healing, liberating, blessing), the tree must be good. If fruit is bad, tree is bad. The Pharisees' error: acknowledging good fruit (miracles) while claiming bad tree (demonic power). This is logically impossible. Reformed theology applies this broadly: genuine faith produces genuine fruit (James 2:17-20); false faith produces false fruit. Profession must match practice; words must align with works. The verse warns against inconsistency: you cannot praise Jesus's words while rejecting His authority, claim faith while living in unrepentant sin, confess Christ while denying Him in practice. Tree determines fruit; character determines conduct; inner reality produces outward expression.

Historical Context

Tree/fruit metaphor appears throughout Scripture: Psalm 1:3 (righteous like fruitful tree), Jeremiah 17:8 (blessed like tree by water), Matthew 7:16-20 (know them by fruits), John 15:1-8 (vine and branches), Galatians 5:22-23 (fruit of Spirit). Jesus used this familiar imagery to expose Pharisees' illogic: they witnessed good fruit yet claimed evil tree. Jewish agricultural experience made the point obvious—

healthy trees produce healthy fruit; diseased trees produce diseased fruit. You identify tree type by examining fruit. Applied to Jesus: His fruit (miracles healing, delivering, blessing) demonstrated His tree (divine authority, Spirit's power). Pharisees' refusal to draw obvious conclusion revealed bad faith. Early church used this principle evaluating teachers and prophets (Matthew 7:15-20, 1 John 4:1-6)—examine fruit (doctrine, lifestyle, effects) to assess tree (genuine versus false). Throughout history, church has struggled balancing: don't judge prematurely (seeds need time to grow) versus recognize persistent bad fruit indicates bad tree. The principle remains: genuine faith inevitably produces corresponding fruit.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What fruit (works, character, relationships, priorities) demonstrates the condition of your heart—is tree matching fruit?
2. How do you evaluate teachers, churches, and movements—what fruit indicates good versus corrupt trees?
3. What's the difference between immature fruit (genuine faith still growing) and bad fruit (false profession)?

Interlinear Text

ἡ	ποιήσατε	τὸ	δένδρον	καλόν·	καὶ	τὸν	καρποῦ
Either G2228	make G4160	G3588	the tree G1186	good G2570	and G2532	G3588	fruit G2590
αὐτοῦ	καλόν·	ἡ	ποιήσατε	τὸ	δένδρον	σαπρόν·	καὶ
his G846	good G2570	Either G2228	make G4160	G3588	the tree G1186	corrupt G4550	and G2532
τὸν	καρποῦ	αὐτοῦ	σαπρόν·	ἐκ	γὰρ	τοῦ	καρποῦ
G3588	fruit G2590	his G846	corrupt G4550	by G1537	for G1063	G3588	fruit G2590
			τὸ	δένδρον	γινώσκεται		
			the tree G1186	is known G1097			

Additional Cross-References

James 4:8 (Parallel theme): Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Amos 5:15 (Good): Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

Luke 3:9 (Good): And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

James 3:12 (Parallel theme): Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

Ezekiel 18:31 (Parallel theme): Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Matthew 23:26 (Parallel theme): Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

