

LIFE GROUP LESSON

June 25, 2011

By Their Fruit You Shall Know Them

[Galatians 5:16-5:26](#)

In the Melanesian islands of the South Pacific during WWII, the natives watched closely as the American and British engineers came in and built airstrips. The islanders were amazed to see that when the airstrips were completed, planes began to arrive filled with cargo: food, building materials, machinery, even vehicles. This, they decided, was something they wanted in on.

The Melanesians deduced, that if they built airstrips, then planes would come to them, too, likewise bringing cargo. They accordingly hacked makeshift runways out of the jungle and built mock-up control towers out of grass and mud. They put fires along the sides of the runways, and put a man in the grass-hut control tower, with two coconut halves on his head for headphones--he's the controller--they rigged antennae out of bamboo and then they waited for the airplanes to land. As far as they could see they were doing everything right. The form was perfect. It looked exactly the way it was supposed to. But it didn't work. No airplanes ever came. (John Derbyshire, National Review Online, June 14, 2002 "It's All America's Fault: The cargo-cult mentality." and Richard Feynman From a Caltech commencement address given in 1974 Also in Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!)

In the world that you and I live in today cargo cults of a similar type are commonplace. The cargo people are looking for is not food and machinery but love, joy, peace, patience and all the other things that our text this morning describes as the "fruit of the spirit." Rather than building runways for the cargo planes to land on, those who seek this precious cargo seek to order their lives in a way that looks religious.

"Surely", the thinking goes, "if my life looks spiritual, then God's blessing will follow." What they are missing, like the Melanesian islanders, is the fact that cargo comes not because of runways and control towers but because of a relationship with the one who sends the cargo.

Love, joy and peace and all the others are not the result of adherence to a set of Christian standards, rather they grow out of a relationship with God born of faith in Jesus Christ.

That's not to say that no cargo comes to the runways of those who have not genuinely experienced God's grace.

Proposition: Spiritually speaking, every life bears fruit, the kind of fruit, or I could say the kind of cargo, depends upon where the life is rooted.

Transition: As we think about the kind of fruit that human lives produce I'd like to break it into three components, first we'll consider the exclusive nature of spiritual fruit and then we'll look at the two main varieties of Spiritual Fruit. The first point that Paul makes is that...

1. You've Got to Pick Your Fruit

vv. 16-17 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Paul makes the same point here about spiritual fruit. The life lived by the Spirit, doesn't cooperate with the desires of the sinful nature. They can't peacefully coexist. When a person puts their faith in Christ,

the Holy Spirit takes up residence in their life and when the Holy Spirit lives in you, He convicts of sin and you can't be satisfied in that way of life anymore.

On the other hand when you haven't put your trust in Christ, when you're trying to earn God's favor on your own, it's hard to maintain the outward facade of Christianity, To go back to the cargo cult analogy, it's hard to keep the runways cleared of overgrowth and to maintain control tower personnel when the cargo of the fruit of the Spirit hasn't arrived, because the flesh doesn't really desire to do what's right. The flesh desires and ultimately will lead a different kind of life. Which brings us to the first kind of Spiritual Fruit...

2. Fruit of the Flesh

vv. 19-21 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: 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.

There's a couple of important points here. First of all note with me the diversity of this list. Most of us do all right with the acts of the sinful nature that really do seem obvious: sexual immorality, debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; fits of rage, and orgies. What becomes more troublesome are those that seem a little more mainstream: impurity, hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness. These are more problematic for us, but the message is clear, they are not separated into first tier and second tier, they are woven together and put on the same plane.

Drunkenness is no more acceptable than witchcraft, jealousy is no less toxic than sexual immorality. All of these are the works of the flesh, the cargo natural to the life unchanged by grace. These are the

desires that Paul says we will not gratify if we are living by the Spirit.

Also note that Paul is quite strong here in his condemnation of all of this type of behavior. Those who live this way, he says **WILL NOT** inherit the kingdom of God. Play semantic games with what that means all you want, but the bottom line is Paul is saying if you live a life that produces this kind of fruit, you are not saved. Clearly this is the balance to the strong emphasis upon faith and Grace we've seen up to this point in his letter to the Galatians. He's not taking all that back, he's not turning around now and saying follow these rules to be saved. He's saying if you are saved you won't live this way.

And I think the wording is important, he doesn't say that those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom. He says that those who live this way will not inherit the kingdom. That's not to give permission for occasional backsliding, but simply to recognize that the changing grace that works in our lives by the power of the Spirit brings us along gently in a process of grace, molding us into the image of Jesus. God isn't up there with a stick ready to pound your head at the first mistake, but there clearly is a divine expectation of a changed life in response to and in cooperation with God's Grace.

Finally let's look at the Good stuff, the desirable cargo of the...

3. Fruit of the Spirit

vv. 22-25 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

The first thing that leaps out at me here is the contrast between the

types of thing that Paul lists as being the fruit of the Spirit and those that he lists as fruit of the flesh. The fruits of the flesh he describes as "acts of the sinful nature" and they are just that--actions, behaviors, things people do.

The fruit of the spirit on the other hand are character traits. They are ways of being, of course it goes without saying that these will manifest themselves in behavior consistent with the life of the Spirit, but it's important to note that the transformation is first internal. Does the behavior change? Yes, but it is the person that changes first and the behavior changes as a result of that.

And it is this internal change that we as human beings are really interested in. Like the Melanesian islanders building empty runways we can attempt to build the Christian life based on externals but the real cargo never arrives when we do it that way. A life of external purity in itself will lead only to frustration because we cannot forever maintain that facade, but a life rooted in faith in Jesus will lead both to an a life filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, AND to a life that is externally pure. The very next verse says **"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires"**

A relationship with the source of the cargo means you get both the cargo--the fruit of the Spirit--and the runway--the changed life, and instead of being drudgery that new life is abundant.

Discussion