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Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Matthew 7:15-23

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Children's Sermon

Do you want an apple? I'll make one. [Peter takes a handful of mud and sheep poop (fertilizer) from a bucket, shapes it into an apple shape, and puts a fake leaf on top.] What's wrong? Apples are made of sheep poop and dirt, right? I have a tree in my back yard, an apple tree. It takes sheep poop and dirt and turns them into apples. But this apple doesn't smell like those apples.

I guess I'm not a very good tree. The Bible says our good deeds are supposed to be like fruit. So we take our dirt and garbage and try to make apples. "Here's an apple!" But it's just apple-shaped poop. We need a tree to turn dirt and poop into fruit.

Jesus is a tree. We give Him our dirt, and He turns it into fruit. That's why we confess our sins.

"Jesus, we confess we're pretty selfish. Thanks for forgiving us and turning our dirt into your fruit. We love you, Jesus. It's in your name we pray, amen."

[Movie Clip: Dogma]

Cardinal Glic: Now, we all know how the majority and the media in this country view the Catholic Church. They think of us as a passé, archaic institution. People find the Bible obtuse, even hokey. Now, in an effort to disprove all that, the Church has appointed this year as a time of renewal, both of faith and of style. For example: the crucifix [displayed]. While it has been a time honored symbol of our faith, Holy Mother Church has decided to retire this highly recognizable yet wholly depressing image of our Lord crucified. Christ didn't come to earth to give us the willies; He came to help us out. He was a booster.

And it's with that take on our Lord in mind that we've come up with a new more inspiring sigil. So it's with great pleasure that I present you with the first of many revamps the Catholicism Wow Campaign will unveil over the next year. I give you the Buddy Christ. [A statue is unveiled of Christ winking and giving the thumbs up. Choir sings "Hallelujah, amen."]

I don't recommend that movie for casual, family viewing. But that scene is a pretty accurate description of much of American Christianity. Sometimes I think the Catholicism Wow Campaign is also called the American Evangelical Protestant Church.

"Jesus Christ and Him crucified" is pretty hard to reconcile with a lot of what you see on TV, get down at the bookstore, or hear in our churches. He's supposed to be a *booster* . . . help us feel good about ourselves, right?

Most people love Jesus the teacher, the philosopher, the role model, the outstanding moral example . . . even the prophet, the exorcist, and the miracle worker. Yet His defining moment, what we're called "to know" ("Jesus Christ and Him crucified") doesn't quite *fit*. So we've got Jesus on the outside . . . but not the heart of Jesus—the heart of God—on the inside.

Matthew 7:15: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."*

A wolf is a predator, and if it has sheep's clothing, it probably got it by consuming sheep. A wolf is also a very *smart* predator. If it ever got sheep's clothing, I doubt it would give itself away saying, "I'm no longer into Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

So folks like Cardinal Glic in the movie, or liberal theologians from liberal churches, probably aren't the wolves Jesus is talking about. There may be jackasses in sheep's clothing . . . but wolves don't give themselves away. Maybe we need to stop worrying so much about jackasses in sheep's clothing, but wolves are another matter.

Matthew 7:15 says to beware of false prophets. Prophecy has a broad definition as something that all believers do. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19). Prophecy also has a narrower definition as a spiritual gift, like a vision or word of knowledge. But prophecy is always to be a testimony of Jesus.

Matthew 7:15: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad [rotten] tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits."*

I've had the privilege of being a part of some very fruitful churches led by very successful pastors.

1. The first church where I worked was the President's church, pastored by an all-American football star who preached boldly. They had just finished a multi-million dollar giving campaign when I left.
2. The second church where I worked was pastored by an internationally known author and speaker. They had just finished a building program when I arrived. His sermons were amazing and intense. His books were about God's grace in Christ . . . biblical and well received. The church was growing by leaps and bounds.

*We've just moved into a beautiful, new building.
We've really experienced some growth.*

Sometimes people will say, "Well, you must be doing something right, Peter. Just look at all these people!" I don't mean to be rude, but sometimes I'll say, "Well, Hitler was pretty popular too. And Hitler had a lot of converts." Is that fruit?

At both of those churches where I worked, the senior pastors were having multiple affairs and living bold-faced lies. That's not good fruit. What kind of tree or trees were they?

But here at Lookout . . .

- We don't only have a big crowd and new building, we have an Orthodox confession: "Lord, Lord."
- We also have a remarkable prophetic ministry team, and people have told me I preach prophetically.
- We've cast out demons.
- We've seen miracles, visions, and even some bona fide healings.

That's got to be some *good fruit* . . . from a *good tree*! Next verse:

"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'"

Yikes!

Maybe "lots of people"
 "a good confession"
 "prophecy"
 "casting out demons"
 "mighty works in Jesus' name" . . .

Maybe that's not the fruit Jesus is talking about.
 Maybe it's not fruit at all.

Well, in Galatians 5 Paul lists some "fruit." He calls it the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (that is, control of self or temperance).

Then Paul lists some "works of the flesh"—our flesh: that is, our self, our old sin nature. They are: adultery, fornication, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft . . . then hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factionalism, envy, drunkenness, orgies. He just lumps them *all together*! . . . from envy to orgies, witchcraft to selfishness.

Witchcraft is rather obvious, but gosh, you could build a church, write a book, run a mission, and do “many mighty works” all out of selfishness, envy, or a competitive spirit. You could be, like, alive on the outside and dead on the inside . . . like a zombie . . . like a white-washed tomb. Worse than dead on the inside, you could be a wolf on the inside.

Sheep on the outside — wolf on the inside — a Pharisee!

In Galatians 5 Paul argues that all those “works of the flesh” come from those under the law, those who “bite and devour one another” (those who compete and compare). Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been talking about Pharisees in Israel. In Galatians Paul is talking about Pharisees in the Church.

Remember, out of all the groups in Jesus’ day, it can be argued that the Pharisees bore the most striking resemblance to the mainline evangelical church of today. They were the good religious folks of their day. And the people in Jesus’ little story of the judgment appear to be Pharisees . . . but Pharisees in *Jesus’ name*!

The right confession,
 the right words,
 the right deeds,
 yet Jesus doesn’t know them.

“You will know them by their fruit.”
 Jesus doesn’t see fruit (love, joy, peace . . .) in them.
 Jesus can judge that fruit. (He can see into a heart.)

But how can we judge that fruit? (We can’t see inside another’s heart.)

From a distance, the pastors in my old churches appeared to have a lot of fruit. People are good actors (“hypocrits”).

- They can act gracious yet be very legalistic about grace.
- They can act faithful and be entirely motivated by fear.
- They can act humble and be extremely proud of it.
- They can pretend to serve, and it’s all a means of control.
- They can affirm with their lips while they bite and devour with their soul.

People are good actors. And it’s extremely hard to tell what’s fruit and what’s flesh in others. It’s hard to tell what’s fruit and what’s flesh in *me*. If I’m honest, I’d have to confess it’s almost as if there are two trees in me. One grows the fruit of the Spirit, and one produces the works of the flesh.

I have to die to one and live to the other. And I can do that, because by God’s grace I’m beginning to discern the fruit and the flesh in *me* . . . in *me*. Jesus says, “You’ll know a tree by its fruit.” Maybe I’m to know a tree by the fruit or flesh it produces in *me*.

Have you ever had someone pray for you because they said they wanted to “bless you”? They used a lot of religious words and proper confessions, yet when they were done, you felt more envious, angry, factional, frightened, or competitive than before. You felt a lot of flesh — a lot of *you*.

Well, maybe you’ve been slimed; maybe you’ve been leavened by a Pharisee. Leaven makes more leaven; flesh breeds flesh. Jesus is saying, “Beware”—take note—don’t confuse that tree with me.

Yet have you ever been prayed for and when it was over you felt love, joy, peace . . . fleshlessness? You were less self-conscious and more Jesus conscious. Well, then, that’s a good tree.

Now, I imagine you may be asking yourself, “What kind of tree is *me*?” I doubt that many people intentionally try to *be* wolves, it’s just that they find that they have a taste for sheep flesh. They deny it, but they feed on sheep. It’s called competition—survival of the fittest—the way of the world—control. And it’s the opposite of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and control of self (the fruit of the Spirit).

So what kind of tree *are* you?
How fruitful *are* you?
How do you compare?

If you answered that question, I guess you’re competing for fruit. If you answered that question, I bet you’re trying to love *best*, sacrifice *best*.

- You’re trying to exalt yourself by being best at not exalting yourself.
- You’re trying to be the very first at being last.
- You’re trying to grow fruit with your flesh.
- You’re trying to make apples out of sheep dung and dirt, and that won’t do.

So try harder! Get your butt in gear and grow some *peace*! Do it *now*! Grow some patience. I’m serious, you bunch of losers, grow some kindness and gentleness! Grow some fruit!

That’s the problem. You can’t grow fruit by trying. No matter how hard you try, you can’t make fruit with your *self*. You can’t turn sheep dung and dirt into apples. You need a tree. A tree in me . . .

Last week on Easter we preached on trees. And I said, “In the end there’s one tree, and that tree is the “xoolon” (the cross). Jesus hangs on that tree and is the fruit of that tree, and in Him is an entire new creation. “For this is the plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in Him, making peace by the blood of His cross.”

So I conjectured that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, like the tree of life, was actually the cross. Jesus said, “You’ll know a tree by its fruit.” From a good tree you get good fruit; from a bad tree you get bad fruit.

I just about gave myself an aneurysm this week trying to figure out if the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was *good* or *evil*.

God knows good and evil, and God is good. God planted that tree, so it must be good.

Yet Adam and Eve had a serious reaction to the fruit: shame and death. So what's the tree?

Furthermore, how would you know if the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good or evil unless you tasted the fruit so you could *know* good and evil? For even if God warned you beforehand, how would you know His advice was *good*? and that *God* was good?

Well, in Matthew 12 Jesus says to some Pharisees who are trying to judge Him, "Make the tree good and the fruit good, or make the tree bad and the fruit bad."

. . . kind of like He was a tree, and for those to whom the fruit tasted bad, He was a bad tree; for those to whom the fruit tasted good, He was a good tree.

. . . kind of like He was an aroma of "life to life" for some and of "death to death" for others.

. . . kind of like He was *their* judgment. Their judgment was how they judged Him. He said, "Now is this world judged," speaking of the moment He would be lifted from the earth on a tree.

Maybe the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is like your judgment: good or evil depending on what you do with the fruit. To some condemnation; to some it leads to life.

Well, I just about got an aneurysm . . . and then I read Romans. And wherever Paul wrote "law," I read "the knowledge of good and evil." That's what the law *is*.

So Romans 7 reads:

What then shall we say? That the law [the knowledge of good and evil] is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law [the knowledge of good and evil], I should not have known sin. . . . For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me. So the law [the knowledge of good and evil] is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Maybe God knew man had sin in him when He planted the tree, and the purpose of the tree (the law, the knowledge of good and evil) is first of all to kill us—to show us that we alone are incomplete, guilty, condemned, and then dead. Then Paul writes this:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law [the knowledge of good and evil] of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law [the knowledge of good and evil] of sin and death.

The law of the Spirit is the *new* law—the *complete* law; as James calls it, “the perfect law of liberty,” that is, the “completed law of freedom.”

For God has done what the law [the knowledge of good and evil], weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law [the knowledge of good and evil] might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Remember at the start of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said He came to “fulfill” the law. That is, He came to fully fill that old tree: that is, bear its curse for us and give it new meaning.

If the law of Moses on Mt. Sinai was the *fillment* of the law, then Jesus on Mt. Calvary was the *full-fillment* of the law—the tree—the ripe fruit.

Now we look to the tree and see “The Good.” The Good is not just ten commandments; “The Good” is Jesus, God’s love. And “The Evil” is us, who nailed Him to the tree.

The good purpose of the tree of knowledge is to kill us: that sin might become “sinful beyond measure,” writes Paul, and that we would see it for what it is: the murder of God! The good purpose of the tree is that we would die to ourselves—our flesh—our self-righteousness. And instead of stealing the fruit, trying to be good with our own power, we’d surrender to God’s grace and receive Christ’s life as the lavish gift it is: “the good” that is *God*. The purpose is that we’d die and be born again. A tree in me. A tree of life that knows the evil but grows the good.

“Jesus didn’t come to give us the willies; He came to help us out.” Actually, He came to fulfill the law and finish the job, crucify our old man and give us His very life. The cross is how He does it.

The problem with a Pharisee is that he doesn’t really believe the law. He hasn’t thoroughly digested the law. The fruit is undigested and has not yet killed him. So he thinks that he can be good in the power of his own flesh. So he’s a bad tree bearing the works of his flesh and lying to himself that those works are good. Yet . . .

- . . . he doesn’t even *know* the good;
- . . . he hasn’t surrendered to the good;
- . . . he hasn’t ever *tasted* the good;
- . . . he’s hiding from the good like Adam and Eve;
- . . . he’s hiding in the trees, the law;
- . . . he’s acting like his thorn berries are grapes and thistle buds are figs;
- . . . he thinks fruit is just apple-shaped sheep dung and mud;

. . . he's wearing sheep's clothing, but he can't help being a wolf.

He can't help feeding on other wolves or sheep. He can't help it because he thinks that's all there is. He's never tasted real fruit. He can't see love. For him, love is just a category of competition. Love is just a way to exalt himself, a sophisticated selfishness. Love is just one more way the strong survive. At best, love is when you really like something (like a steak or a beer or a woman). You like it and consume it and bite and devour it.

So when a sheep says, "I love you," the wolf can't really believe it. For he doesn't really know what "it" is. "It" is God. And God is love.

A wolf has no clue who God is!

But, if you're a believer, you *do*. You've come to the tree and you've seen that you're dead. You've surrendered your life, your heart, your knowledge, your self, and you've seen (if only for an instant) that God is love and He loves you, for He hangs on the tree for you. You took His life, yet now He gives His life to you. So your crime is now His grace. You can't take His life — He for-gave it to you!

He gives you His life, the good, the fruit, the seed.

Eve, He is the promised seed. And fruit is seed.

Eve, He gives you the fruit as a gift.

Eve, He enters you with His body and His blood, His seed.

Seed is "sperma" in Greek. In that culture, children were referred to as fruit. And in that culture, "to know" was a euphemism for making love. Jesus says to those who did the mighty works, "Depart from me. I never knew you. I don't know where you come from. You never surrendered your self, your naked shame, to me. So it's not *my* life that you're bearing now."

You realize it's called the fruit of the *Spirit*, and the *Spirit* is Jesus' Spirit, and the life is Jesus' life.

"love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness,
gentleness, faithfulness, self control"
is Jesus in you.

Some of you thought Christianity was about trying to be good. Well, that's what every other religion is about. Christianity is the Bride of Christ—the Church—allowing herself to be known by her Groom, allowing Jesus to make love to her. And fruit happens!

One last thing . . .

Like we were saying, perhaps you know a tree by its fruit in you. Jesus bears Jesus in me. And Jesus in others bears Jesus in me. And so I can "beware of false prophets and wolves in sheep's clothing," for they *don't* bear Jesus in me. They bear *me* in me.

So when I listen to preachers and when I listen to prophets and when people say, “Brother, can I pray for you?” I’ve learned to check the fruit in me.

- A good tree produces Christ in me, and I forget me and think about Him.
- A bad tree works *me* and the power of me and my flesh. And I think about *me*.

Jesus says, “Beware of false prophets.” It’s imperative tense. It’s not an option; it’s a command. So I’m learning to beware, and I made a little list of when *I* get wary. I get wary:

1. When preachers and prophets make deals. “If you do this, then God will do that.” Prophets in the Old covenant make deals, but on His tree Jesus said, “It is finished”—perfected. There’s one deal, one covenant, one tree.
2. When prophets compare. “Oh, Peter, God wants you to be like so and so, like this church or that church.” My flesh competes and compares.
3. When prophets preach a system, a program, a deed they did. Then it’s what *they* did. *Flesh*.
4. When prophets don’t speak in absolutes. Mohamed says, “I can divorce my wife twice but not thrice” (and remarry her). “I should give some of my money but not all.” Jesus says God requires *all*, absolute love, and I am absolutely guilty. But He is absolutely gracious, and I am absolutely saved absolutely and forever. He did it, it’s done, it’s finished.
5. When prophets speak shame but not conviction. That is, prophets who shame me with vague statements of guilt so I’m in their control, but they don’t convict me with truth in the light so I can die to sin and live to God.
6. When prophets prophesy fear — just *some* fear. Either scare me to death, so I can live, or don’t scare me at all! Perfect love drives out fear . . . crucifies it and resurrects it as faith.
7. When prophets understand everything they say. If they understand everything they say, they’re probably not saying Jesus and certainly not His Spirit.

Well, that’s a list and not a law. Some of it’s probably wrong. I’m just saying that those are the kinds of prophets and preachers who produce flesh in me. But good prophets and preachers produce Jesus in me — the fruit of the tree.

A true prophet paints a picture of Jesus and His tree, and when they’re finished, there’s no *them* and no *me*. I forget them and I forget me, and I find myself worshipping at the tree. I find His fruit in me.

“You’ll know a tree by its fruit,” and Jesus is the fruit. And all around you grow His trees. Adam, don’t hide in the law. Hide in these trees—His tree.

They may not write a book.

They may never win a convert (only Jesus does).
 They may never cast out a demon. In fact,
 They may be the last and the least.
 They may be poor in spirit.
 They may be meek.
 They may be hungering and thirsting for righteousness themselves . . .

But if they testify to Jesus, they are His trees and they are His tree. For there He is crucified, there He rises from the dead, and there He grows His fruit . . . where He knows them.

So on the night He was betrayed (like the poet said, “Here in the dust and the dirt, oh here the lilies of His love appear.”), He took bread and broke it saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper He took the cup and said, “This is the cup of the New Covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you drink of it, do it in remembrance of me.”

When you come to the table, don’t hide your dirt or try to fashion it into fruit. Surrender your dirt. Bring your sin to the tree, surrender, and let Him make some fruit.

At the beginning of Matthew, John preached to the Pharisees, “Repent! Bear the fruit that befits repentance.” That’s where fruit comes from: repentance at His tree.

“Father in heaven, we confess to you that we look at this world, and sometimes all we see is dirt and dung. Father, we look in our own hearts, and sometimes all we see is dirt and dung. But, Lord God, we are your people, and we call on you, Father, to send your Seed—your Word—your Jesus, that your Seed would be implanted in our fertile hearts, that you would grow your tree of life, and that we would bear fruit now and forever into all eternity. I believe the New Jerusalem is fruit from your tree. And it’s so much better than the garden.

“So, Lord Jesus, we are your field, your bride, your people, and you are good. We need you. Amen.”

Chuck Colson works with prison reform. A few years ago he told about a prison he visited in Brazil named Humaita:

When I visited Humaita, I found the inmates smiling—particularly the murderer who held the keys, opened the gates, and let me in. Wherever I walked I saw men at peace. I saw clean living areas, people working industriously. The walls were decorated with biblical sayings from Psalms and Proverbs. Humaita has an astonishing record. Its recidivism rate is 4 percent compared to 75 percent in the rest of Brazil and the United States. How is all this possible?

He's asking, How can there be such fruit: "love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, for against such there is no law"? How is all this possible?

I saw the answer when my guide escorted me to the notorious punishment cell once used for torture. Today, he told me, that block houses a single inmate. As we reached the end of a long concrete corridor and he put the key into the lock, he paused and asked, "Are you sure you want to go in?"

"Of course," I replied impatiently. "I've been in isolation cells all over the world." Slowly he swung open the massive door, and I saw the prisoner in that punishment cell: a crucifix, beautifully carved by the Humaita inmates—the prisoner Jesus hanging on the cross.

"He's doing time for all the rest of us," my guide said softly.

Yes. He bears the pain of all time to wake us in His image for all eternity. He's the good tree and the good fruit. And you are what you eat.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Further Reading

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Matthew 3:7-10

“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. . . . For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:17, 20

“Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.”

Matthew 12:33-35

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

Acts 20:28-31

The established Church is far more dangerous to Christianity than any heresy or schism. We play at Christianity. We use all the orthodox Christian terminology – but everything, everything without character. Yes, we are simply not fit to shape a heresy or a schism. There is something frightful in the fact that the most dangerous thing of all, playing at Christianity, is never included in the list of heresies and schisms.

Soren Kierkegaard, Provocations

There is someone standing by my side, who looks just like a member of the Church. He is a prophet and a preacher. He looks like a Christian, he talks and acts like one. But dark powers are mysteriously at work, it was these who sent him into our midst. Inwardly he is a ravening wolf: his words are lies and his works are full of deceit. He knows only too well how to keep his secret dark, and go ahead with his work. It is not faith in Jesus Christ which made him one of us, but the devil. Maybe he hopes his intellectual ability or his success as a prophet will bring him power and influence, money and fame. His ambitions are set on the world, not on Jesus Christ. Knowing that Christians are credulous people, he conceals his dark purpose beneath the cloak of Christian piety, hoping that his innocuous disguise will avert detection. He knows that Christians are forbidden to judge, and he will remind them of it at the appropriate time. After all, other men’s hearts are always a closed book. Thus he succeeds in seducing many from the right way.

He may even be unconscious himself of what he is doing. The devil can give him every encouragement and at the same time keep him in the dark.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

This is like old times. Hold it beneath your nostrils for a moment, gentledevils. Hold it up to the light. Look at those fiery streaks that writhe and tangle in its dark heart, as if they were contending. And so they are. You know how this wine is blended? Different types of Pharisee have been harvested, trodden, and fermented together to produce its subtle flavor. . . . [They] had in common their self-righteousness and the almost infinite distance between their actual outlook and anything the Enemy [God] really is or commands. The wickedness of other religions was the really live doctrine in the religion of each; slander was its gospel and denigration its litany. How they hated each other up there where the sun shone! How much more they hate each other now that they are forever conjoined but not reconciled. Their astonishment, their resentment, at the combination, the festering of their eternally impenitent spite, passing into our spiritual digestion, will work like fire. Dark fire. All said and done, my friends, it will be an ill day for us if what most humans mean by “religion” ever vanishes from the Earth. It can still send us the truly delicious sins. The fine flower of unholiness can grow only in the close neighborhood of the Holy. Nowhere do we tempt so successfully as on the very steps of the altar.

C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. . . . For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

Galatians 5:4-5, 13-26

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already. Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them. We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of

truth and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.

1 John 4:1-10

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

But he who looks into the perfect [completed] law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

James 1:25

The Ghost made a sound something between a sob and a snarl. "I wish I'd never been born," it said. "What are we born for?" "For infinite happiness," said the Spirit. "You can step out into it at any moment. . . ." "But, I tell you, they'll see me." "An hour hence and you will not care. A day hence and you will laugh at it. Don't you remember on earth – there were things too hot to touch with your finger but you could drink them all right? Shame is like that. If you will accept it – if you will drink the cup to the bottom – you will find it very nourishing: but try to do anything else with it and it scalds." Almost, I thought the Ghost had obeyed. Certainly it had moved: but suddenly it cried out: "No, I can't. I tell you I can't. For a moment, while you were talking, I almost thought . . . but when it comes to the point. . . . You've no right to ask me to do a thing like that. It's disgusting. I should never forgive myself if I did. Never, never. And it's not fair. They ought to have warned us. I'd never have come. And now – please, please go away!" "Friend," said the Spirit. "Could you, only for a moment, fix your mind on something not yourself?"

C.S. Lewis, The Great Divorce

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