



Summer Fruit-Part 12

Comparing Our Fruit Bearing

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Let me ask you, what kind of Christian are you? How godly are you? How do you rate yourself just in terms of living the Christian life? I mean, if you had to give yourself a grade or had to rate yourself from zero to 100 and 100 is like ultimate godliness. I mean, where would you be on that scale? Now, without moving your heads around, look around at some of the people around you. I just wonder how you measure up next to them. Do you think they're more godly than you are or you think you're more godly than they are? I mean, think about the things we've been talking about: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, the practice of those things. I mean, how is your production of that fruit compared to where you were ten years ago? How about just where you were two years ago? And how do you think your fruit production compares to the people sitting around you?

Well, that's an uncomfortable line of questioning, isn't it? And that's a little odd for us to think in those terms. And yet the problem is we do think in those terms, even if it's not as stark and in your face as my series of questions. I mean, you think about where you are in terms of fruit production, probably in every sermon we preach. You think, "Well, I wonder how I'm doing in that? I'm not doing so well in that one? I'm doing okay in this one." And then when you get in a conversation with someone or you're even talking with the closest people in your life about other Christians, it's easy for us to make comparisons, even if it never surfaces to the top of our minds to say, "Yeah, I'm a lot better Christian than that guy is." That kind of stuff happens all the time.

Now, it's important for us to think in terms of what that might produce in our lives and what kinds of sins we might engage in just doing that. Which is really odd after getting through a passage of Scripture talking about the Fruit of the Spirit, knowing that they're all contrasted against the works of the flesh. And when we read about the works of the flesh, we think of those in such, you know, rank, sinful terms. It's just, "Oh, yeah, that's the bad life. That's the old life. That's what the non-Christians live like." And yet what happens is there's a sanctified set of sins, a respectable set of sins, that we can engage in that really look a lot like those sins only the object is really different.

For instance, there can be a lot of hatred in our non-Christian lives. We can look across the aisle politically or philosophically or in terms of some other group of people who we don't agree with and we can really be filled with bitterness and frustration and hatefulness and have a real competitive heart toward those people and we can see that it is bad. But then we become Christians. We feel like I got a new heart. I got new desires, I got a new direction in my life. I want to have more love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. I want more of those things. And you think, "Well, then, I'm on the right track." But like the Corinthians when Paul writes them, he no longer sees them there cheering for their idols and trying to get people to do things like there was so frequently happening in Corinth, these temple prostitutes. That kind of immorality was absent from the church it seemed and yet there were all kinds of competitive things going on.



Like, "Yeah, I think Apollos is a way better preacher than Cephas." "Yeah, I think Paul's better than Peter and Apollos." And, "You know, I'm more of that group and not their group," or even just how gracious you are.

Their competitiveness on exercising grace reached a place where they actually had a group of people who were defending an incestuous relationship all in the name of being godly. I mean, these people had a problem and they were sinful. The whole point to First Corinthians was correcting a series of sins, even things that relate to their domestic life in Chapter 7, thinking, "Well, if I'm really godly, then I'm going to do this." And yet, Paul says there are all kinds of sinful thinking in that.

After dealing with the works of the flesh that paint a picture for us that's easy to contrast with what we're shooting for, and then going through the virtues of the Christian life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, we get to one last verse here in Galatians Chapter 5. I'd like you to look at it. Verse 26. It seems like out of nowhere we have this return to an exhortation and a warning about sin. It's a kind of sin that is different than the sins that were listed earlier, or at least it feels different because much like the Corinthians thinking, "Well, I'm not living that old pagan life anymore," Paul says, but look at how you are trying to do things in the Christian life, and though you have a Christian object with a Christian t-shirt, with a Christian set of vocabulary words coming out of your mouth, you're engaged in sin. And you justify that, you rationalize that, sometimes you even sin in the name of God and you don't realize that. It's much more insidious. It's much more subtle.

Matter of fact, one of the words, the word that it ends with here, the word "envy" was in the works of the flesh list. And he's got to tell them not to envy. But the envy now is different. It's not just, "I'd like to have all that money or the sports car or the house on the hill or these, you know, these relationships this guy has." We're no longer coveting and envying things that are blatantly sinful. The coveting and envy that takes place in this passage comes on the heels of all these virtues. The point is, you can be envious of people who seem to be more godly than you, that have a bigger ministry than you, who seem to have more spiritual successes than you, who are producing more fruit than you. And that's the problem. I look at a congregation this morning and I've got people here bearing fruit some 30-fold and you're sitting next to people bearing fruit 100-fold. And there's going to be within the context of community a tendency to frequently compare ourselves with each other.

Now, there have to be distinctions among us and those distinctions are to be recognized and understood, and there's a reason for us to think rightly about ourselves. Paul says, "Well, you shouldn't think more of yourself than you ought to," but you ought to think so as to have sound judgment. We've got to know kind of where we're at. There's nothing wrong with us assessing our spiritual lives. Every time we hear a sermon, I hope we're thinking about, "Well, I could do better in that. I'm getting a C- in that and I got a B+ in that." That may not be a bad thing. The problem is in community. Even Soren Kierkegaard, the philosopher, reminds us that the more we're embedded in community, the more we compare ourselves with each other.



You can't go to a small group, a home fellowship group at our church, without having a sense of. "Well, I see where he's at. And I get where she's going. And I know what this guy's prayer life is like now. And look at what they asked to pray for. I mean, they're just on a whole different place than I am." And there is all of this necessary built-in comparison that takes place. With the focus that we so naturally have on how I'm doing, that self-focus becomes a lot of what is addressed here in this last verse.

So let's look at it as we wrap up this series on the Fruit of the Spirit. I know a lot of people like to say, "Well I don't even like this here." Matter of fact, some people say, "Well, let's just have this a part of Chapter 6," and some people advocate for that. But I think it's logically, theologically, absolutely important that this comes at the end of this list of the kinds of things we've been dealing with, the fight between the flesh and the Spirit. It ends with this for fruit-producing Christians. Look at verse 26. "Let us..." Well, let's get the context, verse 25. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." We've talked about some profound things there, being connected to God. Right? He is the vine. We are the branches. Christ is the vine. I'm supposed to stay connected. We looked at that fruit-bearing relationship last time. And now with all this great exhortation, all this reminder to fight the flesh and the obvious sins of the passions and desires of the flesh, he says here's an insidious thing that can happen among God's people. "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Now, those two participles, "provoking" and "envying," those fit nicely under this command here, not to be conceited. "Let us not be conceited." So conceit has something to do with how I view myself and two things can come out of that. Because when you assess yourself in comparison with other people, you have a sense of who you are in relation to other people and two things can happen. You can think, "I'm better than you." And here's what provoking does, "I'd like to show you that in some way. I'd like that to be clear that I'm a lap or two ahead of you." And then there are those who say, "Well, I'm not better than you spiritually. I'm less than you." And the temptation there is to envy that.

So we're going to deal with those two things as points two and three in this sermon. But let's start with this first thing here, and that is conceit. It's an interesting Greek word, a compound word. It's the only time this particular word shows up in the New Testament. There is another version of it in Philippians 2. But it's the word "empty" that's put next to the word "glory." Matter of fact, in the old translations, you might remember grandma and grandpa talking about "vain glory." Right? You're all about vain glory, vain glorious things. "Vain" is empty. And then the word "Doxa," "glory" is, you know, the importance of something, to have a sense of your own importance, but it's empty, it's not right. It's like the little kid who watches the shoot-em-up movie and has a cap gun and goes around thinking he's, you know, some huge, you know, foreboding figure who, you know, can bring justice to the world. He's got an inflated view of himself. His glory that he thinks about himself is not accurate. He's misdiagnosing his importance. And that is, I think, at the nub of what the problem is in making these comparisons. Right? We're so concerned with where we stand.



So the conceit is about a focus. It's a focus on ourselves. When I sit there and I think either you're better than me and I envy you or I am better than you and I'd like people to know that, those are the two things, provoking and envying, I think all of that can be solved if I can just look at myself and go, okay, now, let's think about the connection that God has drawn all throughout this passage, and that is its fruit. Now, we've talked about it's an active participation in bearing fruit, but it's fruit. And back to that John 15 example, if Christ is the vine and we are the branches, here's something that's very clearly said, "Without me, you can do nothing." So if the vine is not connected to the branch and the branch doesn't bear fruit and the fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, those things that I'm measuring my godliness with, that's not going to happen if I'm not connected to Christ, which the implication is, then it really is about what Christ is producing in me. Now, are you an active participant in doing that, are you exerting effort? Yes. But ultimately, if it weren't for God bringing you in connection with Christ and then nourishing your spiritual life in Christ, you would produce no fruit.

Let me give you a practical example of this. Turn in your Bibles to John 3. In John Chapter 3, you know that passage because Jesus is talking to Nicodemus. But let me talk to you a little bit about John the Baptist in this passage. Drop down to near the end of this chapter. John the Baptist in John Chapter 3 is having his followers a little concerned about the dwindling crowds that John is preaching to. John is not having the ministerial effect. His fruit seems to be dipping. He may have been 100-fold fruit producer in terms of his preaching ministry, but now it's going down. The apex of his preaching ministry was seen in people being baptized saying, "I like what you're saying. I get what you're saying. God is helping me understand what you're saying. I am a sinner. I need to repent. I'll be baptized." And the baptism numbers for John and his ministry were starting to plummet. They were plummeting because people were going over to get baptized by Christ and his disciples.

So John had his circle of disciples and Christ had his circle of disciples, and this created some consternation in the minds of John's disciples and he's going, what are we going to do about this? That's what verses 22 and 23 and even 24 are about, just to remind us that he's not yet in prison, to give us that historical reminder. He's going to end up in prison. But it says in verse 25, let's pick it up there. "Now a discussion," this is John 3:25, "arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification," which we don't know exactly what the discussion was, although in Leviticus and in Numbers, there's a discussion about water purification of the priest. Maybe it was just about that. The Jew was like, "I don't know why you're baptizing common people. That doesn't make sense. Is this related to what's in Leviticus?" I don't know. Whatever the dispute was. "They came to John," after that whole discussion, these disciples of John, "and they said, 'Rabbi.'" So they're looking at him as the leader here. And of course he was. Matter of fact, Jesus said he was the "greatest prophet born of women." Since all prophets are, that means he's the best. Right? This is the preacher that Christ had on his phone, on his podcast. Let's just put it that way. He loves John the Baptist preaching. I mean, that's not true, obviously, but, he's given him this amazing commendation.



So the rabbi, and that's rightly, that's what he is, he's a teacher, he's a leader. "He who is with you across the Jordan," speaking about Christ who came to be baptized by John, "to whom you bore witness," the one you said was the Messiah, "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." "Look, he's baptizing." Well, that's what you were doing. "And all are going to him." Now that's an exaggeration but the numbers were tanking and Jesus' numbers were going up. "John answered." And here's something I'd love for you to mark your Bibles up with or your electronic Bibles. Highlight this. John answered this. This is the fundamental issue of John 15 that should be remembered in Galatians 5.

Here it is. He says this, verse 27, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven." I don't have a person showing up unless God sovereignly grants that. I don't have any effect in my preaching unless God grants it. I don't have godly children, if I'm a godly mother, you know, unless God grants it. I don't lead a small group and have any fruitfulness unless God grants it. I'm never asked to do anything for the Lord in terms of discipling or leading or biblical counseling unless the Lord grants it. I don't have ANY fruit coming out of my life unless the Lord grants it.

Which, by the way, is why Paul says to the Corinthians, "Everything you have has been given to you." You have to see that heavenly connection. He says if everything you've got has been given you by God, he says, then "why do you boast as though you had not received it," as though you produced it? Well, you do produce it. You produce fruit. But it's really a fruit that is given to you because God is providing that through this relationship with Christ. I know there is that dual connection between me exerting effort and God deciding to produce it, but I hope you're mature enough in Christ to know even if I give my all to produce fruit, if there's any success, the Bible's very clear, it's been granted to you from God.

So, John, yeah, did he study for those sermons? Of course he did. Did he work hard? Did he try to get the word out about this preaching and baptism? Of course he did that. But he realizes this: you don't have anything unless it's been given to you from heaven. "You yourselves bear me witness," verse 28, "and I said, 'I'm not the Christ but I'm the one who's been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom." Really, what I care about is everyone being interested in Christ. Right? And the bride, the people of God, need to go to Christ. So I'm cool with that. "The friend of the bridegroom," who I am and I'm always promoting the bridegroom, "he stands and hears him." And you know what? I'm glad. "I rejoice greatly at the bridegroom's voice." I'm so glad. "Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete." I'm happy that ministry is taking place. When I look across the aisle and I see someone there who is doing effective ministry and they're bearing fruit some 60-fold and I'm bearing fruit 20-fold, I say I'm so glad that fruit is being born to the glory of God. That's a hard thing to do if you're conceited, if you're full of your own worth, if you think more about yourself than you ought.

Then you know this verse. Perhaps this is already highlighted in your Bibles. "He must increase. I must decrease." Now, this has often been quoted by people trying to impose a false humility in their lives. But the truth of that is what matters. That's the eyeball moving off of myself and saying, I'm concerned about fruit because it glorifies God. I'm concerned about



teaching that's good, because it glorifies God. I'm concerned about people getting disciplined because it glorifies God. I'm concerned about people having good biblical counseling because it glorifies God. If I'm a part of it, fantastic. If I can be available to do it, great. If I can produce fruit, that's awesome. If someone else does, what matters is the bridegroom and that's what I'm concerned about. I have joy in that.

Do you see how that's the opposite of what's about to come, provoking and envying? Provoking and envying does not have this perspective. So John responds perfectly to what we're told not to engage in here in Galatians Chapter 5 verse 26. He is not envying, which his disciples apparently were, and he's certainly not provoking. He's not trying to say, "Well, you know what? I set the stage for him and I came before... look at what I did." None of that. Empty glory. A sense of his importance. He didn't care about that. Is there a time to look in the mirror of God's Word to see where you stand in certain things in terms of fruit production? Absolutely. But the focus should not be on yourself and you should not be sitting there saying, "I really want to measure myself against what other people are doing." That is the problem that Galatians Chapter 5 ends with. Do not think in those terms.

All right, let's look at these two words now. "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." Let's talk about this word provoking. As long as we're talking a little Greek here this morning, and since these words with prepositions connected to compound words sometimes they draw a picture that's helpful. Here's a word you've heard a lot from the platforms of not just this church, but other churches. The "Parakletos," "Paraclete." What does that mean? Think about it. Eight o'clock crowd, you're the smartest crowd we got. So you know this answer, right? Parakletos, paraclete. That paraclete is the Greek word that translates one of the names for the Holy Spirit. He's the helper. Right? "Para" is the preposition "alongside of." "Kletos" is the verb "to call" and I'm "calling in alongside of." Jesus calls in the Spirit alongside of us and he now keeps us from being orphans in this world because Christ goes back to the Father. Parakletos, the helper, the advocate. He's the parakletos.

This is the same word with a different preposition. Kletos is the word "to call." But instead of para, you might get this confused if you're a first-year Greek student and you read it really quickly. It's "pros" kletos, "Proskletos", not the paraketos, not called in alongside to help, but I'm calling out to you. I'm calling out at you. The point is that I'm provoking you. In what way? In that I'm saying things to try and build a contrast. Matter of fact, it's a word that's used in secular Greek to call someone to a challenge of some kind. "I challenge you, sir, to a duel." It's calling out to them to say I want to measure me against you. I want to show, and people only provoke people when they have a superior thought about themselves that they are better. So they're going to try in some way to say things, call out things, and they're going to say those things to people to show that really I'm doing better than you are. I have more gifts than you do. I'm producing more fruit than you are.

Most of you don't think that we think that way. But think how often in our words we're doing just that very thing. I mean, really the symptoms of this. Well, let's give you the point first. Here's what I'm going to call it. It's a competitiveness. I want to "Never Be Spiritually

Competitive." And I'm speaking to you where you're healthy in your Christian life, and there's fruit in your Christian life. Now all of the sudden you want to compete and the people that want to compete are people that think that they can beat the other person. Right? I rarely say to some great ping-pong player. "Hey, let's play ping-pong" so I can get whooped. Right? I always say let's play if I think I can beat you because I want to provoke you and I want to have a match where I can win. That's the point. I think it'll be a challenge. I would like to see if I can beat you. That's the calling out, proskletos.

If I am competitive, I'm thinking of a couple of things. Here are the symptoms. First of all, I'm thinking about my spirituality or my fruitfulness in light of yours. The thing that always is the default of my heart is I'm want to feel good about me. To feel good about me, I've got to think that I'm doing better than you. So it's the wrong thinking. It's the Romans Chapter 12 verse 3, "Thinking more highly of myself than I ought to." So it starts with that. Then it goes to my mouth, my words. And because proskletos is a word that actually speaks to speaking, I think back to what we studied in terms of James 3 recently in this series about the tongue being this restless evil. But one of the things that James says in James 3 is that "it boasts of great things." It's a small part of your body, but it boasts of great things.

Now, again, he's talking to Christians. Why would Christians boast? Christians love to boast. They love to make big out of something good that they've done. They like to say, "Here's what I did. Here's what I engage in. Here's where I serve. Here are the things that I accomplished." And while it doesn't sound like a third-grader, listen carefully to people's conversation and see if you don't see being motivated by thinking more highly of myself than I ought. Now I'm speaking more highly of myself than I ought. I'm boasting of great things. I'm able to, in my words, show you by what I'm saying. The motivation is I want to show you that I'm doing good spiritually. I want to show you that I've prayed a lot or I've studied that passage or I've read that latest Christian book. I'm going to share that. And that is an act oftentimes of boasting. It's trying to show you what I've done. It's trying to show you that I know my stuff. I want to show you that I've done things for the Lord.

There's an overthinking, there's an overstating, and then let me tell you this, to think back to Matthew 6, there's an overacting. An overthinking, an overstating and an overacting. The overacting, Jesus said the Pharisees are all about overacting. They may want to pray, but when they pray, they want to make sure you know they're praying. They may want to give. I mean, there may be something about their virtue in wanting to give, but when they give, they want to make sure you know they're giving. They may want to serve. I mean, they may have some interest to serve, but when they're serving, they want to make sure that you know that they're serving. They're going to do something, not just by stating it, but by showing you visibly that they're the guys and they're all that and they overact.

I wonder if you've ever seen that in a prayer meeting. I wonder if you've ever done that in a prayer meeting. I wonder if sharing in a small group you've ever done that. To overstate and then overact in the things that you do. Maybe even showing up to certain things because it's all motivated by the first point, and that is, I think highly of myself and I now want to make it clear to you by what I'm doing, that I am a good, good Christian here. Track your words.



Police your words. Try and objectively, dispassionately step out of yourself and say, are my words self-promoting? Am I concerned with putting myself in the best light? Do I by biblical standards really promote myself by overthinking, overstating and overacting in my spirituality?

Christ is the standard. You're never going to measure up to him. Right? There's no one good but God alone. I know that my abiding in Christ is to produce some fruit. I'll never produce the fruit in a way where I get to be the example. And in that sense, I must decrease and Christ must increase. I want people to understand, he is the ultimate example. So me trying to present myself as the example, even though there are examples in the Christian life, and I'll correct that in a minute, because there's a way to go into the other ditch in all this, I just want to make sure that I'm not trying to be competitive with you by overthinking, overstating and overacting in my Christian life.

Let me say this, though, as a caveat. Can I step out of that for a second? The only thing you should be competitive with is the clock. The only thing you should be competitive with is the calendar. I say that because in Hebrews Chapter 6, here's the writer of Hebrews looking at people he'd like to talk to them about the Melchizedekian priesthood and how it relates to christology and he's all queued up to do that. He's talking about why Christ fulfills the roles of prophet, priest and king. When he gets to this concept of priest, he wants to talk about how Melchizedek was an important figure 2,000 years before Christ and the prophecy of David, you know, 1,000 years before. He would like to talk about why that's important. It's not some weird Mormon doctrine. The idea of the Melchizedekian priesthood is a clearly and exclusively a Christological category and he wants to talk to them about that.

So I'd love to talk about that. This is in Hebrews Chapter 5, the end of the chapter. But he says you are "Nothros", a great Greek word. You're dull, you're "dull in hearing." Your ears are just filled with spiritual wax. And he said, why? Because you guys, even though by now, "by this time," that's a Greek word, "Chronos," by this particular time you've been a Christian long enough, "you ought to be teachers." You ought to be teaching these things. But instead, your appetite wants milk and you're continually ingesting spiritual milk. Meat, now, on the other hand, like talking about the Melchizedekian priesthood and the implications of that, he says "that's for the mature" and the mature have their senses, their sense of discernment, it has been conditioned by, it's been practiced in this constant decision making between what is right and what is wrong.

So we're not just talking about knowledge so that you can talk about christology. It's about you putting biblical truths into practice. So mature people who are knowing the Bible and applying the Bible, they're people who can take the meat of the Word and they live that out. But you guys have been Christians so long, but your growth has been stunted. You just want the elementary principles continually repeated to you. I mean, you don't really read the Bible. You've had plenty of time to read the Bible. You don't avail yourself to opportunities to learn even though you could. You spend money on other things that you should spend on other things that would help you move along. You could invest in these classes or this stuff or this training. You could be involved in discipleship or Partners or leading small groups. You should



be doing all that by now, knowing God's word and applying it, but instead, you're not and it all comes back to that word *chronos*, time.

Do you want to compete? There's nothing wrong with having somewhat of an appropriate governed sense of competitiveness. You ought to compete with the clock. And therefore, I would ask you this morning, how long have you been a Christian? I don't want to compare you with the person across the aisle. That's not a healthy thing for you to do. I'd like you to compare yourself with where you ought to be, where you ought to be, as a general sense, like when you take your kids to the well-check and they say, well, he's in the 60th percentile or he's in the 80th percentile. There is a sense in which we expect weight, girth, height to grow in this baby. That's what we expect from healthy babies. If God's looking at the chart for you, how long have you been a Christian? If you say, well, I've been a Christian for 13 years, I've been a Christian for 20 years. I'm a Christian for 12 years, I've been a Christian for 8 years. What does God expect with all the advantages and opportunities you have to know his Word and apply his Word and serve his Church, what kind of Christian ought you be right now? You want to get competitive, get competitive with that. How long.

That's not a bad thing to do. I just don't want you to be spiritually competitive with the people in your small group. I want us to stop thinking this way, horizontally. I want us to think this way, vertically. Think about, "OK, God, you expect something from me, you've invested in me and just like the opening illustration from Isaiah that there is a vineyard and God is invested in that vineyard, he expects fruit from that vineyard. I want to see in my life all the opportunities that I've had." That in Greek is the *chronos*. Right? The opportunity and also the *chronos*. How much time have I had to take advantage of those?

So, there is a sense in which there ought to be some competitiveness. But as far as you looking into your own life, your focus should be on other people. Your focus should be on service. I said there is a reference to this word that we started with, *conceit*, and it shows up in Philippians 2. In Philippians 2, you know, speaking of christology, the great christological passage about the "Kenosis" or Christ laying aside his glory to come and be found in the appearance as a man, take on humanity and to humble himself, even to the point of death on the cross. Well, all that starts with an exhortation to the Thessalonians in Philippians Chapter 2 by saying this: that you should "not have a selfish ambition or *conceit*." Some translations call it *vain conceit*. That's the noun form, actually, of the word that we have in our passage in Galatians 5:26.

That means that I need to replace that with something and in the passage it's replaced with this. The next verse says, "You ought to have an interest," not just in your own stuff, "but in the interest of others." Look at Christ, how he put the interest of other people before himself. That's the service mentality. When Jesus had his disciples comparing themselves with each other, remember that? They were arguing on multiple occasions who was the best. "How do I measure up?" He says you need to serve. "The greatest among you," not that there's not importance in terms of distinction. I am concerned in you bearing 100-fold fruit. And there is a distinction between the Christian who bears 100-fold fruit versus 30-fold fruit. And one day there'll be two guys sitting, one at his right and one at his left. So God is all into keeping track



of that. Not that it doesn't matter. It matters. But when it comes to that, he says, you want to be great in the kingdom of God, then you "should be the servant" of all.

Jesus proves this. You want to keep the right mentality, as Lewis said in the Screwtape Letters, letter number 14. It's a great section of that book. He says, "The problem with Christians who become Christians and seek to be humble is in their humility, they've got the wrong perspective. They're always trying to think less of themselves." He says that's a mistake. What you need is self-forgetfulness. You need to think of yourself less. The problem is and he says, the folly, and he uses, you know, illustrations, it's like the beautiful woman trying to remind herself that she's ugly or the gifted businessman trying to, you know, remind himself that he's a fool. It's ridiculous for us to not only sin against the giftedness that God might have given us. We need to think so as to have sound judgment.

But it's wrong for us to spend all this time sinning against reality. God has gifted you to do things and it's important for you to understand that. But what God would want you to do is take the focus off of yourself. That's a good line there in that book, Screwtape Letters. If you haven't read it, start with Chapter 14. He says that's the problem when it comes to humility. We've got to get our minds off of ourselves and focus on service. And that's what Christians, unfortunately, aren't doing when we're busy comparing ourselves and trying to prove to someone else by our overthinking, overstating and overacting that we're better than the next guy.

"Well, that's not my problem, Pastor Mike. I don't think I'm better. Matter of fact, I just feel like I'm way out of place, man. My small group, those guys are godly and smart." Well, then the last line is for you. "Don't be envying one another." Don't be envying one another. I put it this way, "You Can't Envy Fruitful Christians." That's a horrible thing for you to do. Envy. Here's how it's described in Proverbs Chapter 14 verse 30. Proverbs 14:30 says this: that "Envy rots the bones." It talks about a tranquil heart and that brings refreshment to us. But envy, it rots us on the inside.

There are several books written about this, but one in the 4th century, which is a great picture, this pastor in Caesarea writes about this, at least part of what he's writing is about envy. He says what we need to do when it comes to envy is know what we're doing. He says, we need to look at the stark ugliness of the sin of envy. Envy, and I think I wrote part of it down here, he says, basically what we're doing is we're envious and bitter because of the gifts of my friends, "The gifts of my friends torment me. I grieve at my brother's happiness." Right? How good is it for the person who you envy for them to have the fruitfulness that they have, to have the family that they have, to have the ministry that they have, to have the things that they have that you envy? How good is that for them? And that is the source of you being grieved? Think of how ugly that sin is. No wonder it rots the bones. Don't envy fruitful Christians.

I know that we think if I'm better, I want to prove it. But look how ugly it is to say, "No, you're better and I resent it." That's what envy is. I resent the fact that you're more spiritually fruitful than I am. Can you really rejoice in the good of other people's spiritual productivity? We're called to rejoice with those who rejoice. Romans Chapter 12. Do you rejoice in someone's



knowledge of Scripture that's better than yours? Do you rejoice in someone's ministry that's more effective than yours? Do you rejoice in someone's giftedness, that is more polished than yours? Do you rejoice in the fact that someone has more people affected positively in their lives because of their Christianity? If you can't rejoice in that, then we've got a rotting sin in our hearts. We're envying the fruitfulness of Christians.

What Basle said there in the 4th century, he's trying to say, "Look at what you're doing. You're mad about fruitfulness because it's not your fruitfulness. You're mad about righteousness because it's not your righteousness. You resent good things in this church or in this world because you're not the source of it." What a ridiculous thing when God is the source of it all. That's why John could say in John 3, John the Baptist, "No one has anything without God giving it to him." I'm grateful if he gives it to me and uses me for it or gives it to them and uses them to do it. I am grateful. Don't envy fruitful Christians. Don't envy fruitful ministries, fruitful churches. Don't begrudge other people for God giving them what you don't have. Be thankful for the role that you do play.

If the capacity of your spirituality leads to 30-fold fruit and the guy that you like or your best buddy is producing 100-fold fruit, can you not resent it? Can you be thankful for the role that you play? That's what First Corinthians 12 is all about. The fruitfulness in the body of Christ. I mean, an elbow can't say if I'm not an ear, I don't want to play. Right? The foot can't say because I'm not an eye I don't want to be a part of this thing. How ugly is that? What an ugly sin for us to participate in. Not only that, how offensive a sin.

I wonder how the Father feels about your heart when he sees envy in it. I say that because even Pilate, the pagan Roman governor, could say, "I know why Jesus is standing here in front of me to be crucified, because those guys envy him." When Pilate could see envy leading Christ to the cross, you just wonder how God feels when he sees that very same sin in your heart. And of course, the Pharisees were envying the spiritual impact of Christ. I don't want to envy anybody. I don't want to envy anybody.

That doesn't mean, by the way, as you'll see on the discussion questions this week, that we just say, "I'm not even going to look at those people, just try not to care. Just care about my stuff." No, you should look at those people. Matter of fact, I give you three passages in the discussion questions this week that remind you they're to be models for us, they're to be motivation for us. Use the fruitful 100-fold Christians to motivate us. That's why we read Christian biographies, I hope. Can you read a Christian biography and not be resentful at the impact of the people who you read about? I hope if they're dead, at least, you're not resenting them. Right? The problem is it's the guy that's two years younger than me who sits across me in the home fellowship group and seems to know things so much better than I do. Who seems to be more fruitful, more effective in his parenting or his work or whatever. That's just got to stop. Look at their lives as a Christian biography that you can stand back and learn from.

Paul makes comparative statements about the other apostles in First Corinthians 15. Talking about those who Christ had appeared to after his resurrection. He makes those. He talks about. But he realizes this because of the grace of God that I look at in my life and I know



how undeserving I am even to be connected to the vine, I just think "I'm the least of all the apostles." And yet he says, you know what, I do think "I've worked harder than any of them." But then he says, "I know it's not me." Right? None of this is produced alone, he says, "but the grace of God that works within me." I mean, this is a great picture there of the fact knowing that he's doing amazing things. He takes over the spotlight in the second half of the book of Acts. Of course, he's got sound judgment to say he's just a... he's not going around going, "I'm a nobody. I'm a nobody. I'm a nobody." Because he realizes in his comparative statements with other people that he's a recipient of grace and that he needs to remain humble, even though he recognizes the call for him to work and produce more fruit.

Listen, if you and I are not humble, if we're conceited, God is going to oppose us. I hope he'll love us enough to do what he did, even in Paul's case. He gave him a thorn in the flesh so that he would not be conceited. Because conceit in our church is going to ruin us. It's going to ruin your ministry. It's going to ruin your life. Don't be conceited, because it will either say in your own heart, I'm better than him and I want to prove it, or I'm worse than him and I resent it. If we want to compete, let's compete against the clock. Let's measure ourselves to conformity to Christ. Let's be grateful when anyone produces fruit in the body of Christ. Let's cheer them on. I don't want to be a church that's opposed by God and God is opposed to the proud. But he'll give grace to the humble.

Let's pray he does. God, help us this morning as we think through these very important issues, issues that we all grapple with on a secret level because we don't present ourselves as 3rd graders, so unless we make a big mistake and let stuff tumble out of our mouths that we never expected to say out loud, most people don't even know our battle with envy, resentment or pride and self-promotion. God, we struggle with this because we're human beings. Even as philosophers say, in any community, there's going to be a tendency to compare, to figure out the pecking order, to figure out the giftedness, to figure out who's bearing more fruit than the next person. God, instead of throwing our hands up and saying, well, we shouldn't care about fruit production, let us care about producing fruit, but let's stop comparing the way that promotes this provoking and envying. Make us humble Christians who forget as often as possible about ourselves and give ourselves fully to work hard, to produce more good in our church, in our small groups, in our families and in our world. Do that through us, I pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.