

The Fruit of the Tree

by Tricia Berg

There is a lot of symbolism in the Bible. One metaphor frequently used is that of a tree to represent a person. Jesus used it to teach about how we can observe by a person's fruits what is inside of them, whether good or bad. Since we can't see INSIDE of a person, we need to look for what is visible on the OUTSIDE. That's why He used the fruit as an illustration.

*"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is **known by its own fruit**. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Luke 6:43-45*

We can be sure that He wasn't just condemning some people as being inherently evil and commending some for being good—we have ALL been born with the sinful nature, which we ALL display by exercising our free will to sin as soon as we are able. (Rom. 3:23, 5:12, 6:23) Jesus went on to say this right after what He said above:

***"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?** Everyone who comes to me and **hears my words and does them**, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who **hears and does not do them** is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." Luke 6:46-49*

Now we know that He spoke against the Pharisees who thought they were righteous by their works, so this is obviously not about saving ourselves by what we do—ONLY Jesus saves. (John 3:16-18) Putting the two passages together, we can see that it's about how a person reveals what they are like by what they do. The person who believes in Jesus will LISTEN to Him (which means to heed, to DO what He says). That person's faith INSIDE saves them, and they act upon it, showing on the OUTSIDE that they really believe. The person who truly believes in their heart is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who produces good fruit which becomes visible by their outward actions. (John 14:15-26, Rom. 10:10)

*But the **fruit** of the **Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23*

The Pharisees were not interested in worshiping from their heart, but loved to make an outward display of holiness to impress others. John the Baptizer "called them out" on this when they came to be baptized by him for the repentance of sins (of which they thought they HAD none to repent of!) (Luke 18:9-14, 1John 1:8-10, Acts 19:4, Rom. 9:30-33, 11:23-25)

*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **Bear fruit in keeping with 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 for 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.** I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Matthew 3:7-12*

The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes continually tried to "catch" Jesus doing something they considered sinful (according to the letter rather than the spirit of the law), and He said something similar to what John said to them. (Luke 6:7, 11:53-54, 13:10-17, 14:1-6, 20:19-20, 26, Mark 3:2, 12:13 John 8:6, Matt. 12:10, 22:15)

*"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 person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.** I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Matthew 12:33-37*

I saw on the news last night that a new term had been added to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Here is how Wikipedia defines it:

TL;DR, short for "too long; didn't read", is slang to say that some text being replied to (online or in an app, etc.) has been ignored because of its length. (It

can also stand for "too lazy; didn't read".) It is also used to identify a brief summary of an online post or news article for those who do not wish to take the time to read the full post.

That must be what happens when people read Luther's writings, such as "On Christian Freedom," having the presupposition that good works are like an "enemy" of salvation. By the time they read all of the stern warnings that works do not save, only faith, their attention span (or time allotment) has expired. But towards the end, he actually gives his approval to the following saying (which apparently his readers were familiar with):

"Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works"...

We could re-phrase it to apply to faith as "doing good works do not make you a disciple of Christ, but a disciple of Christ does good works."

*For the **grace** of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age**, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are **zealous for good works**. Titus 2:11-14 (Also see Titus 3:8.)*

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to **control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God**; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For **God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness**. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who **gives his Holy Spirit to you**. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8*

I didn't find anything in this particular writing by Luther about self-control being the result of salvation (which clearly the above passages do indicate), but I did find this:

"We do not then reject good works; nay we embrace them and teach them in the highest degree."

He goes on to clarify that it is thinking the works will contribute to salvation that is evil, not the works themselves. A little later he says these things:

"For as works do not make a believing man, so neither do they make a justified man; but faith, as it makes a man a believer and justified, so also it makes his works good."

"Now it is clear that the fruit does not bear the tree, nor does the tree grow on the fruit; but, on the contrary, the trees bear the fruit, and the fruit grows on the trees."

When Jesus talks about "good trees" and "bad trees" and their "fruit," He is NOT talking about an imaginary concept. He intentionally uses this example as one that we can observe with our eyes. The Pharisees were claiming to be "good trees," but their "fruit" was bad. Jesus wanted them to either "bear the fruit of repentance" as John told them to do, or admit that they are "bad trees," as evidenced by their "bad fruit." (Matt. 3:8, 12:33) He does NOT mean that even if the "fruit" (works) of a "tree" (person) appears to be exactly the same after "believing" as before, it is now considered "good" now that the person believes (even though the very same behaviors and deeds were considered "bad" prior to the person believing). He means that IF the person REALLY believes, then their "fruit" (visible works) will CHANGE to match what they NOW are INSIDE, which is a "good tree" (a person who has been washed of their former sins because they believe; a person who has been made NEW inside, and so the fruit they now bear is good). Paul explained it very well:

What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:15-23

The different “kind” of fruit is not a tree changing from apple to pear, for example, but from rotten apples to healthy apples. Jesus said in Luke 6:44 that figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor grapes from a bramble bush. There is a stern warning about how believers should not bear thorns and thistles in Heb. 6:4-8. There’s something seriously wrong if that’s the case—those are NOT the fruits of the Holy Spirit! Jesus said that everything good or bad comes from inside of us:

*And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: **There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.**” And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, “What comes **out** of a person is what **defiles** him. For **from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.** All these evil things come from **within**, and they **defile** a person.” Mark 7:14-23*

The above discussion was in response to the Pharisees insisting that the tradition of ceremonial hand washing had to be observed in order not to become defiled inside. Jesus explained to them that serving and worshiping God is not a matter of outward appearances, but that God desires obedience from the heart, out of genuine love for Him and our neighbor.

*Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “**This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.**” And he said to them, “**You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!** For Moses said, ‘Honor your father*

and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And **many such things you do.**" Mark 7:1-13 (Also see Matt. 23, Luke 11:37-54.)

"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth**, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:20-24

Jesus told a parable that showed His Father doesn't want to discard anyone, not even because their deeds are evil. (Neh. 9:17) He WANTS people to turn from their sin and be saved by believing in Jesus and His payment for our sin. (Psa. 45:22-25, Rom. 11:28-36) His beautiful, undeserved mercy and grace grants repentance to those who believe, and even the faith itself is a gift. He is patient and longsuffering, but Judgment Day will come (and for most people, their own "appointment with God" will come sooner.)

And he told this parable: "A man had a **fig tree** planted in his vineyard, and he came **seeking fruit** on it and **found none**. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then **if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.**'" Luke 13:6-9 (Also see Isa. 5, Matt. 21:28-32, 33-41, 42-46; Matt. 13:36-43, 47-52.)

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:30-31

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is **patient** toward you, **not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.** 2 Peter 3:9

*But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord **depart from iniquity**." Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone **cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work**. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. **God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will**. 2 Timothy 2:19-26*

*For by **grace you have been saved through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the **gift of God**, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are **his workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should **walk in them**. Ephesians 2:8-10*

In this next example, Jesus used the wind, which we cannot SEE, but we can see the EFFECTS of it—we can hear it (and we can see what is moved by it) to represent the Holy Spirit:

*Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water and the Spirit**, he **cannot enter the kingdom of God**. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is **born of the Spirit**." John 3:3-8*

The following passages are not saying that God "forced" anyone to believe and will "force" them to obey Him. It's saying that those who cease striving against Him and accept the free gift of salvation—who truly believe—are born of God. By the working of His amazing grace, power and mercy, they have His Spirit IN them, giving them the ability to seek to know and to do His will.

*For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one **inwardly**, and circumcision is a matter of the*

heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. Romans 2:28-29

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were **born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.** John 1:12-13*

*"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as **you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us**, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, **I in them and you in me**, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." John 17:20-24*

*"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you **know the way** to where I am going." And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" John 14:1-6*

*"**If you love me, you will keep my commandments.** And I will ask the Father, and he will **give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. **You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.** I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that **I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.**" Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "**If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.** And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." These*

things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But **the Helper, the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. John 14:15-26

As Jesus promised, the Helper is with us always, teaching and guiding us, transforming us into the image of Christ. (Eph. 4:22-24, Rom. 8:29, 12:1-2) However, we must yield to Him rather than striving against Him, just like when we stopped rebelling against God and agreed with Him that we were sinners in need of a Savior—the ONLY one, Jesus.

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 **keep in step** with the **Spirit.** Galatians 5:24-25

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if **by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are **led by the Spirit** of God are **sons** of God. Romans 8:13-14

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for **it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.** Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Philippians 2:12-16

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith **by his power**, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be **strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being**, so that **Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, **according to the power at work within us**, to him be glory

in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21

*And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual **wisdom** and **understanding**, so as to walk in a manner **worthy** of the Lord, fully **pleasing** to him, **bearing fruit** in every good work and increasing in the **knowledge** of God. May you be **strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might**, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:9-14*

We have to bear in mind that Luther was coming from the perspective of his fight against the Roman Catholic system of works salvation. Therefore, he goes on and on quite vehemently about how works do not save, almost to the exclusion of anything else. However, his words written in 1520 were not meant to reassure those who do not believe that they are saved—neither back then nor now. We can all be absolutely sure of that. However, neither can we ignore the fact that if a person IS saved, then good works WILL result (as we saw earlier, Luther acknowledged this.)

In the early days of the church, they held a “conference” where the apostles met with each other and consulted the Holy Spirit as to what His will was for the believing Gentiles (anyone not born a Jew):

*When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, **“It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”** The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And **God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.**” And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders*

God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that **the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.'** Therefore my judgment is that we should **not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.** For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues." Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and **troubled** you with words, **unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. **For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.** Farewell."** Acts 15:4-29

Notice that the only reference to keeping the Mosaic Law is about how it was a heavy burden that was impossible to bear. We are FREE in Christ, but there WERE some expectations specifically named. NO ONE has the right to revise that list but God, and He won't, because He doesn't change. If He did change, we couldn't be assured that His promises are true. (Mal. 3:6, Heb. 13:8) The same things that caused the former inhabitants of the promised land (which was a "type" of the kingdom of God") to be "vomited out" are the same things that will keep us out of the Kingdom of God now IF we refuse to repent of them and be washed clean by the blood of Jesus through faith. (Lev. 18, Gal. 5:19-21, Rev. 21:8, 22:15, Heb. 10:26-31, Rev. 3:19, 1John 1:5-10) Those people were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit like we are. They didn't have that power within them, and their bodies were not the temple of God.

As followers of Christ, we keep His words out of LOVE. (John 14:15, Matt. 28:19-20, 2Cor. 5:14-15, John 15:10, 1John 5:3, John 10:27) We believers in this age are under the "law of liberty" and will be judged by how we use our freedom. (Jam. 1:22-25, 2:12, Rom. 2:4-11, 14:12, Gal. 6:7-9, Eph. 5:6, Rev. 22:12) Anyone who says differently is not being truthful, whether they know it or not. (2Tim. 3:12-17, 2Pet. 2:18-22, Rom. 16:18-19) Those who deceive and are deceived, despite the warnings, are taking the chance of not entering the kingdom of God. **ALL can be forgiven when repented of and confessed to Jesus.** (1John 1:9, Matt. 18:15-17, 21-22, Heb. 7:25)

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? **Do not be deceived:** neither the **sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.** And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. **The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.** And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that **your bodies are members of Christ?** Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But **he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality.** Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.** 1 Corinthians 6:9-20*

*Do you not know that **you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.** For God's temple is **holy, and you are that temple. Let no one deceive himself.** If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.* 1 Corinthians 3:16-18

Luther didn't live in the times that we live in. His times were treacherous, but for a different reason—you could almost say it was the opposite. Then, most people were deceived into thinking that works saved. Today, most people (and by that, I mean that "mega-churches" with massive numbers of attendees all

teach this) believe that "freedom in Christ" means "freedom TO sin." Paul predicted this would happen:

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For **the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.** 2 Timothy 4:1-4*

We know that Paul wasn't referring to false teachers on the other side of the fence (both extremes are evil) who want to revert to Mosaic Law keeping, because he talks about their passions, and earlier, had given the following description (as confirmed by Jude and Peter), which fits OUR time to a "T":

*But understand this, that **in the last days there will come times of difficulty.** For people will be **lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,** having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 2 Timothy 3:1-5*

*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, **ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality** and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:3-4*

*These are grumblers, malcontents, **following their own sinful desires;** they are loud-mouthed boasters, **showing favoritism to gain advantage.** But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "**In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.**" It is these who cause divisions, **worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.** But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; **save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.** Jude 1:16-23*

So while there are indeed some these days (like in Luther's time) who wander off the narrow path into the direction of trying to save themselves or keep themselves saved by keeping the law, there are more (on the broad path to destruction) telling people what they really prefer to hear. What is that? People LOVE to hear that they can have their cake and eat it, too. They can have the promise of eternal life later, but they can still enjoy all of the sinful pleasures of this world NOW. Make no mistake, all of it is irrelevant for unbelievers, who will perish either way. The exhortations to obey Jesus are for those who BELONG to Him. The children of God are expected to behave as such.

*"Enter by the narrow gate. For **the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many**. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. **Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves**. You will recognize them **by their fruits**. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, **every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit**. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. **Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire**. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits." Matthew 7:13-20*

*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the **holiness without which no one will see the Lord**. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become **defiled**; that no one is **sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal**. For you know that **afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears**. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus **let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe**, for our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:14-17, 28-29*

***Do not be deceived**: "Bad company ruins good morals." **Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning**. For some have **no knowledge of God**. I say this **to your shame**. 1 Corinthians 15:33-34*

*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has **righteousness with lawlessness**? Or what fellowship has **light with darkness**? What accord has **Christ with Belial**? Or what portion does a **believer share with an unbeliever**? What agreement has **the temple of God with idols**? For **we are the temple of the living God**; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be*

separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” 7:1 **Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.** 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

As **obedient children**, do not be conformed to the **passions** of your former **ignorance**, but as he who called you is holy, you also **be holy in all your conduct**, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were **ransomed** from the **futile** ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but **with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.** 1 Peter 1:14-19

John the “apostle of love,” who used the word “love” (or a form of it) 114 times in 76 verses of his writings (as inspired by the Holy Spirit), said these things:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. **If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17

My little children, **I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.** But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are **in him**: **whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.**** 1 John 2:1-6

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the **anointing** that you received from him **abides in you**, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has **taught** you, **abide in him.** And now, little children, **abide in him**, so that **when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.** If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that **everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.** 1 John 2:26-29

Everyone who **makes a practice of sinning** also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. **No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.** Little children, **let no one deceive you.** Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. **No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.** By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. 1 John 3:4-10

And this is his commandment, that we **believe** in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and **love one another**, just as he has commanded us. **Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him.** And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. 1 John 3:23-24

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; **whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.**" John 3:36

Jesus said this about abiding in Him (not merely a "moment of faith") being necessary (also see Heb. 10:36, Phil. 3:17-21, Jam. 1:12, 2Pet. 2:9-11, 2Pet. 3:13-14, Heb. 6:11-12)—it's not about working for salvation, but about our salvation working its way OUT—HE does the work in those who abide in Him:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. **Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. **Abide in me, and I in you.** As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.** If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. **If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.** These things I have

spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.** No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and **bear fruit and that your fruit should abide**, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will **love one another.**" John 15:1-17

Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And **we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope**. 12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an **evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God**. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be **hardened by the deceitfulness of sin**. For **we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end**. Hebrews 3:5-6, 12-14

We can easily see in these "modern" times what Paul meant by "difficult times," because "truth" has been redefined to mean "hate," and "love" has been redefined to mean "permissiveness." I realize that this next passage is LONG, but we need to see what was said in context. It's TOO easy to lead people astray when using only a piece of a verse here and part of a passage there.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may **no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes**. Rather, **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must **no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to**

sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to **put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires**, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to **put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.** Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and **give no opportunity to the devil.** Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And **walk in love**, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But **sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For **you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." **Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be **filled with the Spirit**, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of **reverence for Christ.** Ephesians 4:11-5:21

*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and **people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil**. For **everyone who does wicked things hates the light** and does not come to the light, **lest his works should be exposed**. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." John 3:19-21 (Also see 1John 3:12.)*

A final word of caution: Another way that these times could be considered "opposite" to Luther's times is that the Roman Catholic church was unified then and he was trying to (first reform it, unsuccessfully—then) break away. In our times, the Roman Catholic church has been separate and is trying to merge back in (which really means to "reabsorb") the rest of Christendom. The danger is the same now as it was one and a half millennia ago. They expect people to take the authority of church leaders and traditions OVER the clear teachings of the Bible.

But how will we recognize false teachers if we only listen to people who tell us what we like to hear? How will we recognize these things if we "don't have time" to study the Bible for ourselves with the help of the Holy Spirit? (Remember the term referred to earlier: TL;DR. Most of us can manage to find time for the things we truly value and enjoy.) If we don't MAKE time to read God's word, are too busy to put our faith and spiritual gifts from God into practice, don't want to "stand out" or be disliked for holding fast to biblical principles, etc., then we're showing that God is not really first in our lives as He should be.

If we don't listen to and obey GOD instead of listening to false teachers—if we don't hold fast to Jesus, the ONE Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22-23, Col 1:18, 1Tim. 2:5-6) according to the spirit of the law instead of the letter, instead of holding to traditions like the Pharisees did, we may find that Jesus is on the OUTSIDE of His OWN Church, knocking...

*Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may **belong to another**, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may **bear fruit for God**. For while we **were** living in the flesh, our **sinful passions**, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to **bear fruit for death**. But now we are released from the law, **having died to that which held us captive**, so that we **serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code**. Romans 7:4-6*

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. "'I know your works:

*you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will **spit you out of my mouth**. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I **love**, I **reprove and discipline**, so **be zealous and repent**. **Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me**. The one who **overcomes**, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**” Revelation 3:14-22*

And if we don't answer, then we may find ourselves on the outside of the Kingdom of God, knocking...

*“Then **the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom**. Five of them were **foolish**, and five were **wise**. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. **As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept**. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, **the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut**. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, '**Lord, lord, open to us**.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, **I do not know you**.' **Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**” Matthew 25:1-13 (Also see Mark 13:32-37.)*

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