

Theme: What Kind of “Fruits” are You Producing?

- 1. The Fruits of the Flesh?**
- 2. Or, the Fruits of the Spirit?**

Galatians 5:19-25

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

During the summers between my late high school and early college years my brother (Neil) and I worked at a farmer's market just outside of Saginaw, MI. *Hemmeter's Produce* was the name of this market, and George Hemmeter, the farmer and owner of the market, was famous in the area for growing some of the best strawberries in the state. When the strawberries would start coming in around this time of year we usually had a hard time keeping the shelves stocked with them. They would sell almost as fast as we could put them out. As great as his strawberries were, we still had to sort them in the back room when they came in from the field. We had to throw out the bad ones and, very rarely, even had to throw out some of the quarts that had been on the store shelf too long and had begun to mold and rot. My brother and I always got the job of throwing the crates of rotten fruits and vegetables into the dumpster near the end of the night. Now, I don't know if you've ever smelled rotten fruit before, but you'd think of all the fruits certainly rotten strawberries can't smell that bad—especially not Hemmeter's strawberries! Believe it or not, strawberries are some of the worst smelling rotten fruit I've ever smelled! I was always amazed at how a fruit that smelled and tasted so good could smell so nasty when it was rotten.

In our text, Paul talks about good and bad “fruit:” the things that are produced in the believer by the Spirit of God, and the things that are produced by the sinful flesh of man. As Christians—who are both “saints and sinners” at the same time—we are like a very strange tree that can produce both of these kinds of fruits: the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of the flesh. The question we will ask ourselves this morning is this: **What Kind of Fruit are We Producing?** The rotten, foul smelling **1. Fruits of the flesh?** Or, the sweet smelling, perfectly ripe **2. Fruit of the Spirit?**

Sometimes when we are trying to pick fruit we need someone to help us determine whether a particular fruit is ripe or not. However, you don't usually need any help determining when a piece of fruit is rotten. It's obvious! So it is with the putrid, rotten **1. fruits of the flesh.** Paul says in our text, **“the works of the flesh are evident” (v. 19).** They are obvious! Paul goes on to make a lengthy list of some of these “obvious” sins: **adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like (v. 19-21).** These are the works, the “fruits,” that we produce by nature. As you can see, it's not a pretty picture. Take a closer look at these fruits and you'll see just how rotten they are.

The first four, **adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,** are sexual sins; sins against God's sixth commandment. These sins are not just dangerous because they can harm us physically and emotionally, but worst of all, they can harm us spiritually. When we keep on saying “No” to God's will for us concerning our sexual behavior in word, actions, and yes, even thoughts, we push ourselves away from Him. We allow those sins to make a “wedge” between us and God that pushes Him further and further away, and in turn we begin to make things, like pleasure and sexual gratification, our motivating force in life.

The second group of “**fruits of the flesh**”, **idolatry** and **sorcery (v. 20)**, are sins against our God Himself! They are sins against His first commandment [“**You shall have no other gods before me**” (**Exodus 20:3**)] and His second [“**You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God**” (**Exodus 20:7**)]. Again, these rotten fruits threaten to weaken and even destroy our relationship to our heavenly Father and His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

The third group that Paul lists, **hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, and murders**, are all sins against our neighbor. These fruits of the flesh destroy relationships, families, and entire lives. They likewise can have a destructive impact on our spiritual health.

The fourth and final group that Paul lists, **drunkenness** and **revelries** (NIV- “**orgies**”), are sins of absolute excess: destructive, degrading acts that show a complete absence of self-control. Think of the spiritual damage and destruction that can be caused by these types of sins—as well as the potentially devastating physical damage they can cause.

As ugly, harmful, and destructive as these **fruits of the flesh** are, they are exactly what our fallen human natures want to produce. Need proof? Take a look around you as you go about your day. Look at what the world is shoving in your face on TV, internet, and radio. It won’t take you long to realize that these “**fruits of the flesh**” are produced and consumed in massive quantities. Buying and selling these “**fruits of the flesh**” is big business, because they are what mankind—what we all!—by nature want to hear, see, and do.

However, think back again to the illustration about the rotten strawberries. How long do you think Farmer George would have let a strawberry plant grow if all it produced was rotten fruit? Not long! What good would it do him? The plant is not doing the job that it was made for: to produce good strawberries. In the same way, God did not create man to produce the rotten fruits of the flesh. Therefore, Paul says, “**just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things** [these fruits of the flesh] **will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (v. 21).

Now, I know for a fact that I’ve produced many of these **fruits of the flesh**, if not in word or deed, most certainly in thought. If the rest of you here this morning are flesh and blood human beings, then it’s a safe bet you’ve produced many of these same rotten fruits as well. Should these words of Paul frighten us: “**those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (v. 21)? Well, they should at least make us pause and take a close look at what Paul is saying, and then take the time to examine our hearts and take inventory of our lives and ask ourselves again, **What Kind of Fruit are We Producing?** First of all, Paul is speaking of a pattern, a consistent and persistent lifestyle when he says “**those who practice such things.**” The original Greek makes this plain. Literally he is saying, “Those *continuing to do such things* will not inherit the kingdom of God.” In other words, those who live a lifestyle that is completely void of repentance and faith. If when we examine our lives we find this pattern of the “**fruits of the flesh;**” if we find that we are excusing or ignoring our sins, and repentance and faith in Christ are not in our hearts then we should be frightened. God is serious about sin! Paul’s words here prove it: “**those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (v. 21).

OK. Time for some good news! God is so serious about sin, in fact, that He sacrificed His only Son to pay the eternal punishment for sin. Forgiveness for all the rotten fruits that we have produced is made ours through faith in His Son Jesus Christ and His perfect sacrifice for us! Paul tells us, “**those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**” (v. 24). That sinful flesh that still lives inside each one of us, that wants to produce only the rotten “**fruits of the flesh**” has been crucified with Christ on the cross. It no longer has any power over us! We are Christ’s! We have His power; we rely on His strength to produce “good fruits;” fruits that please God.

These fruits do not come naturally from our sinful, dead, human hearts. That is why Paul calls them, **2. “the fruit of the Spirit” (v. 22)**. These fruits are produced only by the power of Christ Himself through His Holy Spirit. The Spirit uses the Word of God, and the Sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) like soil, fertilizer, and water to plant that seed of faith and cause it to grow and produce the most un-natural fruit in our lives. Fruit that is nothing like the rotten **“fruits of the flesh.”** Fruit that is like a sweet-smelling, sweet-tasting fruit that pleases God.

The next time you go to the grocery store this week I want you to pay attention to the type of fruit you choose to buy for yourself. Pay attention to the look, smell, and ripeness of the fruit you are buying for you family and the people you love. I’m willing to bet that there will be nothing moldy, rotten, or smelly about the fruit you buy for yourself or your family. In the same way these **2. fruits of the Spirit** are the complete opposite of the **1. fruits of the flesh**. **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience [longsuffering – NKJV], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”**

We can categorize these fruits into groups as well.

- ✠ The first group Paul lists, **love, joy, and peace**, are “inner qualities” that reflect our relationship to God as Christians.
- ✠ The second group, **patience [longsuffering – NKJV], kindness, and goodness**, are “outer qualities” that show themselves in our attitudes and actions toward our fellow human beings.
- ✠ The third and final group that Paul lists, **faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**, reflect how we, as New Men and Women in Christ, conduct ourselves in regard to the obligations and opportunities that are ours in our Christian calling.

Just consider how contradictory these two kinds of **“fruit”** are:

- The **fruit of the Spirit** begins with **love** for **“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10)**. The **fruit of the flesh** is **hatred**.
- The **fruit of the Spirit** is **self-lessness, generosity, goodness and kindness**. The **fruit of the flesh** is **selfish ambition, jealousy, and envy**.
- The **fruit of the Spirit** is **peace**; **peace** with God and our fellow man. The **fruit of the flesh** is **contention and dissention**.
- The **fruit of the Spirit** is **self-control**. The **fruit of the flesh** is **drunkenness and orgies**.

Which kind of **“fruit”** would you rather have? Which kind of fruit would you rather give to others, to your loved ones, and to God? **What kind of Fruit are we producing?** Thanks be to God that we are Christ’s; that we have **“crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (v. 24)** through daily repentance at the foot of Christ’s cross for forgiveness and new life. Thanks be to God that He has given us His Spirit to produce in us the **2. fruit of the Spirit**. **“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (v. 25)**. **“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (v. 16)**. God help us all to do this through His Spirit! Amen.