

**BAD FRUIT – GOOD FRUIT**  
**Sermon for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent, 2026**  
**Romans 5:12-19**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from Romans 5:12-19, the Second Reading, read before:  
Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

You can't really fix something until you know what's wrong. This is true of any problem you may face in any field of human endeavour. You've got to be able to identify and describe the real problem, otherwise you end up wasting time and effort on faulty solutions geared toward *treating symptoms* rather than what's *causing* them.

The season of Lent is a time when we turn our attention to the problems of our fallen condition as we prepare to better understand and appreciate the salvation achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ in His passion, death, and resurrection: the event we call the atonement, which is the very heart of the Gospel. To 'atone' is an act that brings together, or makes "at one," two individuals or groups that had been enemies. That's what Jesus has done. Paul writes to the Colossians, "*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, (Christ) has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him*" (1:21-22). That is the only solution to the problem of our fallen condition. But let me suggest that we still shall not be able to fully understand or apply this graciously provided solution until we can adequately describe the problem.

Let us use an example: Suppose I went to see a doctor because I had a rash. The doctor takes a look and then prescribes some medicine to treat it. After a week or so of rubbing this medicine on the rash and not seeing any sign of improvement, I go back to see him again. "Doctor," I say, "*this stuff isn't working. I've been putting it on the rash twice a day, and nothing is happening.*" He replies: "*Well, that's because your rash is caused by bacteria in your system. You're supposed to drink the medicine, not apply it to your skin.*" You see, the mistake I was making was to use the medicine to treat the symptoms rather than the problem.

Now, that example may sound foolish, but it sometimes happens that Christians use the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the atonement He made—in the same inappropriate way, when God's Word and His message of salvation are used to treat the symptoms of the fallen human condition rather than its ultimate cause, because we often don't adequately understand the real problem to begin with. Sure, we know that the problem is our sin. At the start of our divine worship service, we confess our sins to the Lord. But what does that mean? What really is our sin problem? Is it only the *accumulated list of the bad things we've thought, said, and done* – and *the good things we should have done but didn't do*? Or does the problem of our sin run a lot deeper than that? This is the question we shall explore today to better understand the human problem.

In today's First Lesson, taken from Genesis, we find the familiar story of our first parents' temptation by Satan and their subsequent fall by disobeying God and eating the forbidden fruit. We correctly identify this episode as the beginning of the sin problem from which we all suffer and note that the first breaking of a commandment was not simply from the perspective of Adam and Eve, an unbridled act of open rebellion. They didn't wake up one morning and say, "*How can we be evil and disobedient and make the Lord angry with us today?*" No, there was some priming and buildup by Satan. *They had to be prepared through his deceptions.*

Can you see that what Satan is doing as he begins his conversation with Eve is planting the seeds of

doubt in her heart and mind? He implies that the Lord is not the great Benefactor she believes Him to be, that He has not been entirely honest with her, and that He's been holding out on some blessings—the grace of being like God, no less—which she can obtain simply by reaching out her hand and taking a piece of fruit. It's so easy, Eve thinks, and the results will be so good. How could it be wrong? Especially since the Lord has lied to us, trying to scare us with that warning about dying. It's a good thing we have our friend the serpent here to set us straight on that score.

By the time Eve and then Adam ate the forbidden fruit, the bad seeds Satan had planted had already taken root. In fact, you could say that eating the forbidden fruit was only the fruit of the corrupt tree that Satan had planted with his lies. Adam and Eve's first mistake was letting the bad seed grow: the bad seed of the thought that they couldn't trust God, that they would have to take care of themselves and look after their own interests, and that they could get the desires of their hearts *by going against what the Lord had said*.

Their evil actions came from hearts that they had already allowed to become corrupted by lies and distortions. To see the other side of it, you can see how Jesus contends with Satan's seeds of temptation and deception in today's Gospel lesson. He never gives them a chance to grow. He took His stand always on the Word of God and refused to entertain other ideas. That's the only way to beat temptation.

But as you know, that's not what Adam and Eve did. And you also know from the first chapter of Genesis that during the creation, when God made the plants and trees, He made them so that each would bear fruit with seeds in it, and each according to its own kind, which means that apple trees bear apples containing apple seeds, orange trees bear oranges containing orange seeds, and so on.

But this is more than a statement about botany. Having allowed Satan's bad seed to grow in their hearts, our first parents became *bad* trees bearing *bad* fruit containing *bad* seed. And we could look at that two ways. One is that by having become internally corrupt, they naturally produced acts of sin. And make sure you've got that: they were no longer good people who sometimes committed evil acts; they were at that point evil people doing what comes naturally to those who are evil: producing evil fruit. But, these two people produced another kind of fruit—not just their sinful actions, but also their offspring. Their children, too, were the fruit of evil trees. They were spawned from bad seed. They were natural born sinners. Or to be more precise, according to Scripture, they were natural conceived sinners<sup>1</sup>; and like their parents before them, they produced only one kind of fruit in the same two ways: they produced sin, and they gave birth to more sinners. And so it was that the whole world was plunged into darkness and came under the curse of death and decay.

What we're talking about here is *original sin*. It's the inherited corruption and guilt we all carry within us, and that taints us with sin in everything we think, say, or do. As Jesus once said, bad trees simply cannot produce good fruit.<sup>2</sup> Neither can they produce good children. Parents, if you don't like the way your children are behaving, you know now where they got it from!

Unfortunately, many people in the Christian church deny this. They say we have 'free moral agency,' that is, *the ability to choose good or evil*. They hold that we really aren't thoroughly corrupted but only weakened. Some say that we are born in a state of moral neutrality, and that sinful behaviour is something we learn, and that can be unlearned by turning to God's Law and trying to live by it. And this is where the Gospel gets pulled in to treat symptoms rather than the real problem. The idea is that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the 'empowering force' that enables a sinner to overcome temptation and stop sinning; it's the extra added boost the weakened will needs to choose and do good. What this approach ends up doing, though, is simply fertilising a bad tree. And do you know what you get then? ***You get a big, strong, green, leafy, great-looking bad tree that produces even more bad fruit.***

No, this original sin we have is real, totally corrupting sin. And something else: it carries real guilt and consequences. As we say, "*Adam's fall condemned us all.*" This is what Paul is talking about today in

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 51:5

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:15-20

his Letter to the Romans. He's showing how not only sin's corrupting effect but also the penalty of that first sin was passed down through the generations. His argument is quite interesting. He asks us to consider all those people who lived between the time of Adam and Eve and the time that God gave the Law to Moses years later. Paul says, "**death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given.**" Even though the Law had not yet been written, so they could not have broken it, they still died. Having said this, please understand that we aren't talking about questions of right and wrong, and whether or not they sinned—of course, they were sinners; here we are talking about the power of the Law to condemn and impose penalties. Paul says, "**sin is not counted where there is no law.**" He means that you cannot prosecute and punish someone for something they did if there was no law against it *at the time*.

But going back to the point, we know that in eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve broke the law, the only law that was on the books, and as a result, they came under the penalty of the law, which, as the Lord had said, was death. But what about their descendants? They didn't break the only law that carried the death penalty. They couldn't, because their parents had been banished from the garden where the forbidden tree was, and yet, though they didn't commit the death penalty sin, they all died. That's what Paul is saying: "**Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.**" Again, remember: the question isn't whether or not they sinned; of course, they did. The question is, "*On the basis of what crime did God charge them that they should have to pay the penalty of death?*" The answer is: Adam's sin. Because the seed of all people was in Adam when he sinned, all through Adam sinned, and so the curse of death was passed to all. Let's say it another way: we are guilty of Adam's sin.

Now, this whole original sin thing may seem to be a bit unfair. We were corrupted and condemned by someone else's temptation and sin. We are fruit of bad seed that can do nothing else but produce bad fruit containing bad seed, and we're condemned to be chopped down and thrown into the fire for it. And it's actually worse for us than for those living before Moses, because now we have the whole Law of God. Ever since the time of Moses, there have been a lot more laws on the books that we are commanded to obey—laws that we cannot help but break, but which also condemn us. So we're even guiltier before God than those others were.

While this sounds unfair, the truth is that the situation we're in isn't. That's the wrong way to look at it, and it does us no good to think of it that way. The fact is that's the way it is. We are the spawn of bad seed. That's the problem we have. But having accurately identified and described the problem, we are now able to understand and apply the solution, and we discover that the same mechanism that seems so unfair by which we were corrupted and condemned actually works to our advantage in Christ Jesus. He is the Man produced by the Good Seed: the long-promised Seed of the woman whose Father is the holy God. He was planted in this world to produce a different kind of fruit: good fruit with good seed that saves us from sin and its penalty. As we saw from our Gospel, when tempted by Satan, He did not fall. And so, He lived a perfectly righteous life full of good fruit, the fruit that ensures life. Nevertheless, He was condemned as bad seed on our behalf. Like rotten fruit, He hung on the tree scorned and rejected by God, and now, just as eating the fruit of the tree condemned our first parents, those who eat the fruit of the cross are given life and salvation, for they are receiving to themselves Christ Jesus and His atoning sacrifice. This is what Paul is saying: "**For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.**"

Just as the sin of Adam was imputed to those who are his seed, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to those who are born again of heavenly seed, which is the message of the Gospel. When it is heard and takes root and grows, that is, when a person trusts in Jesus and the sacrifice He made, the good fruit produced by Christ is counted as having been done by the believer. And no, it may not seem to be exactly fair, but it's the only plan of salvation we have been given by God's superabounding grace,

and it's what actually gets to the root of the problem.

Dear friends, you need to place your whole life into the hands of the Lord. Time and time again, you will fall into temptation—you can't help it, you all have that inherited sin, but please, every time you fall, don't look toward yourselves to seek a way out. Go to the Lord, confess your sins and trust in Him because in doing so, you will **“receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”** So great is the love of our Saviour-God! So rich His grace to fallen sinners deserving of death! Where sin previously reigned in death, there grace now reigns to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. May God grant this to us all. Amen.