

A Tree of Life

Proverbs 11:30

by Pastor Bill Farrow

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.” - Proverbs 11:30.

This is one of the more “well-known” verses we find in the Book of Proverbs. It might also be one that can easily be misunderstood, or at the least, be over-simplified. It is in this past two chapters (10:1-11:31) that we find some real ***contrast in life and conduct is made*** in matters of work, diligence, ambition, speech, truth, stability, honesty, integrity, fidelity, guidance, graciousness, kindness, and other such personally known matters.

One thing we ought to note is that the Hebrew phrase translated “**whoever captures (or wins) souls**” is used elsewhere in the OT in places where the sense is “to take life” or “to kill” (e.g., 1 Sam. 24:11; 1 Kings 19:10, 14; Jonah 4:3). It seems clear that the reference here is not in the idea of causing death but in drawing a parallel in the drama and extent of what is happening in the spiritual realm.

And so, this proverb appears to be purposely playing off the usual sense of the phrase to focus on the effect of **the fruit of the righteous**. The life of the righteous leads not only to blessing for themselves but also provides fruit that “captures souls” in the sense of leading people off the path that ends in death. It is almost certainly referring to idea of evangelism and the matter of preaching and witnessing the truth of the Gospel with the result that, as a result, persons come to know the Lord.

For similar declarations, cf. Dan. 12:3, equating “*those who are wise*” to “*those who turn many to righteousness*”; see also James 5:20, where the one “*who brings back a sinner from his wandering*” will “*save his soul from death.*” This is basically the idea here. is that the one who knows the Lord, who gives evidence of the presence of “the fruit” of possessing the righteousness of God is, likewise, one who seeks to bring those around him/her to know the Lord Jesus.

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There is real evidence here that the one emerges from out of the true presence of the other. What “grows” from of the righteous knowing of the God of life is desire and willingness to act as the venue by which, in human terms, leads to the winning of souls.

To summarize in terms of interpretation - “*The fruit of the righteous*” is that which proceeds from him, the outcome of a renewed heart. In temporal, still more in spiritual ways he is always communicating good to others. As the tree of life was in Eden and will be in heaven, fruitful, nourishing, healing, even so is the one who in the sphere he occupies at present in the Church. The second

clause of this sentence represents a more active and definite putting forth of energy for the special purpose of winning souls (who can doubt?) to the knowledge of God, in doing which a man will prove himself wise.

As always, there are Biblical illustrations that can help us to grasp more clearly what is shown here:

- It is at least probable that the “souls” which Abraham and his party “had gotten in Haran” (Gen. 12:5) were heathen servants who had become proselytes (they were afterwards circumcised, Gen. 17:27), through the holy influence of the patriarchs.
- The “devout soldier” who waited on Cornelius had doubtless been favorably disposed towards religion by his master’s example, and to him, as to the rest of his family, that good man became as a “tree of life,”
- Also to Peter “the fisherman” (Luke 5:10) was granted the honor of winning all their souls to Christ (Acts 10:24, 44, 48).
- The Apostles set us the example of using every lawful means, and the wisest they knew of, to save souls, and did save many by bringing them into the fold of Christ.

For applications’ sake, we think of the fact that Life is not long, therefore let the most be made of it. Having first given myself to God (2 Cor. 8:5), let me live not unto myself but for others. If wealth and position be mine, how much may I do in the course of a few years to relieve want and misery, and thus to *conciliate* others to Christianity!

Or if mine be an obscure lot, yet, still, within my own circle, my influence may be beneficent. No true Christian can be as an upas tree, withering all within its shadow, nor yet as a barren tree doing nought for others’ good. The true follower of Jesus must needs resemble his Master in being, on a humbler scale, as a “tree of life,” a source of blessing to many. This from the spontaneous outcome of the life within. But more—I shall endeavor, layman though I may be, to win souls to God. Not by intruding into the office of the ministry, but by supporting and aiding it in all legitimate ways, and utilizing opportunities. How often may influence gained be employed for a soul’s good, a doubt removed, a word in season spoken!

*The wife may win her husband, the godly neighbor his fellow-man.
And they who have been guiding stars upon earth shall shine as the
stars (in a far wider sphere), for ever and ever (Dan. 12:3).*

The life-work of the won, what is it but to win the lost?
