

(pt 2 on Contrasts)

Okay, now to really dig into more of how we can clearly differentiate between a true follower of Christ and a self-deceived rebel against God (and to double-check ourselves) - for ourselves and so we can help others too. I'd like to look at two passages in 1st John, and then move swiftly through a variety of Biblical passages that highlight the two pictures - either we are drifting further from God (and what that looks like) or we are actively growing closer to Him and even inspiring others to do the same (and what that looks like).

So, here we go. If you will join me in the book of 1st John, let's look at a verse in chapter 1. **“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”** (1st John 1:5)

This is THE message - what message? That God is Light (literally: the LIGHT), and in Him is no darkness (literally - no shade of darkness) at all. When He tells us to avoid every appearance of evil (1st Thess. 5:33), He already does that - He leads the way in setting the example. We just need to learn to follow that. How, some may ask? ~ When you see anything that is either wrong and/or bothers your conscience, you need to leave that completely alone, unless you find a Scripture that gives you the confidence of how to handle that, Biblically. We must not work off of our feelings and base our assessment on whether we are doing what's right or not on things like:

‘I think this is right’ or

‘I feel this is right’ or

‘This is fun, so it must be right’ or

‘This makes me happy, so it must be right’.

Why not? Because very often those are lies from Satan to get us doing things that will hurt us and grieve the Holy Spirit. We need to always remember that God works with absolutes - everything to Him is either: black or white - right or wrong. I know for those who are younger, this is a big statement, but for all of us, we just need to make sure that we are doing what we know is right and growing from there. We can find those definitions in His Word, if we want to, or we can ignore them and choose to be willfully ignorant (not a good choice) as many sadly do. But either way we choose (daily), He stays faithfully righteous and calls us to grow in doing the same - learning what it means to walk before Him in a way that is blameless.

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So, to bring this into focus in our life - where you and I live, we need to honestly ask ourselves a couple of questions.

\* Am I leaving behind more things that are clearly evil and situations, friends, patterns that are wrong, going the wrong direction, or have the appearance of evil?

\* Or (the other side) - Do I not care or do I not like to think about that question? If it's not important to us, then we need to double-check whom we serve and whom we follow.

Okay, a quick side-note ~ let's look at another passage that has been a huge comfort to me for many years. **“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”** (1st John 5:13) ~ Pretty cool, huh? God's Word is written so that we may believe in the name of Jesus and that we may be absolutely sure that we not only have eternal life, have the confidence to live victorious in Him and serve Him boldly, and that we may continue to grow in obedience to His Word (daily) and so that we can have that confidence of knowing that we are walking with Him and pleasing Him.

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Okay, now let's look at another way to assess if we are walking in obedience and the Light of God's Living Word, or we are walking in darkness - examining spiritual fruit.

**“Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye. For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?”** (Luke 6:42-46)

Okay, so I like this passage because it highlights a few key areas we can double-check ourselves on, daily.

>> First, are we actively trying to only do what is right? Fear of man/woman (*or better put*: desire to please them) will be a serious trip-hazard for us on this - if we don't deal with it. So, instead, we need to determine (daily) that we do not care if we please people or not, but we must please God.

**“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.”** (Proverbs 29:25) ~ Trusting God would also include obeying Him, and growing in it.

A verse for 20:20 spiritual vision - **“And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’”** (Exodus 20:20) ~ fearing God does not mean terror, it means fearing sin. And since He is going to be our Judge (and He is awesome, in holiness and splendor), we do need to actively learn to fear Him - realizing that He too is everywhere we go

and watching and recording everything we do, say, think and our motives - nothing is hidden from Him, everything will be replayed and we will have to give an account for them - even the idle words. Just worth keeping in mind ~

>> Secondly, are we looking for ways to harshly criticize others (insults, slander, gossip, whatever) so that we can ignore our conscience and feel that we do not have to get our lives right with Him? It's the 'I belittle you so I don't have to fix my problem' wrong attitude that we all have to fight.

Or, are we growing in keeping our ways, thoughts, actions, words, motivations - pure so that we can genuinely and graciously help our brothers and sisters to see where they are tripping up and what is specifically hurting them?

>> Thirdly, what kind of fruit are we producing - good fruit or bad fruit?

***Good fruit:***

- \* A growth in hunger and time spent in the Word (compare to last year)
- \* A growth in praying for a growing group of people God has brought in your life
- \* A growth in turning away from things I selfishly like that I once thought were ok
- \* A growth in sharing the truth of God's Word with those around me
- \* A growth in standing up for what I know is right, rather than backing down and giving in
- \* A growth in the standards of conduct that I hold myself to - not as a list of rules, but a growth in understanding who God is and how to please Him, and consistently making changes that remove distractions from my life
- \* A growth in genuine love for those around me. Do I care more about that person who always treats me rudely than I used to? Do I treat those closest to me with more love or more impatience?
- \* How sensitive is my spirit to hear when God's Spirit is grieved that I do something I know is wrong? Is it growing more sensitive or less?
- \* How quick am I to laugh right along with a perverted joke or immoral comment? Do I walk away from those bad situations more or less than I used to?
- \* Am I quicker to throw away something that is turning me against God, His Word, and His servants?
- \* Am I growing in passion and desire to see those around me in Heaven, so that I'm opening my mouth more for Christ? Or am I decreasing in passion?

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***Flipside - bad fruit.***

- \* Am I becoming calloused to doing what I know is wrong?
- \* Am I hiding more from those who caringly watch over me and keep me accountable?
- \* When I hurt, do I run away from holiness teaching and toward selfish comfort teaching? Am I doing this more or less than I used to?
- \* When I hurt, do I run to food, friends, girlfriend/boyfriend/wife/husband, TV show, movie, music - for comfort or to God and His Word? Am I turning to God's Word in those times more or less than I used to?
- \* Am I becoming more or less attached to addictions?

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Well, I know I didn't do a really great job there, but I tried to contrast the life-direction of producing good fruit, contrasted with the life-direction of producing bad fruit. And I tried to ask it in question-form so that we might assess ourselves more quickly, and (when we are spiritually standing, actively doing what we know is right) so we can pass them onto people we care about, coming alongside them and helping them spiritually stand, too.

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Ok, let's look at another key way to assess if we are growing in good fruit or bad.  
>> Why did we get up this morning? I personally know that the days are only seeming to get longer - I feel it too. So, I don't mean any criticism by this, only to ask the question - why did we get up this morning? Because, I believe if every morning we ask ourselves why we got up and we have the right motivation, then we can more quickly and easily pick up where we left off with our Heavenly Father the previous day and grow more today in obeying Him, turning from what is evil, and reaching out to others - with His message and truth.

Next section - stages of spiritual growth and several key verses that show these stages and help us determine our progress. :)

Till next time, let's grow in love and humble obedience to Christ.

a growing live-slave of Jesus, SH

