

Fruit of Unforgiveness

Ephesians 4:32 (KJV) And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Forgiveness is one of the most difficult things for human beings to do. Forgiveness is something that comes from God. Our nature is not like God's.

Instead we lust, lie, cheat, steal, murder, are unfaithful, are selfish, are short-tempered, and hold grudges. But to be like God we need to show:

Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV)

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, **23** Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

The Bible calls these attributes "fruit." Trees produce fruit. Why do trees produce fruit? Inside of each fruit is a seed. That seed is how the tree reproduces itself.

Mark 4:3-8 (KJV)

3 Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: **4** And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. **5** And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: **6** But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. **7** And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. **8** And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

But then Jesus explains the significance of the seed in verse 14:

Mark 4:14 (KJV) The sower soweth the word.

So, the seed is the Word. The fruit is how the tree spreads its fruit. We are to have the Fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is how we spread the seed. When the seed finds good ground, it will grow and produce more fruit.

For a tree to spread its seed, it must produce good fruit. The better the fruit, the more desire there is for it. In my local store, there are fruits from California, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Hawaii, India, and many other places. Trees in those faraway lands have spread their seed to my home town, because they produce great fruit. I have never been to those places; I do not know those trees or the farmers who tend them. Yet I know their fruit.

On the other hand, I have an apple tree in my back yard. I am told that at one time that tree produced great fruit. The neighbors came from all over the neighborhood to pick the fruit of that tree. But now the fruit falls to the ground and rots uneaten. Since the tree produces bad fruit, the seed does not get spread. Instead, the fruit and the seeds are gathered up and thrown into the trash heap. Each of us, as a follower of Jesus Christ, are expected to produce fruit. We may not all produce the exact same fruit, but we must produce something.

Peach. Peaches are sweet on the inside, but fuzzy on the outside. I do not like to eat raw peaches. To me the feeling of the fuzz on my teeth is like nails on a chalkboard.

Peaches remind me of Evangelists. The role of an Evangelist is to come into the church and make everyone uncomfortable. We have these events we call, "revivals," but perhaps we should call them, "uncomfortables." The Evangelist makes everyone, saints and sinner alike, feel uncomfortable in their current situation. He urges us to move from the place of comfort we have created for ourselves and instead move to a place of comfort in Jesus.

Like the travelling Evangelist, the local preacher also brings a little discomfort to the local congregation. The local preacher may not be bringing out the stark realities of hell fire, but they do tell everyone that their lives could be improved.

The preacher brings the Word to our hearts. We live in a comfortable world where we live with what we can see. Most of us make a living based on the work we do with our heads. But the preacher does not appeal to our heads, he speaks to our heart. He speaks to those insecurities we have about ourselves. He speaks to the pains in our body, in our mind, in our soul. The preacher tells us about a God that can heal the injuries we have suffered. He exposes the secret pains we are afraid to reveal to ourselves, let alone to others.

Nectarine. This fruit looks like a peach, but it has no fuzz. I liken this to a Teacher; one who educates those who are willing to learn.

I worked with a Product Manager once who told me there are three steps to marketing: find a happy man, make him unhappy, and promise to make him happy again.

The evangelist comes into a happy city and makes it unhappy. He tells them that their relationship with an eternal God is not right. A teacher then comes in to tell the unhappy congregation how to get right with God. Someone like me educates you on the things that have been written in the Bible. You already have the desire to learn, the teacher can teach you without the fuzz or discomfort.

Plum. I have a plum tree in my front yard. It is a beautiful tree that someone planted for the look of the tree. It produces little fruits, but I am more interested in the look of the tree itself. I liken this to the things in the church that are not spiritual, but they do make everything very nice. Things like church picnics, youth outings to a Cedar Point, clean restrooms. These things are not normally associated with the spiritual fruits of the church, but they are ornamental things that make it much nicer.

There are many people who make the church a nice place to be for its own sake. Many people sweep the floors, clean windows, tune instruments, balance sound systems, launder the baptism towels, etc... They are not salvation issues by themselves, but they make the visit much nicer.

Cherry. This is the smallest fruit I have. They are the little fruit that anyone can produce. A kind word here, a prayer there. Visitors come into the church and are greeted with little bits of fruit. "How are you?" "We are glad you are here." "I am praying for you." Little bits of fruit that may not seem like much, but before you know it you have eaten the whole bag.

Each of these fruits is related to each other in the plant world. These fruits and their trees are closely related. In a spiritual sense, each of the fruits I have described are related. Any of you can produce any of these fruits. I have described each of these fruits as though they are exclusive to a role in the ministry. But the truth is that every one of us can produce these fruits.

You can preach to your family, you can teach a Bible study to your neighbors, make the church a nicer place. But there is also another relative of this family that is not so nice: the almond.

Almonds are a close relative of the peach. In fact, if you look at the seed inside the peach, you can see that it resembles an almond. But wild almonds are poisonous. They contain huge amounts of cyanide and can kill a human. (The almonds we buy in the store are domesticated by man.)

When we live in sin, we are like the almond:

We are hard on the outside. The peach is soft and fuzzy.

We are poisonous. We hurt ourselves and those around us.

We have no fruit to surround us. There is nothing that makes someone want to be like us. The fruit is the desirable part of the seed.

We are bitter. Fruit is sweet, but wild almonds are bitter.

When we spread seed, we spread the tree of poison. If the good tree will not reproduce, the bad tree certainly will.

So how do we turn from the poison nut to the sweet fruit?

Romans 12:2 (KJV) And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Forgiveness transforms our poisonous selves into the sweet fruit of Jesus. We are transformed through grace into something that people want. Forgiveness is a financial term that means to settle a debt owed. Forgiveness comes in three forms:

Forgiveness of God. This is perhaps the easiest to achieve. The Lord's mercy is renewed daily. All we need do is ask for His forgiveness and he will give it to us. He considers our sins to be unknown; under the ocean; as far as the East is from the West.

Psalms 130:3 (KJV) If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

God hates sin and will not have any part with it. Yet if we allow Him, He will cleanse us and make us suitable for His service. The poison of sin keeps us separated from God, but he will clean and make us part of His family. That is what we mean by the Forgiveness of God. We owe Him a debt, but He does not hold us accountable.

Some people, however, have trouble forgiving God. They feel that they were harmed by God and refuse to forgive the debt they feel that he owes to them. For example, a woman might feel that God cannot be forgiven for giving her a miscarriage. This poisons her relationship with God.

Forgiveness of others. This is one with which we have a lot of trouble. We keep score. We know how many times we have been hurt by someone. We may give them a pass once, but if it happens again we are eager to say, "See, they have not changed."

Matthew 18:23-35 (KJV)

23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. **24** And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. **25** But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. **27** Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. **28** But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. **29** And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. **30** And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. **31** So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. **32** Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: **33** Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? **34** And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. **35** So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Forgiveness does not take away the result of the sin. Sin may take your money, give you a disease, give you a baby, whatever. Forgiveness by itself will not remove those things, but it will take away the poison in your life. It will take away your feeling of revenge. A father who holds a grudge against his daughter for getting pregnant hurts himself, his daughter, and the child. The child is innocent. God is very impatient with anyone who hurts the innocent. Forgiveness of others frees you from spreading the poison and hurting the innocent.

Forgiveness of yourself. This is one that is the hardest to identify and the hardest to accomplish. As someone who wishes to do well we need to keep a record of our own wrongs so that we can monitor our own progress. We remember our own wrongs. We play them over in our head to understand what we did wrong and how we might fix it in the future. But in doing so we tend to hold those sins and forget to let go of the guilt. We blame ourselves. We seek out ways of revenge against ourselves. The poison grows within us and begins to spread to those around us. If we are not careful we find that we are hurting the innocent around us.

These three forms of forgiveness are the key to turning our poison, sinful selves into sweet, fruitful selves. Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches." As such we will produce seeds one way or the other. Hold onto our sins and the sins of others, we will produce poisonous nuts that will spread into the world. If we accept forgiveness from God, from others, and from ourselves then we can produce good fruit; fruit that others will want to have. By taking that good fruit from us, those seeds can find good ground and flourish.