

**On the Day of Judgment  
A Third Conclusion 12:33-37  
(Matthew 15:11)**

**Trees and Fruit (12:33)**

**Matthew 12:33** *“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] make....** Grammatically this verb is a 2<sup>nd</sup> person, plural, imperative, *you make the tree good*. It has confused many. How can Jesus tell the Pharisees to make themselves into a good tree? In support of this position, one author says, “This is a call to conversion.”<sup>1</sup> Hardly. Another says, “For Matthew, the Pharisees are like a bad tree, and the bad fruit they have produced is their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> No. **It is not Jesus who calls the Pharisees a bad tree, it is the Pharisees that call Jesus a bad tree—notwithstanding his fruit!**

Jesus is talking to the Pharisees addressing their confused opinion of him. He does good, they call it evil. He responds, telling them to either identify him as good for his fruit is good or identify him as evil because his fruit is evil. In fact, the tree is known by its fruit and his fruit (casting out demons) is good. “How, if, as you think, I am a sinner and have an unclean spirit, can I do good works, such as casting out devils, restoring the blind, the deaf and the dumb, raising the dead? Either therefore make Me evil and My works evil, or make Me good and My works good.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus already addressed this earlier saying:

*“A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.”*  
(Matthew 7:18, ESV)

They know this but charge him with evil contrary to the facts. They are therefore a brood of vipers.

**Words and the Heart (12:34-35)**

**Matthew 12:34** *You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 570.

<sup>2</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 349.

<sup>3</sup> John Maldonatus, *A Commentary on the Holy Gospels* (ed. George J. Davie; trans. George J. Davie; vol. 1, Second Edition.; Catholic Standard Library; London: John Hodges, 1888), 407.

**You brood of vipers....** It is to the Pharisees and others of the religious crowd that Jesus makes this remark as did John the Baptist earlier.

*“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?”* (Matthew 3:7, ESV)

It will be used again in 23:33 and the Pharisees will be the audience there as well.

*“You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?”* (Matthew 23:33, ESV)

But, “It is hard to hear “pack of snakes” from a teacher who taught us never to call anybody “idiot” or “liar” (5:22).”<sup>4</sup> Yet, as poison comes from the mouth of a snake, so poison comes from the mouths of these Pharisees. So, the phrase is not pejorative, it is theological analysis; this is something Jesus can do but not recommended to others without his knowledge of the heart.

There are some that believe Jesus wouldn’t say a thing like that. They do not understand who Jesus is—the judge of the universe.

**How can you speak good, when you are evil? Or, how are you able....** What is implied is that they are not able.

**For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** From the mouth of the viper comes poison, from the mouth of the Pharisees come what is found in their heart, evil. In this phrase we have “the link between words and heart which underlies the emphasis here on what one says: words betray what the heart is full of!”<sup>5</sup>

*“But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”* (Matthew 15:18–19, ESV)

**Matthew 12:35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.**

**treasure....** A treasure is what one values. If the treasure is good, good results; if the treasure is evil, evil is produced.

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 571.

<sup>5</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 507). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

“The point is ... that one’s actions (here one’s words) reveal what one most deeply values; they are what one brings out from one’s treasure trove to give to others.”<sup>6</sup>  
“...what a person truly is determines what he says and does.”<sup>7</sup>

“The thought is again of bringing to light what is in the secret place, so that a person’s words or deeds reveal what is really important to them, and so their true character.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Words and the Judgment (12:36-37)**

***Matthew 12:36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,***

***careless [worthless]<sup>9</sup> word....*** The Greek word careless means “without work” or every ***workless word....***

*“And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle [not working] all day?’” (Matthew 20:6, ESV)*

“The traditional translation of ἀργός [argos] here by “idle” [careless] misses the point. In our idiom an “idle word” means a casual utterance, to which no importance is attached. But ἀργός [argos] means “idle” rather in the sense of doing no work, accomplishing nothing; the reference is probably to words which are not backed up by actions (as in 21:30) and so are “empty,” hypocritical.”<sup>10</sup>

“The point is not the casualness of the utterance, but its fallaciousness: “not ... ‘thoughtless’ words, such as a carefree joke, but deedless ones, loafers which ought to be up and busy about what they say, the broken promise, the unpaid vow, words which said, ‘I go, sir’ and never went (Matt. 21:29).”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 507). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>7</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 293). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>8</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 485). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>9</sup> *careless ἀργός* “Not at work, idle, not employed, inactive .... Idle, insincere, false, unprofitable (Matt. 12:36, “idle word,” insincere language of a person who speaks one thing and means another....).” Zodiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>10</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>11</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 486). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

“The Pharisees’ charge against Jesus, which was far from “casual” or “thoughtless,” is such an utterance, purporting to be a defense of God’s truth but all the time working against his saving purpose.”<sup>12</sup>

These words “talk the talk” but do not “walk the walk.” The careless or idle word is represented in verse 35 as the person who produces evil in his life, notwithstanding his “testimony.” He says one thing but does another. Perhaps the word **worthless** comes closest to this context.

“The Pharisees’ offensive words in v. 24 reveal their true nature, and on this they will be judged.”<sup>13</sup>

**Matthew 12:37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”**

**words....** Which worthless words is Jesus referencing?

*“But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”” (Matthew 12:24, ESV)*

It is for these words that they were to be **condemned**.

**justified**<sup>14</sup>.... There are at least two common definitions to this Greek word.

The first: “to demonstrate that something is morally right—“to show to be right, to prove to be right.”<sup>15</sup> Or to show something.

The second: “to cause someone to be in a proper or right relation with someone else—“to put right with, to cause to be in a right relationship with.”<sup>16</sup>

Although Paul typically used the second in his teachings, Jesus typically used the first. Look at these verses on Jesus’ use of the Greek word for justified.

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<sup>12</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 486). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>13</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (pp. 485–486). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>14</sup> *justified* δικαιόω “to demonstrate that something is morally right—“to show to be right, to prove to be right.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 743.

<sup>15</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>16</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

*Matthew 11:19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified (**shown** or **demonstrated**) by her deeds."*

*Matthew 12:37 for by your words you will be (**shown** to be) justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*

*Luke 7:29 (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just (**shown** to be righteous), having been baptized with the baptism of John,*

*Luke 7:35 Yet wisdom is justified (**shown** to be right) by all her children."*

*Luke 10:29 But he, desiring to justify himself (**show** himself to be righteous), said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

*Luke 16:15 And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves (**show** yourself righteous) before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

Jesus is saying that **by your words, you will be (shown to be) justified or righteous**. "Verbs which end in -óō generally indicate bringing out that which a person is or that which is desired, but not usually referring to the mode in which the action takes place. In the case of *dikaióō*, it means to bring out the fact that a person is righteous."<sup>17</sup>

**condemned**<sup>18</sup>.... Thus *katadikázō* [condemned] stands as a direct opposite of *dikaióō* [justified]."<sup>19</sup> The direct opposite of condemned is either "declared to be righteous" or "shown to be righteous." It does not mean "judged to be...." It is difficult to accept "declared to be righteous" here simply because saving righteousness is not a product of talking. Talking is however a demonstration of the spiritual condition. And keep in mind "show to be righteous is the normal way Jesus uses this word.

**"Words spoken provide a proper basis for the judgment to be made precisely because they are a faithful index of the nature of the real person (the heart of v. 34; the treasure of v. 35)."**<sup>20</sup> Jesus is addressing words that the Pharisees just uttered:

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<sup>17</sup> Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>18</sup> *condemned καταδικάζω* "...to judge someone as definitely guilty and thus subject to punishment—'to condemn, to render a verdict of guilt, condemnation.'" Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>19</sup> Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>20</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 508). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

*“... but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12:32, ESV)*

**condemned....** would refer to damnation.

*“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:28–29, ESV)*