

“BAD FRUIT” **(Galatians 5:19-21)**

1.13.19

INTRODUCTION

I love fruit. I also love visiting orchards. Now around here, in a northern state like Minnesota, the only orchards I have ever personally been in are apple orchards. But when I lived down south, particularly when I was on a college choir tour to Florida, I saw something I had never seen before: acres and acres and miles and miles of orange groves. What I remember was something that those groves actually had in common with the apple orchards in Minnesota: the air — the smell of the fruit in the air was almost intoxicating. But my favorite fruits are summer fruits — plums and grapes in particular. One reason I love those fruits so much is that they aren't available in the winter months — at least not the fruits grown in the good old USA — so the short season for summer fruit makes them even more special.

Now fruits are kinda funny things. Some fruits, if they are bad, show that from the outside. You can tell pretty easily if an apple is bruised or if a banana has gone long past its prime. I always appreciate that because, let's be honest, who wants the taste of bad fruit in their mouth? But plums, maybe my favorite fruit, is also one of the sneakiest. Why? Because you can't always tell if a particular plum is maybe not as good as you're thinking. [EXPAND, including liking rock-hard plums, the kind that could knock somebody out.]

The apostle Paul was wanting to share with his Galatian readers the concept of fruit — not just any fruit, but the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And one thing he brilliantly does before sharing about that amazing fruit is to highlight the incredible difference between the fruits of the Spirit and the fruits of the flesh — those fruits that, spiritually, for Christians, should leave a “bad taste” in our mouths. That's what we're going to be talking about today.

TEXT

The acts of the flesh are obvious (KJV: “manifest”) (Greek: “public”): sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God - Paul, Galatians 5:19-21.

ACTS (“FRUITS”) OF THE FLESH:

Greek scholar Richard Lenski highlights one of the most important aspects of this look at “bad fruit,” the acts of the flesh. He translates that the acts of the flesh are “public.” As he elaborates: “Works betray and advertise their source. . . . Where the flesh is in full control works like this result. They show publicly what the flesh is. One does not need to speculate in regard to the flesh; look at what is “public,” open to the eyes of all.” One of our contemporary words for this is “transparency”; we hear that demand all the time from police investigations or political issues, that every step of the process should be transparent. Our works make our hearts transparent. Jesus said as much: ***“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 12:35.*** It is the same way with our mouths, according to Christ: ***“[T]he things that come out of a person's mouth (in public) come from the heart” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 15:18a.***

So, as he wrote about these fruits, Paul grouped them into categories in which all the fruits relate to each other. The first group consists of sexual behaviors:

Sexual immorality (KJV: “Adultery”) (Greek: “Fornication”) — voluntary sexual relations between a married person and somebody who is not his or her spouse. It is estimated that 45-50% of married women and 50-60% of married men cheat on their spouses. According to the American Psychological Association, infidelity accounted for approximately 20-40% of divorces in the United States.

Impurity (KJV: “Fornication”) (Greek: “Uncleanness”) — a broader concept because it includes not only other forms of sexual deviance (i.e., premarital sex, homosexuality, incest, pornography) but also everything that leads to those behaviors. The Greek is the word from which we get our English word “pornography,” and it refers to all God-forbidden sexual activity.

Debauchery (KJV: “Uncleanness,” “Laciviousness”) (Greek: “Unbridled conduct”) — moral uncleanness, lewdness, pollution as opposed to chastity; the picture presented of “unbridled conduct” is of all restraint being removed; imagine a horse breaking free from its rider, racing forward with no idea of where it is going. It is unchecked sexual behavior that lets nothing stand in its way.

The next group that Paul highlights could maybe be called “godless” sins. These were sins that were deeply inhabiting the religious practices of the pagans who surrounded them. Remember that, as Christianity was “the new kid on the block,” all kinds of false religions were firmly in place. And a vital part of the worship and festivities of those pagan practices were sexual practices — temple prostitution, for example — that tied false religion and sex together.

Idolatry — the worship of false gods and any images associated with those false gods; any acknowledgement contrary to the words of God: ***“I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” — God speaking, Exodus 20:2a, 3-5a.*** This is not only referring to worship in a formal religious setting, but anything that at any time we place ahead of God in our attention and devotion. In the words of pastor and teacher Warren Wiersbe: “We are to worship God, love people, and use things, but too often we use people, love self, and worship things, leaving God out of the picture completely.”

Witchcraft (Greek: “Sorcery”) — implies the associated use of mood-altering and mind-altering drugs and other medications in pagan, idolatrous practices and rituals, and by extension includes the occult and magic (when associated with false worship). The Greek word forms the basis for our English word “pharmacy.”

The next group of “fruits” listed by Paul fall under the heading of “personal animosity.”

Hatred (Greek: “Enmities”) — an attitude that defies and challenges others; the exact opposite of “agape,” the love of God, implying of course that, as God is the source of love, Satan is the source of hate.

Discord (KJV: “Variance”) (Greek: “Strifes”) — literally, “to cut apart, to divide into two,” the direct result of hatred. Wrangling (to dispute angrily, to bicker, to do so frequently, often for a long period of time and over insignificant or unimportant things), contention, debate.

Jealousy (KJV: “Emulations”) (Greek: “Jealousies”) — the motives so often involved in discord. It comes from a base word that means zeal, but often is used as zeal — meaning great energy or enthusiasm — applied in an evil sense, leading to envy, jealousy and anger. It is not only the picture of Christians competing against one another but also making somebody look bad in the eyes of others.

Fits of rage (KJV: “Wrath”) (Greek: “Wraths”) — an agitated condition of feelings, an often-unrestrained outburst of hostility coming from inward indignation that quickly blazes up. Fierce passion, violent commotion of mind, anger. As a reminder of the seriousness with which God views fits of rage, Jesus famous said in the Sermon on the Mount: **“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 5:21-22.**

These four are all linked; the first and third (hatred and jealousy) point to motives while the second and fourth (discord and fits of rage) are the product. Hate produces discord; jealousy creates passionate outbursts of anger.

Next for Paul comes what one writer calls “partyism,” which alludes to people taking sides.

Selfish ambition (KJV: “Strife”) (Greek: “Factions”) — ambition, self-seeking, rivalry; self-will is an underlying idea in the word in the sense of “seeking to win followers” or “to create factions.”

Dissensions (KJV: “Seditions”) (Greek: “Splits”) — division, literally “a standing apart,” the outcome of which is cliques.

Factions (KJV: “Heresies”) (Greek: “Separate notions”) — the Greek word gives us our word “heresies” but here it means a choice of special opinion for oneself and, therefore, a further operation of the flesh. It is only used in this one place in the New Testament and, while it means a chosen way of life, by implication that choice leads to discord and dissension.

Envy (KJV: “Envyings”) (Greek: “Envies”) — the feeling of evil displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage of prosperity of others, suggesting, among other things, grudges that are carried on without being resolved. It comes from a Greek root that means “ill will” and is always used in a negative connotation.

Drunkenness (Greek: “Spree”) — denotes not just being drunk but rather habitual intoxication.

Orgies (KJV: “Revelings”) (Greek: “Carousings”) — the consequences and associated behaviors of drunkenness. Comes from a Greek root meaning “letting loose.”

PARALLEL LISTS

Now this is not the only list of bad fruit in the New Testament. There are several others: For example, Jesus Himself, in an argument with the Pharisees concerning eating with unwashed hands and how that defiles somebody, said: **“What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come — sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person” — Jesus Christ, Mark 7:20-23.** Paul added

some lists himself in a letter to the Colossian church and also in his first letter to his protégé, Timothy.

APPLICATION — What do all these “fruits” have in common?

First, the fruits of the flesh are all negative. One of the coolest things that was ever communicated to me happened within the first 2-3 weeks of my being here. We got a message in the office from “I don’t know who” saying simply: “Church is fun again.” That implies that positive things, such as the fruit of the spirit, were starting to be seen again. That also tells me that what was dominating to some degree were “bad fruits” — these acts of the flesh. And it does illustrate one of the things that all of these have in common: They are all negative. Their results are all negative. All of these fruits tear apart, create and feed hostility, and destroy unity. When this or any church creates an atmosphere where there is tension, apprehension, anger, frustration and so on, it is the fruits of the flesh that are most prominent — not the fruit of the Spirit.

Second, these fruits are all consequences — consequences of living in our own strength, our own abilities, our own judgments. They are ALL sin. Living in our own strength will always be doomed to failure — and it is what happens when WE occupy the throne of our lives instead of surrendering that throne to Jesus Christ. It’s what happens when we substitute our own minds for the “mind of Christ” that Paul so passionately described in Philippians 2: ***[I]f you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross! — Paul, Philippians 2:1-8.*** If our lives are not all about Christ, then all that’s left are lives about us. And the fruits of the flesh are the natural outcome — the only outcome that can happen when the church tries to exist and wind up separating themselves apart from the life of its Savior.

And what is guaranteed to separate us from our Savior — both individually and collectively — and promise us a harvest of bad fruit? Three things which combine to starve us from the life of Christ:

Living apart from communication with God — what we call prayer.

Living apart from meditation with God — what we call reading and studying God’s word.

Living apart from fellowship with God and his people — what we call church.

Living without those three avenues running in our lives will absolutely drain us of all spiritual strength, leaving us with nothing but our own resources to deal with life.

Third, these fruits betray what the body of Christ is supposed to be — a unified body of believers that represents Jesus Christ. What was it that Paul said to the Corinthian church? ***[God] has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as***

though God were making His appeal through us — Paul, II Corinthians 5:19b-20a. Listen to some of these fruits again: Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions and envy. Do those sound like anything even remotely connected to Jesus Christ, or His design for His church? The fruits of the flesh betray that mission because they are the polar opposite of reconciliation. The church was never founded or intended to represent us or our interests. Remember that moment when Christ asks the disciples: “[W]hat about you? . . . Who do you say that I am?” — **Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:15.** And it’s Peter who answers: “**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God**” — **Peter, Matthew 16:16.** And, as part of his response to Peter, Jesus says: “[O]n this rock I will build my church” — **Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:18b.** What was the “rock” to which Christ referred? Peter’s answer: “**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God**” — **Peter, Matthew 16:16.** That’s what the church was created for, to represent God the Son to the honor and glory of God the Father for the purpose of seeking and saving everyone who is lost, separated from the eternal life which Jesus Christ, in His life, death and resurrection on our behalf offers to the entire world. That’s what we are here for. That’s ALL we are here for.

Now another one of the “lists” of the fruits of the flesh was authored by Paul in his letter to the Corinthian church. Listen to what he said: **[D]o you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God — Paul, I Corinthians 6:9-10.** But what makes this listing significant is that Paul doesn’t stop them; instead, he tells “the rest of the story”: **And that is what some of you were — Paul, I Corinthians 6:11a.** Note the past tense: “what some of you WERE.” Why does he say it that way? Because of what comes next: **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God — Paul, I Corinthians 6:11b.**

What’s the point? Folks, church is messy; there’s no getting around it. So, what makes it messy? Several factors:

First, we’re all at different points on the scale of what Paul was talking about when he wrote that he was **confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry out on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 1:6.**

We are all struggling with something.

We all come with context.

None of us are “mind readers”; we can’t assume what’s going on.

Because of all of the above, love and forgiveness are so important.

Second, we are reaching out into the community, with the idea of bringing people outside the church into the church to start hearing about the salvation offered to them through Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION — Two stories to illustrate the body of Christ (teaching 2nd grade)

First, cleaning up a “mess.” [MAKE SURE the point is made that we should be so anxious to be pleasing to God that we will do ANYTHING to make this place authentically His.]

Second, helping a classmate succeed (math flash cards). “If he succeeds, we all succeed.”

Let’s pray!