

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, You are so good and gracious to us and we deserve none of it. We pray, Lord, that You would continue to bless us and be merciful to us. Without Your grace and mercy we would wind up in hell; yet, because of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, we have salvation. Thank You Lord for being so merciful and gracious to us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in Saint Paul's letter written to the Galatian Christians, the fifth chapter beginning at the sixteenth verse:

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit

against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ 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, 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.

And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and

acceptable to You, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

The psalmist best describes the man who loves and listens to God. In Psalm 1 he records it as thus, ***“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”*** This is a very apt description of those who would listen to the words of God and truly live their lives according to them.

Yet, there is a different fate for those who do not follow God. Hear again from the psalmist, ***“The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away.”*** The ungodly are those who despise the word of God, who want nothing to do with God

and His salvation, and who wither and are blown away by any changing wind.

Dear friends, throughout this life it is a great practice to imagine yourself as a tree. You are planted by God, you are nourished by God, but the winds of the world will continue to blow around you and cause you to sway greatly. Friends, please, pray to the Lord and beg of Him to allow you to bear ***Fruit of the Spirit.***

While Paul is not quoting the first Psalm, we can see a definite parallel in thought. The psalmist was warning those who would hear these words that they need to watch out what fruit they are producing... and Paul definitely echoes this message. Paul is warning the Galatians, and us, that we will be producing many fruits in this life but not all of them are God-pleasing and acceptable.

Looking at Paul's distinction, we can definitely see the concepts of our old man and our New man, can we not? Our old man, our sinful nature, loves to produce the fruits of the flesh. And what are those fruits that our sinful man, our old man, loves to produce? Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries... and the like.

Now ask yourself, how many of these have I 'produced' in the past week?

Adultery? Remember, Jesus tells us that even lustfully looking at another person who is not our spouse is committing adultery. That co-worker, that internet site, that television show... any and all of these are winds of the world that are helping us

produce the fruits of the flesh... and very often we enjoy those images and those fruits.

Sorcery? Read your horoscope or anything of the like and put any credence in it? Jealousies? Of friends or family who have more than you, of the car next to your beater, of the house next to your 'dollar house,' of the perfect couple, of the bigger church? Selfish ambitions? Have you been selfish about anything? sharing toys? sharing money? Are you more likely to give to those in need or pad your retirement account? Murders? Even Jesus says that hating another person and calling them names (Raca [empty head] and the like) is akin to murder in the sight of God... have you done any of these this week?

And now the coup de gras, idolatry. Yes, every one of us is an idolator. We each have our own idols that we pray and bow down to. The winds of our idols are probably the

strongest winds we face on any given day. The winds of our money which seem to make our entire life flow smoothly or provide the roughest waters. The winds of family can cause smooth sailing and sustained growth or it can tear us down branch by branch.

Notice, that no where did we say that God provides the money or God provides the family... rather we see these 'things' as the most important. We do not see God as most important but our money, our family, our friends, our jobs, our houses, our... you name it and it is very easy for us to place it above God. And so we go about producing the fruits of the flesh as we are blown around by the winds of the world and as we chase after the same fruits that they produce.

And as Paul tells us, that as we produce these fruits, as we continue to give in to what the world wants and what the world

produces... well Paul tells us, ***“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.”*** When we are too busy producing things of this world and bowing to idols, we will not enter into His eternal kingdom.

Yet, then came into this world Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. He came into this world to live the most perfect and fruitful life ever. He lived a life in perfect obedience and adherence to God's Word and God's commands. He lived His entire life to the glory of God and bore fruit that was pleasing to God... even if the world was not the most pleased with it. Jesus was not swayed by the winds of the world, but was rooted in the truth of God's word.

And for His perfect life, for His perfect and abundant fruit... Jesus Christ was crucified. He was hung on the cross to die a death that

He did not deserve; yet, He chose to die it for you and for me. Jesus chose to hang on that cross because He knew that we would not always bear abundant and good fruit in this life... but Jesus has. And as He hung on that cross for us, He took all of our guilt, all of our punishment, all of our shame and He left them on that cross.

And now through faith in Jesus Christ, we know that our sins are forgiven. Through faith in Jesus we know that heaven is waiting open for us. Through faith in Jesus we know that while we are not perfect and bearing abundantly perfect fruit... Jesus has and He has done it for me and now through faith in Him I know that I have eternity waiting for me. Also, through faith in Him, through faith in all that Jesus has done for me, I can now bear fruit.

The fruit I bear will not be as beautiful or as perfect as Christ's and yet in the eyes of God

the fruit I bear in faith is the most beautiful fruit that has ever been born. And I can now spend my life bearing abundant fruit for Him because that fruit allows me to show my God and all that He has done for me.

Maybe now instead of being angry and selfish, I can show more love and long-suffering to all people. I know that I may not always want to show love and long-suffering; but when I am not feeling the greatest I can lean back on my Savior, who has always loved me and was full of great long-suffering towards me.

Maybe now instead of hatred and wrath I can show the love of God through joy, peace, and kindness. I can be joyful, not in myself but in my Savior. I can have peace knowing that my salvation is now assured through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and not my own actions. And I can show kindness... because everyone can afford to be a little

kinder throughout their lives. Showing joy, peace, and kindness will also set you miles apart from much of the world... and they will be able to see your God and Savior all the more.

And maybe instead of idolatry... we can show faithfulness and self-control. Instead of worshipping and trusting in the created things of this world, we can be faithful to our God. Instead of being blown to and fro in the winds of idolatry and in chasing after all the 'new gods' of the world, I will show self-control to my God, my God who has redeemed me and saved me from my sins. Just like the joy, peace, and kindness... being faithful and self-controlled will be fruits that the world is not completely used to seeing. Instead of focusing on ME and I and NUMBER ONE, we can put ourselves second and allow God to be God... and we can continue to grow because of what He has done. And then with the Spirit leading us, we

can do as Paul says, "***And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.***" We can crucify the flesh, and live and produce to God.

Dear friends in Christ, while you may not have thought of yourself as a tree before... it seems to be a pretty apt description. We are planted in this world and the winds of the world blow us around a lot! But praise be to God, that we can be grounded in His Word and sacraments, and through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ, we can bear fruit in accord with what He wants.

Thanks be to God that He has planted me and He provides me His means of grace to continue to grow. Thanks be to God that He has blessed me and has covered me in the blood of Christ. And thanks be to God that though my fruit is not perfect nor the most beautiful, God still allows me to bear ***fruit of the Spirit.***

Dear friends, thanks be to God. Amen.