

Bad Fruit

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Preacher: Neil MacMillan

[0 : 0 0] Right, good evening. So thanks to Corey, early on for the introduction. My name's Neil McMillan. I'm the minister of Cornerstone Church in Moringside.

So it's good to be with you this evening. Whenever St. Columbus here decided to do a series of sermons on any particular part of the Bible, then I know that I can look ahead into that series and find the most awkward passage and I'm going to be the one that's asked to preach on it.

That's generally the pattern that's emerging. So here we've got one about orges and sexual immorality. I knew I was doomed to be the one. And it's just in case I really upset anyone, the blame doesn't fall on one of the ministers who's here every week.

So Derek, the minister, is in Nepal. And we are, well, he's away. He's left me. Just to guide you through really verses 19 to 21, the works of the flesh are evident, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalry, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, orges, and things like these.

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. So this is called bad fruit this sermon.

[1 : 3 3] So just imagine you're walking along. It's a beautiful sunny autumn day and you find yourself for no good reason in an orchard and there are fruit trees all around you.

And as you come close to the trees, you see that some of the fruit trees are bearing very good fruit. It looks delicious. You can see it's going to be great to eat.

But you also look at other trees and you see that the fruit in them looks shriveled and dead and bitter. You can't work out why is it that the fruit in the trees is so different?

Why do some trees have good fruit and some trees have bad fruit? And so you find the headman, the keeper of the trees, the orchard master, or whatever that person is called, and you say to them, what's the deal with the bad trees?

And he explains that the bad trees, somebody has come in and poured poison on the roots of these trees. And because the roots are bad, the fruit is bad.

[2 : 4 3] And so it is with us as human beings that for many of us, the roots of our life are poisonous and that means that the fruit of our life is poisonous.

Your roots determine your fruits. That's just the kind of simple idea that we're working with. If your roots are bad, your fruit is bad, but if your fruit is good, then that means that your life is rooted in something good.

If your fruit is good, it means that your life is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that's the contrast that the apostle Paul's bringing out here in this letter to the church in Galatia.

What does it look like to live a life that is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is full of the Holy Spirit, and that is walking in step with the Spirit?

And what's the contrast to that? So we're looking at the contrast this evening, the bad fruit. So we're going to think about fruit for a little while, and then we're going to think about the heart behind the fruit, and then we're going to think about our roots.

- [4 : 01] So that's kind of where we're going, fruit, heart, root. Okay, so let's start with the fruit. There are 15 kinds of bad fruit here in these couple of verses.
- They're listed there for us, and you could break them down into four sections. So the first three relate to sexual behavior.
- So there we have sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality. So that's all around our sex lives. And then the next two are to do with idolatry, false worship, sorcery.
- So we've got three about sexual behavior. We've got two on idolatry. And then we have eight that relate to strife in human relationships.
- So enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalry, dissension, division, and envy. And then we've got two that relate to kind of intoxication and sort of unbounded behavior, unrestrained living, if you want to put it that way.
- [5 : 20] So you've got those four different areas of bad fruit. Now the thing about bad fruit, of course, is that it doesn't sell itself as bad fruit.
- Bad fruits always want to advertise themselves as good fruits, because the bad fruit brand doesn't sell well. Most of us don't set out in life intending to bear bad fruit.
- And so what we could say really is this, that the bad fruit is a counterfeit of good fruit. It's the kind of fruit you buy at the bar as if you're in Glasgow, okay?
- You go along, it's a knock off, it's a dodgy deal, it's supposed to be the real thing, but it's not. So think about this, sexual sins are counterfeit goods.
- Where sexual sins are a counterfeit of love. It's replacing love with sex and getting the two confused.
- [6 : 24] And so we have to be really clear from what's been said here that sexual contact, sexual involvement with somebody who's not your spouse is sinful in God's eyes, it's not good.
- And yet in our culture, of course, we're told it is good. Sexual freedom is a good according to the culture. It's normal we're told. And yet God says no, it's not normal for a Christian.
- So to many people it may seem like a good fruit, but God says no, in reality it's a bad fruit. So sexual sins are a counterfeit of love.
- Idoltrous sins are a counterfeit of worship, it's replacing true worship with false worship. Sins of strife are a counterfeit of community.
- It's the kind of community where you gather people around you in a divisive way. In opposition to others or to hostility to other people, you create your group and you use your group in enmity against others.
- [7 : 30] I was reading about the Black Panther movie that's coming out. Black Panther movement, of course, was about dealing with racial injustice in the United States back in the late 1960s.
- But the Black Panther movement was driven by hatred, internal conflict, violence. So gathered around a good cause, but a community that was actually deeply fractured.
- And many of our communities are like that, some of our families feel like that, don't they? Fractured, strife, envy, bitterness, all those different kinds of things.
- It's a counterfeit of true community, because true community is found around the gospel in Jesus Christ. At the end we have sins of pleasure, the last two intoxication and orgies, and these are a counterfeit of true celebration and joy.
- So these are the bad fruits, and just be clear about this, that bad fruits have bad outcomes. They're dodgy goods, they've fallen off the back of Satan's lorry, they seem attractive, they might appear compelling.

[8 : 42] But God says that fruit, that bad fruit, will not bring you the good life that you long for. You may think your happiness and the happiness of the people around you can be pursued through these kind of things.

But God says in the end they'll have a terrible impact on you, they won't bring you the peace and joy you long for. And the ripple effect will be felt in the lives of many others.

Bad fruit isn't just bad for us, because our behavior and our action, it always has consequences for other people.

And so what's bad for us will be bad for many of the other people who are close to us in life. When we make bad choices, when we behave and live in bad ways, it's not only us that suffer, many others suffer too.

So that's the bad fruit. Where does the fruit come from? Well let's think about the human heart for a moment, because Jesus says to us very clearly that our behavior, our speech, our actions are a reflection of our inner life.

[9 : 54] And sometimes we describe that as our heart, our inner being, our inner person. So I'm just going to read you from Mark chapter 7, where we read this, Jesus calls a crowd to him and he says, listen to me, everybody listen and understand this, nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them, rather it's what comes out of a person that defiles them.

So Jesus was addressing religious rituals that were about maintaining religious cleanliness and washing your hands, eating the right thing, all that kind of stuff.

So after he leaves the crowd and enters the house, the disciples ask him about this parable and he says, are you really so thick? That's basically what he says. Are you so dull? Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them?

For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach and then out of the body and saying this Jesus declared all foods clean. And then Jesus goes on, it's what comes out of a person that 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, folly, all these evils come from inside and defile a person.

[11 : 21] And so when you think about the fruit of your life, the Bible is not saying to you, you need to change your behavior, the Bible is saying to you, you need to change your heart because it's the heart that determines the fruit.

It's from within you that these evils come. It's the heart that governs our desires, our affections, our thoughts, our actions and our behavior.

It's your polluted heart that comes out and expresses itself. If I'm an angry gossip and I come along to you one day over a cup of coffee and I tell you something really nasty about another person, that's an expression of something broken inside of me, something wrong in my life.

If I'm prone to anger, that's not the fault of the person who's annoyed me, it's a reflection of the poison in my heart.

If I'm driving along in my car raging at the idiot in front of me, it's not because he's an idiot, it's because I'm an angry person with an angry heart.

[12 : 41] And an angry heart is a heart that's out of step with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is very clear in the Sermon in the Mount, isn't he? If you know the Sermon in the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5 and 6 and 7, Jesus is very clear in speaking to people about human ethics that sin is truly a matter of the heart, that you can't just look at sexual behavior and say, well, I've never cheated on my wife, therefore I'm sexually pure.

Jesus says, no, you have to look at your heart and what's going on in the lusts of your heart to determine whether you're sinning in that area of your life or not.

So it's a heart issue that Jesus wants to deal with. So how do we deal with a heart that is polluted, that is angry, that's defiled, that's producing bad food, food, food, food, fruit?

So let's think fruit, heart, root. Okay, so that's where we start. Just saying, you know, the roots of our life feed our heart.

Our heart expresses itself in the fruit, in the behavior, the speech that we see working its way out in our day-to-day behavior.

[14 : 09] So where is your heart rooted? Well, when we see things are wrong, we try and root our heart in a way that will change our behavior. And just as there are counterfeit fruits, there are counterfeit cures.

And one way that we as human beings try and cure the problem of our bad fruit and our bad heart is through religion.

And so what we try and do is to root our lives in the law, and especially if we're religious in the law of God. And we have lots of rules about our behavior to try and manage the problem of bad fruit.

So we try and use religion to change who we are. That's what the Pharisees did. And what they did was they took the laws of God and they created more and more and more rules around them in a very complex way to try and manage their behavior.

But Jesus said that was powerless to bring good fruit because no matter how many rules they had to govern their behavior, those rules could never deal with the unruliness, the darkness of their hearts.

[15 : 29] Rules don't cure the problem of the heart. The Pharisees were religious. They had their laws, but their lives bore bad fruit.

Their lives rippled out into the wider community, into their families, into their synagogues, into their workplaces. The Pharisees brought fear, bitterness, oppression, bullying, the oppression of power and cruelty to the sick and vulnerable.

They lacked mercy. They had no compassion. Their lives were devoid of grace. So if you think that obeying rules is what's going to change you as a person, you've misunderstood Christianity.

You're not going to change yourself by giving yourself more rules because that's trying to change through your own strength. And this passage says that what changes us is the strength and the power of the Holy Spirit.

And if you're looking to rules to modify your behavior, all you'll become is a legalist. You'll become obsessed with keeping the rules. Am I keeping the rules?

[16 : 45] Are you keeping the rules? Is he keeping the rules? Is she keeping the rules? That's what a Pharisee is. So you may want to try and root your heart in religion as a cure to the problem of bad fruit.

But what Jesus wants us to do and tells us through Paul to do is to root your heart in the gospel. So instead of being obsessed with rules, we become obsessed with Jesus.

Because when the Holy Spirit is ruling in your heart, He will move you towards Jesus Christ. That's what the ministry of the Holy Spirit is for.

So there's a very good book about all of this called Keeping in Step with a Spirit by a theologian called James Packer. And James Packer goes through a lot of different sort of understandings of what the work of the Holy Spirit is in the life of the Christian.

And he ends up basically saying this, that the work of the Holy Spirit is presence, to make Christ present in our lives.

- [17 : 54] And by that he says this, he says, the Holy Spirit makes God real and he makes God close. That's what he means by presence.
- God is real and God is close. So that's what the Holy Spirit wants to do for you and that's what's going to change you.
- The more real God becomes to you and the closer God comes to you, the more your life will be changed.
- You don't root your life in religion, you root your life in Jesus Christ. This new life is a life that is lived out of union with Christ.
- By faith we are united to Christ in His death and resurrection. We die to sin, we rise to new life in Jesus. Life in the power, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.
- [19 : 03] So if all we have is the rules, if all we have are hearts governed by the law, then we do not have the Spirit. Look at verse 18.
- If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. So there's a contrast there that Paul says is very real, which is this. You can be under the Spirit or you can be under the law, but you can't have both.
- So you can root your life in the law and in religion and use that to change your behaviour. But if you do that, then it means that you don't have the Holy Spirit.
- Those who have the Spirit don't rely on the law to change them because those who are under the law cannot resist the life of the flesh.
- The Pharisees, they had so many laws but they could not resist the life of the flesh. They were angry, they were bitter, they were corrupt, they were hateful, they were murderous.
- [20 : 04] They could not resist the life of the flesh. So the works of the flesh, verse 19, flows out from this idea of people who live under the law.
- All the rules that we can make for ourselves are unable to tame the wildness of our inner life. All the rules are unable to cleanse the heart from its pollution.
- But if you live in union with Christ, if you're rooted in Christ, then you will walk with the Spirit. When you walk with the Spirit, you can resist the encroachment of sin as it tries to reclaim your heart, your affections, your life.
- Sin will try to infiltrate you, but once you're a Christian and you are risen to new life in Christ, you are no longer the slave of sin. Jesus reigns in the life of the believer, not sin.
- So now in Christ, in the power of the Spirit, you can resist sin, push back against it and overcome it. At times you will falter, at times you will fail, but you will also be changing, becoming more like Jesus.
- [21 : 28] You will want to cooperate with the work of God in your life rather than to obstruct it or ignore it. So fruit, the fruit comes from the heart.
- If the fruit's bad, the heart's bad. The heart comes from the roots. Is your life rooted in Christ and in His presence?
- Is your life rooted in religion? Or maybe your life is just rooted in rebellion, just trying to carve your own good life for yourself.
- And so it says in verse 21, I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. So we just got to be really clear on this.
- So verse 19 and 20 and 21 describes that is not the life of a Christian, okay?
- [22 : 28] That is the life of the non-Christian that is described. And those who live like this do not inherit God's kingdom.

So what does that mean for you? Well, I want to say a couple of things, Christians can sin in these kind of ways, okay? If you fall into one of these sins, it doesn't mean you're not a Christian.

Christians can fall into terrible sins. There was a very famous old time preacher in Scotland called Robert Murray McShane, who died I think when he was only 29 years old.

So he died when he was young, but he was famed for his piety. He was an outstandingly godly young man. The holiness of his life left a profound impact on people who met him.

But talking about this, McShane said this, he saw this seed of every one of those sins in his own heart, okay? So Christians can sin in all kinds of ways.

[23 : 35] But these sins are no longer our default setting. They no longer seem like good fruit to us. They seem like bad fruit. They're no longer the habit of our hearts.

We can see them for what they are. So we're not immune to these sins as Christians. If we fall into one of them, then we have to run back to Jesus.

And at the beginning of chapter 6 in Galatians, it says, if anyone sins, then those of us who are around them should restore them gently, okay? We're a community of grace.

And we walk with each other in the struggles of life. And we're realistic about these things. But there is something really important here too, which is just to ask what rules your heart, okay?

So that's my last thing. Got fruit, okay? You've got your fruit. You've got your heart. You've got your roots. And then just ask that, what is ruling your heart?

[24 : 45] Okay? Because this is about kingdoms and kingships, about what reigns in you. Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So 19 to 21 do not describe the life of a Christian. It's describing the life of those who do not live under the rule of Christ.

And those who do not live under the rule of Christ do not inherit the kingdom. If Christ is your king, you inherit His kingdom.

If Christ is not your king, you don't inherit His kingdom. That's just the very simple reality that the Bible presents us with. So what reigns in your life today?

And who reigns in your life? And if 19 to 21, the bad fruit describes you, then what you need to do, what I need to do, is to repent and to run to Jesus and to put your life under His authority and His kingship and His rule.

[25 : 52] Only Jesus can rescue you. Only Jesus can change your heart. Only Jesus can transform us so that we go from being the people of bad fruit to the people of good fruit.