
Words of Truth

“You Can Tell A Lot About A Person From Their Trash”

By: Brian A. Yeager

As I was working here in my office I had the television on. There was a show on that was talking about tactics of investigation. One private investigator was making the case that he can find out many details about a person's life by sifting through their trash. Just think about this for a moment. Let's say that someone's trash contains drug needles, bottles of beer, a wine bottle, some cigarette butts, plastic gloves, and other drug related items. What does that tell you about this person?

The truth is, that doesn't tell you anything about a person. The contents I listed above describe my trash recently. Remember, I have a son who gives himself four shots of insulin every day because he is a type one diabetic. Thus, you are going to find drug paraphernalia in my trash all of the time. The bottles of alcohol and cigarette butts came from the parking lot of the "church building". When you clean the building we assemble in you have to bring the trash back to your house. Because of the neighborhood we assemble in, there are often horrible things around the building. There have been times when I've even had to pick up used condoms, syringes, and other disgusting materials from the parking lot. Well, those things are then in my trash. I had a neighbor next to my house that loved to throw his cigar and cigarette butts into my driveway. I picked them up and threw them in my trash.

Getting to know someone requires much more than looking at his or her trash. We must always remember that there is more than one side to every story. Remember that the Scriptures teach this: *"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him"* (Proverbs 18:13). The Scriptures also teach us that things are not always what they appear on the surface. Remember this verse: *"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment"* (John 7:24).

I am not going to keep this article on the subject of looking at a person's trash. Rather, I want to deal with the matter behind the idea of looking at things on the surface. In fact, even when you dig a little beneath the surface of a person's character you still don't fully know what you're looking at. What we are going to discuss is how we need to take more than just a quick look at people before we come to conclusions about them.

Knowing Someone Requires More Than A Quick Peek

It has become a horrible tradition amongst supposed "brethren" to use preachers as an identifier of who is and who is not sound in the faith. Some will ask those they are inspecting what preachers they know. Sometimes they'll ask what preachers the congregation has for Gospel Meetings (a tradition in itself). What does this really tell you about a person or a congregation? Knowing someone and even thinking that person is "great" doesn't make someone sound in the faith. I know false teachers who "respect" me. Does that make them sound or put me in their company? NO WAY!

The Scriptures teach us not to measure others or ourselves by the standard of men (II Corinthians 10:12). Demons knew who Jesus was, did that make them faithful (Mark 5:1-7 and Acts 19:13-16)?

The actions of a person can tell you some things about them (Titus 1:16). The words of a person will can you some things about them as well (Matthew 12:34-37). The company a person keeps can tell you a lot about that person (Proverbs 13:20). We have to be careful on these matters though. Sometimes a people do “good things”, but they are not good people (Matthew 7:21-23). Sometimes the words of a person are deceptive (Proverbs 26:24-28). Sometimes a person keeps what is seen as bad company, but he or she is not a bad person (Mark 2:15-17). On the other hand, a person can keep the greatest of company and be a horrible person (John 12:3-6).

So, what should we learn in these things we have considered already? We should have learned that things are not always as they appear. In fact, we should learn that there could be disciples of the Lord (i.e. Judas) who are not as they appear to be (cf. Acts 20:28-31, II Corinthians 11:13-15, Galatians 2:4, and Jude 4). We should have learned that even after some investigation and questioning, we might not fully know a person because they could just be telling us what we want to hear (I Samuel 18:17-22, Psalms 12:1-2, Jeremiah 9:1-8, Luke 20:20-21, and Romans 16:18). This is why we must examine people deeper than just their trash cans, friendships, words, or even their works.

Looking At The Fruit

Notice this inspired instruction: *“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them”* (Matthew 7:15-20).

Fruit inspection takes longer than inspecting one's works and words. For example, we know that saying “sorry” is not repentance (II Corinthians 7:9-10). Repentance requires true changes in one's life (Acts 26:18-20). Those changes are seen not by works, but by the results of those works called “fruits” (Matthew 3:8). Saul [the Apostle Paul; Acts 13:9] was once a persecutor of Christians (Acts 9:1-2, I Corinthians 15:9, and Galatians 1:13). How do we know he changed? He was converted to Christ (Acts 9:3-18), but his repentance wasn't known until he brought forth fruits of repentance (Acts 9:20-31). Brethren, if you read the aforementioned Scriptures, you will see that it rightly took brethren time to believe in Paul's conversion (cf. I John 4:1). We too should act in such a manner.

Conclusion

We are commanded of the Lord not to be deceived (Matthew 24:4 and Ephesians 5:6). If you think you can know the faithfulness of a person through a conversation, their companions, where they attend services, etc.; you might as well conclude I am a drunken drug dealer because of what has been in my trash. It is absolutely ABSURD to conclude you know someone after a conversation. It is naïve to act this way (Proverbs 14:15). Let's examine fruit rather than trash cans!