

“The Fruit of the Spirit” (part 4)

Galatians 5:22-23

When I was young, I went on a cross country road trip with my dad. It was one of the greatest experiences of my young life, and I got to see a lot of things. I remember seeing the Rocky Mountains for the first time. We went to the Grand Canyon. My favorite part of the trip by far was Yellowstone National Park. If you’ve ever been to Yellowstone, you are well aware that it is a hotspot for geothermic activity. We’re told that it is one of the largest supervolcanoes in the world. The ground sits on a hot spot made of molten rock called magma. There are special hot springs through Yellowstone which are known as ‘geysers’ (I remember asking my dad what all the ‘geezers’ were when we were there). Geysers as they are pronounced are hot springs that will periodically erupt. As the underground water is heated, pressure builds up, and when that pressure becomes too great, the water and steam is forced to the surface. There are more than 500 of these geysers in Yellowstone, which accounts for more than half the total number in the world. And the most famous of all is called “Old Faithful.” As the world’s most famous geyser, Old Faithful erupts around 20 times a day. And these eruptions can be predicted almost to the very minute, hence the name, ‘Old Faithful.’ Faithfulness and dependability is something that the Holy Spirit produces in a believer’s life. That’s what we will look at this morning, along with the accompanying virtues of gentleness and self-control.

Let’s turn in our Bibles one last time to Galatians 5:22-23, where we will consider the last three virtues listed with the fruit of the Spirit—faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If love, joy, and peace is upward fruit that relates to God, and patience, kindness, and goodness is outward fruit that is related to others, these last three virtues are inward fruit that relates to ourselves. Each of these traits are produced within the believer by the Holy Spirit, so that they’re internal before they are external. These last three that are listed are especially related to our individual development as people.

1—Faithfulness in our DEVOTION (5:22)

“The fruit of the Spirit is...faithfulness.”

Look at the last word mentioned in verse 22—‘faithfulness.’ The Greek word used is ‘pistis’ which is the common New Testament word for faith. And the word is used in at least three different ways. Sometimes, the word is used to refer to ‘the faith’ or the substance and content of the Christian gospel. It means moral conviction about the truth. Then, this word is also used to refer to ‘faith’ required for a person to be saved, the faith that trusts in Jesus for salvation. But the way the word is used here in verse 22 means faith, not in the sense of belief in God or in the content of the gospel, but in carrying out our responsibility before God and other people. Faith produces faithfulness! It is the idea of fidelity or the character of one who can be relied on for something. As the fruit of the Spirit, faithfulness is the trait of character that enables us to be trustworthy, reliable, and dependable people.

Are you a reliable person?

Proverbs 20:6—“Many claim to have unflinching love, but a faithful person who can find?”

In other words, people make big boasts, but the simple fact of the matter is that faithfulness is rare. Today’s motto is to be true to yourself. Follow your heart. We live in a culture that is comfortable with unkept promises and broken vows. It tolerates and even promotes unfaithfulness. We live in a culture in which if it doesn’t suit you to stay faithful to your spouse, then do what’s best for you. Some years ago, the dating website ‘Ashley Madison’ was marketed to people who are married but are looking for affairs. The slogan is, “Life is short, have an affair.” And also, “When monogamy becomes monotony.” There was a data breach in which the list of their clients was made public—36 million people. If it doesn’t suit to be faithful to your promises, then break your promises. If it doesn’t work to tell the truth, then tell lies. That’s the world in which you and I live. Faithfulness may be admired, but it is in short supply.

John Drescher—*“Faithfulness is being dependable in the discharge of our duties and in our devotion to people and principles.”*

When it comes to evidence that a person is truly a Spirit-filled believer, what would you expect to find? Maybe great giftedness or ability? Again, we need to be careful when it comes to prioritizing the gifts of the Spirit more than we do the graces of the Spirit. Would you ever think to mention a sense of dependability as an important marker for spiritual maturity? Spirit-filled people are faithful and dependable.

The example of faithfulness

God's character is faithful. We learn from the Bible and from personal experience that God is faithful. So much so that we can stake our eternity on His faithfulness.

2 Timothy 2:13—“If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.”

God's Word is faithful. We can always trust in His promise because His Word never fails. Jesus said that heaven and earth would pass away, but My words will never pass away.

Psalm 119:86, 89-90—“All Your commandments are sure...Forever, O Lord, Your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations.”

For centuries, sailors navigated their vessels by being able to locate the North Star in the night sky. When they were in unfamiliar surroundings, fooled by their senses, they could find the North Star and have a fixed point. Wandering stars or shooting stars, on the other hand, always prove to be an unreliable guide. They may light up the sky for a time, and seem to come out of nowhere. But as soon as they catch our attention, they fade and fizzle. They are not a faithful and dependable compass like the North Star. In a similar way, the Word of God is our faithful guide in life. And this is what we mean whenever we say that the Bible is infallible. Jude 13 warns us against false teachers and describes them as “wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.” They will catch your eye, but they will never lead you to spiritual safety and truth. God's Word on the other hand is fixed and reliable.

God's leadership is faithful. As we look to Him in faith, He is faithful to lead us in life. God will be faithful to us even in those moments of temptation that we face. He is faithful to provide a way out. For instance:

1 Corinthians 10:13—“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

God's forgiveness is faithful. When we sin, we can trust in the gracious character of God to forgive us. The Bible says in 1 John 1:9 that if we 'confess' our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Thank God that He is faithful when we fail!

Lamentations 3:22-23—“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning—great is Your faithfulness.”

The expectation of faithfulness

The God we love and serve is faithful, and He expects us to be faithful as those who bear His image. Faithfulness is the fruit of the Spirit, which means it is something that He will reproduce in the lives of the people in whom He dwells. Think about the amazing change that took place in the lives of the disciples. On the night of Jesus' arrest, they forsook Him and fled. They were hiding behind closed doors out of fear until the Day of Pentecost. Then, everything changed! Suddenly, these men who had been faithless became so faithful to the Lord Jesus that went on to seal the testimony of their faith with their own death. The presence of God's Spirit living within them made all the difference.

When the Spirit of God has His way in your life, it will lead to greater and greater faithfulness. Think about what this looks like practically:

- Faithfulness in personal discipleship

The fruit of faithfulness in our lives as Christians shows up in our devotional life. Maturing saints love God's Word and are consistent in their church attendance. They serve and give. They look for opportunities to share Christ with other people.

- Faithfulness in family devotion

The fruit of faithfulness shows up in the way husbands and wives are devoted to one another. Parents are devoted to the physical and spiritual well-being of their children, and children are obedient to their parents.

- Faithfulness in work duties

The fruit of faithfulness is on display in the way we show up for work on Monday. We don't cut corners or shirk on our responsibilities. Instead, we heed the words of Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward—for you are serving the Lord Christ!" I'm sure you can come up with more ways that the fruit of faithfulness is displayed in the believer's life.

The examination of faithfulness

Faithfulness is a matter of follow-through. We should all ask ourselves how well we are following through with the commitments we've made in our life. It is easy to start something. It takes diligence and dependability to see the job done. Faithfulness doesn't quit before it finishes. The faithfulness of our lives will one day be under review when we stand before the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:2—“Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”

God's kingdom is ordered in such a way that if you and I are faithful in the small things, we can be entrusted with greater responsibility. Faithfulness in the opportunities that God has already given you will lead to greater opportunity. Jesus illustrated this principle in the parable of the talents. Not talents in the sense of natural ability, but in the sense of opportunities. The master gives talents to his servants. One was given

five, another was given two, and the last is given one. What will they do with what the master gives?

Matthew 25:21 — “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’”

The time eventually came when the servants would give an account of what they did with the master’s resources. And it is an example of faithfulness. Dependability, punctuality, and responsibility are all part of the package of faithfulness. All three of these are involved. Jesus said:

Luke 16:10— “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

Sometimes, a person will say, “If I made more, I’d give more.” While that may be true, it is also true that if you are not faithful in the little that you have, you won’t be faithful with the much. If you don’t tithe on \$100, you certainly won’t tithe on \$1,000. Serve and give where you can! Faithfulness is a matter of the heart.

Colossians 3:23-24— “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Faithfulness perseveres and keeps the finish line in mind!

2—Gentleness in our DISPOSITION (5:23)

“The fruit of the Spirit is...faithfulness, gentleness.”

The fruit of the Spirit involves faithfulness in our devotion, and it involves gentleness in our disposition. The word for ‘gentleness’ means meekness or humility. I like how it is paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in the Message, “Not needing to force our way in life.” Gentleness doesn’t try to strong-arm people or manipulate situations to get its way. It

isn't threatened by someone else's success, and it does not rejoice in someone else's tragedy. It is a tender, meek, sensitive disposition that is secure enough to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Unfortunately, most people in our day think that meekness is the same thing timidity. Meekness may rhyme with weakness, but they are not one and the same. Don't think that gentleness is weakness or a lack of internal strength. It does not mean a person is spineless. Meekness is not weakness! There are three key ideas bound up in the word for 'gentleness.' It is a submissive spirit, a teachable spirit, and a considerate spirit. One writer has described it as "a submissive and teachable spirit toward God that manifests itself in genuine humility and consideration of others." It is strength under control. It is the picture of a horse that has been broken so that it can now be led. In fact, that is how the word was used by the ancient Greeks.

"Gentleness" —*root word is 'praus' and means to be meek and mild in disposition*

It is the racehorse that has been taught to do exactly what its rider leads it to do, such that it knows when to run at full strength, or when to pace itself, or when to jump. It is now in submission to another. That's gentleness. Now, that is not to imply you've become everybody's door mat. No, it means you are living in submission to God, and therefore you know how to respectfully treat other people. You know when it is time to be assertive, and when to be quiet.

A dog can whip a skunk, but is it really worth it?

Stuart Briscoe —*"Meekness is the strength of backing off from a fight you could win and a point you could nail down, for the sake of the damage that would be done and the greater issues at stake."*

Proverbs 15:1 —**"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."**

My grandfather on my mom's side of the family was a picture of New Testament 'gentleness.' He was a deacon in their church, not a man of many words. But when he

spoke, you listened to what he had to say. After he died, we heard one story after another about how he would visit someone who had a need. If there was anyone stirring up conflict in their church, my Papaw would privately confront them and offer correction. Gentleness doesn't back down from a fight, but it knows when and how to take its stand.

Chuck Swindoll — *“In our rough and rugged individualism, we think of gentleness as weakness, being soft, and virtually spineless. Not so! The Greek term is extremely colorful, helping us grasp a correct understanding of why the Lord sees the need for servants to be gentle. Carefully chosen words that soothe strong emotions are referred to as ‘gentle’ words. Ointment that takes the fever and sting out of a wound is called ‘gentle.’ Those who are polite, who have tact and are courteous, and who treat others with dignity and respect are called ‘gentle’ people. So then, gentleness includes being calm and peaceful when surrounded by a heated atmosphere, emitting a soothing effect on those who may be angry or otherwise beside themselves, and possessing tact and gracious courtesy that causes others to retain their self-esteem and dignity.”*

The Bible tells us that this is the character of Jesus:

Matthew 11:28-30—**“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”**

Jesus invites us to learn gentleness from Him. To take up a yoke meant to become a disciple. It was the picture of a younger ox being placed in a yoke with an older, seasoned ox so that they walk in step together. That's what Jesus is saying to us—**“Surrender and submit your life to Me. Walk with Me. Learn from Me.”** He is not a harsh task master, but His yoke is easy and His burden is light. What does that mean? Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people who were weighed down by the burdens of life, including the burden of religious self-effort in trying to please God. But by inviting us to get yoked up with Him, He is saying to us, **“I'll bear your burdens. I'll carry the weight of your sin. I'll give you My life!”** That's the gentleness of Jesus, friend.

To take up His yoke is to be brought into union with Him through faith, so that He begins to transform your life and your character. The fruit of gentleness and humility is the work of the Spirit in our lives. Practically speaking, here are just a few ways the Bible says we're to be gentle:

- We are to respond to criticism with gentleness

It takes humility in a person's life to receive criticism, even if it might not be easy to hear. We're naturally defensive and want to assert ourselves. I remember in my first pastorate how I felt that any question or disagreement a person had with me as their pastor was unfair opposition. I felt attacked and easily got defensive. In my youthful immaturity, I'd fight at the drop of a hat, like the third monkey waiting in line for Noah's ark. Thank God I had a seasoned, wiser older man who loved me enough to come alongside me and offer constructive criticism that was hard to hear, but I needed to hear. It was gentleness. And having been a pastor now for 23 years, I've learned that if you get all bent out of shape over the slightest thing, you won't make it very far in your relationships with people.

Proverbs 19:11 — “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook an offense.”

1 Peter 4:8 — “Love covers a multitude of sins.”

- We are to receive God's Word with gentleness

Humility and gentleness is the attitude with which we are to receive God's Word in our lives. The Bible says:

James 1:21 — “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to see your souls.”

- We are to restore wayward believers with gentleness

Gentleness is also the spirit in which we're to confront one another in sin. When someone falls morally, or we have to go to someone in love and point out their

transgression, the way we do that is very important. I've seen a lot of people attempt to correct a wrong, but they go about it the wrong way and in the wrong spirit. Or, sometimes we refuse to speak to another person because of some sin they have committed. The Bible says:

Galatians 6:1—“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourselves, lest you too be tempted.”

- We are to represent Christ with gentleness

Our witness as Christians demands gentleness. The way in which we share the gospel with nonbelievers ought to be with a gentle, patient spirit. Peter tells us:

1 Peter 3:15—“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness, gentleness, and then:

3—Self-control in our DISCIPLINE (5:23)

“The fruit of the Spirit is...faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

The word translated as ‘self-control’ means temperance, or the controlling power of the will under the operation of the Spirit of God. We live in a day of an increasing lack of self-control. People out of control are self-destructive and dangerous to others. Any society whose citizens throw off moral restraint isn't far from its own demise.

Edmund Burke—*“Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites...Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of*

things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.”

Self-control is the moral and proper use of freedom. Those who indulge the passions of the flesh may boast of liberty, but there is no worse form of tyranny. Those who try to find freedom through indulgence will only find bondage.

Billy Graham—*“There are men who can command armies but cannot command themselves. There are men who by their burning words can sway vast multitudes but who cannot keep silence under provocation or wrong. The highest mark of nobility is self-control. It is more kingly than regal crown and purple robe.”*

Are you a slave to your appetites? Are you mastered and dominated by your emotions? Jesus has come to set us free from the tyranny of ourselves. The one the Son sets free is free indeed. So that now the indwelling Holy Spirit produces the fruit of self-control in our lives. Spirit-filled men and women are not mastered by their emotions, but have learned to ‘master’ their emotions. Self-control is the answer to the question, “How do we stop yielding to the desires of the flesh?” We walk in the Spirit, and the Spirit empowers us to abstain from that which wars against our soul. The works of the flesh that Paul mentions in verses 19-21 are the result of yielding to sinful passions. Those who sow to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption. If you go through the list that he mentions, each one is lack of self-control in some area.

- Sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality is sex out of control
- Idolatry and sorcery is worship out of control
- Enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger is emotion out of control
- Rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy is opinion out of control
- Drunkenness and orgies is appetite out of control

2 Timothy 3:1-5—**“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant,**

abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”

And don't think that you are above committing any one of those sins which are mentioned. A Christian who is not in step with the Spirit of God is capable of committing great sin. That's because you still carry around this flesh, and will do so until the day you die. Paul writes in:

Romans 7:18—“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

You and I are powerless to tame the flesh. The only thing that can be done with it is to crucify it daily in dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Proverbs 25:28—“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.”

You're familiar with the story of the Odyssey, written by the Greek poet Homer in the 8th century B.C. It tells the story of a respected warrior who is named Odysseus, who is returning from the Trojan War. On his journey home, the hero is warned about some enchanting creatures known as the sirens. In Greek mythology, the 'sirens' were strange creatures with the appearance of women and the bodies of attractive birds. With the irresistible charm of their song, they lured passing sailors to their destruction on the jagged rocks surrounding their island. They sang so sweetly that all who sailed near their home in the sea were fascinated and drawn close only to be destroyed. When Odysseus passes that enchanted spot, he has himself tied to the mast of his ship and puts beeswax in the ears of his men, so that they might not hear the bewitching songs.

In another story, a warrior named Jason chooses a better way. He took the Greek musician Orpheus along with him. Orpheus took out his instrument and then played a song so clear and beautiful that it drowned out the sound of those fatal voices of sirens.

Let me tell you—the world’s sirens are singing their enchantments to our generation. These come at us from all sides, tempting us in the area of the flesh. The best way to break the charm of this world’s alluring voices is not simply to shut out the music by plugging our ears, but to have our hearts and lives filled with the much sweeter music of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures so that the lies of the enemy will have no power over us. This is the key to self-control.

Jerry Bridges—*“Self-control is the exercise of inner strength under the direction of sound judgment.”*

It is inner strength under the direction of sound judgment that enables us to think, say, and do those things that are pleasing to God. And the instruction is given for all of us in all of the different stages of our lives. This is Paul’s point in Titus 2 where he gives directions for various elements in the church—older men, older women, younger men, and younger women. So in other words, there’s no stage of life where you get out of this class. Then, after he’s given all of these imperatives, what does he immediately say? Verse 11, “For the grace of God has appeared.” In other words, here’s the impetus. Here is the dynamic. You never get the imperative in isolation from the indicative. “Urge them to be self-controlled. Make sure they stop doing this, start doing that. Why? For the grace of God has appeared.” Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit before it manifests itself in outward resolve. Grace changes us before it commands us. And it is when we get these things backwards that we inevitably go wrong. Religion says, “Become by self-effort what you’re not.” Christianity says, “Become by grace what you are!” Because you’ve been set free, 2 Corinthians 5, in order that you might live for Him!

And so notice that what begins with love now ends in self-control. The ability to have self-control comes as a result of growing in the preceding eight virtues. The fruit of the Spirit works together as we experience different situations and temptations in life. As we consciously abide in Christ, recognizing that He is the Vine and we are the branches, His Spirit produces love which increases our joy and the experience of peace. In turn, we then become much more patient in our dealings with others, filled

with kindness and God's goodness. That leads to growth in faithfulness, to a gentle disposition, and then self-control when it comes to restraining our passions and emotions.

Perhaps you're looking at your life and thinking, "I sure do have such a long way to go in these areas!" Maybe you're frustrated with what you perceive as a lack of love or joy in your life, lack of peace and patience with others, or finding it difficult to respond in kindness and goodness to those who have hurt you. Maybe your struggle is faithfulness and follow-through, gentleness, and self-control when it comes to some stubborn habit. If anything, I hope that these messages over the past few weeks have convinced you that by God's grace you can grow in these character traits. Don't let Satan deceive you into thinking that you're a lost cause. Paul said to these believers:

Galatians 4:19—“My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”

“Formed” — *word is ‘morphoō’ and means the inward and real formation of the essential nature of a person*

Paul's ministry aim involved his agonizing until Christ was formed in the Galatians, concerned that they demonstrate the character of the Lord Jesus. This same term was used to describe the development of an embryo in a mother's womb. Isn't it an amazing, miraculous thing that happens in a mother's womb over the course of nine months? Life begins with conception, has a heart beat, and little hands with tiny fingers begin to form. That's 'morphoō.'

Romans 12:2—“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

“Transformed” — *the word is ‘metamorphoō’ and means to be changed into another form*

The transformation of your mind is the formation of Christ's character in you. And what begins with conversion and the new birth will continue throughout your lifetime until you go to be with Christ.

*He's still working on me,
To make me what I ought to be!
It took Him just a week to make
The moon and the stars,
The sun and the earth
And Jupiter and Mars!
How loving and patient He must be,
He's still working on me!*

Philippians 1:6—“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”