

This morning, I am beginning a new sermon series that I've entitled "The Spirit-Formed Life." For most of this series, I plan to look at what is known as the fruit of the Spirit, a phrase Paul uses in Galatians 5:22 to describe the kind of character that is formed in the person who lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit, walking not according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit of God. In case you're unfamiliar with the concept of the fruit of the Spirit, it comes from Paul's words in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.

This, Paul says, is what the Spirit produces in the life of the person who walks in step with God's Holy Spirit. When you read that list, I hope that you see in there the kind of character you wish you had, or the kind of character you hope your children, or your friends, would have, and the kind of world we would want to live in. People marked by love, not hatred, hostility or indifference. Joy, not despair, depression or cheap thrill-seeking. Peace, not anxiety or conflict. Forbearance or patience, not anger, irritability, or impatience. Kindness instead of meanness, callousness or cruelty. Goodness instead of selfishness, corruption, or perpetrating evil. Faithfulness instead of faithlessness, unreliability, or a lack of integrity. Gentleness instead of harshness, abusiveness, or aggression. And self-control instead of living a chaotic, out of control life enslaved to desires. And Paul tells us that these qualities will be ours in increasing measure as we learn to walk with the Holy Spirit of God and to yield ourselves in obedience to His fruit-producing work in our lives. That is the Spirit-formed life.

Next week, we will dive into the first fruit listed, love. But for today, I want to set the context, because it's always important to read a verse or passage in context. Who is Paul? What is Galatia? What was his message to the church in which this passage is found?

Paul (originally Saul) was a Jewish Pharisee from the city of Tarsus who initially persecuted Christians but was saved and transformed by Jesus on the road to Damascus, which you can read about in Acts 9. After a time of training with the early Christians in Antioch, he was sent out on missionary journeys around Asia Minor. And in Acts 13-14, around the years 47-48 AD, Paul and Barnabas travel through southern Galatia, which is part of modern-day Turkey, planting churches. He will return twice, which we read about in Acts 16 and Acts 18.

Unfortunately, after he started the church in Galatia, some other Jews came to Galatia with a different message, preaching a different gospel, telling them that it wasn't enough to believe in Jesus to be right with God; they also needed to become Jewish as well in order to be accepted by God. The men needed to be circumcised, which was the sign of the old covenant. They all needed to observe the law of Moses, especially the Sabbath and eating only ritually clean food. And in response to these false teachers, Paul writes the letter to the Galatians. And there are three main things that he communicates about the true gospel of Jesus and how they should live as a result of it that help us understand the context of the fruit of the Spirit:

1) We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, not by anything we do

Remember, these other teachers have come in to persuade them that they need to become Jewish. Listen to what Paul writes in response:

Galatians 1:6–9 - I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

Paul is vehement here – there is only one gospel (the good news), and even if he comes back telling them something different, or an angel from heaven preaches something different, let them be under God's curse. Ironically, Muhammed claimed to receive the Koran from Allah through the angel Gabriel, and Joseph Smith received the book of Mormon through guidance from the angel Moroni. As Paul would say, let them be under God's curse.

Galatians 2:15–16 - We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Justified means declared not guilty. Paul asserts here that they are right with God not because they have followed God's laws, but because they have put their trust in Jesus. And how does that save?

Galatians 3:10–14 - For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” ¹¹ Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is **hung on a tree**.” ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Jesus took the curse on the tree, on the cross. And we are righteous, right with God, by faith in Him, by trusting in Him for our salvation, for our forgiveness, for our righteousness. Or as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Paul continues in Galatians 3:

Galatians 3:23–29 - Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The law could not save us, but its job was not only to show us God's holy standard but to show us our need for a Savior, by showing us how far short we fall of God's holy standard. And now the good news is that all can be saved in Jesus and become heirs of the promise given to Abraham. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus.

Paul is essentially saying this: If you believe the Christian life or religion is “do these things and then God will bless you” or “follow these laws and obey these

sacraments and you will go to heaven when you die” or something else that is essentially “you do this and you receive this,” then you have missed the point of Christianity. You do not understand the gospel, and you have missed the whole thrust of Jesus’ teaching, and you may not be saved.

Paul is saying that it does not matter how hard you work at obeying God’s laws, at being a good person – you can never do enough to save yourself, to be declared righteous, or right with God. This is why we believe that no good Jew or Muslim or Hindu or atheist is saved, because God is holy, He is perfect, and He requires perfection, sinlessness. The good news, Paul declares is that there is a way to be right with God that has nothing to do with the law and our obedience to it. It is given to us through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a gift of God’s grace, given through Jesus’ sacrifice of atonement on the cross, through the shedding of His blood.

Romans 5:6–8 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Put your trust in Jesus this morning. No matter who you are or where you have come from, you can be saved.

2) We can respond to this grace by erroneously falling into two opposite extremes

In Galatians 5, Paul tries to warn them against the danger of falling into two opposite extremes in response to God’s gracious gift of salvation. The first would be legalism – thinking that we are saved or stay saved with God by our good works. Some of you tend towards legalistic tendencies, even if you are truly saved. The legalistic attitude can be summed up like this: “**If I perform well, God will accept or bless me.**” This is the mindset that God’s attitude towards me depends upon my performance or behavior. If I am doing well in my version of Christianity, then I think God is pleased with me, but if I am caught in sin, not praying enough, lacking in love, etc., then I believe God is angry or disappointed with me. In response to this attitude, Paul writes this:

Galatians 5:1–6 - It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. ² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value

to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have **fallen away from grace**. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

He warns the Galatians not to believe these false teachers, not to become circumcised out of the false belief that it will make them right with God. No! They are right with God only and completely because Jesus died for their sins and their trust in Him for salvation. The only thing that matters is faith in Jesus' death for our sins, a faith that will manifest itself in increasing love for God and love for others. It has ALWAYS been and always will be about the undeserved grace of God, not about how well you are doing following the laws. Let that love transform your heart!

But on the opposite end is licentiousness, or antinomianism – the belief that because Jesus died for our sins, we are now free to live however we please. This attitude can be summed up as **“Because God has forgiven me, I’m free to disobey.”** Listen to how Paul addresses this tendency:

Galatians 5:13–25 - You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. ¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit **what is contrary to the flesh**. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ 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**. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

If you tend towards legalism, believing that your righteousness is measured by your performance, your heart and mind need to hear that it has ALWAYS been grace. From the first to the last moment of your discipleship, God's favor has and always will be an undeserved gift to you on the basis of Jesus' life and death and NOT your performance. And now, because of Jesus, this is true about you:

Romans 8:1–2 - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

And if you tend towards antinomianism, believing that God's forgiveness is a license for you to live as you please, Paul reminds us that living as we please is not freedom but is slavery to sin. You can choose to serve Jesus, who brings true freedom and life to the full (**John 10:10**), or you can be a slave to sin.

3) The truly saved person will begin living a Spirit-formed life

Galatians 5:22-25 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

The truly saved person will show ever-increasing fruit in their lives as they partner with the Spirit to grow in Christlikeness.

When we put our trust in Jesus, we are justified – declared not guilty. We are adopted – we are beloved children of God. And we are regenerated – God puts His Holy Spirit in us. We are new creations in Christ. We are born again. The old has gone, the new has come. We have a new sensitivity to the world, a new way of seeing ourselves and the world. There is a difference between a human and a Spirit-filled human. And part of this new heart is a changed attitude towards God, a new motivation to know and follow Him:

Ezekiel 36:26–27 - I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Remember that Paul tells the Galatians in 5:13: “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

If I am free, why would I use my freedom to serve one another humbly in love instead of indulging the flesh? If I know I am already forgiven and going to heaven, then what is my motivation to pursue love and service to others instead of indulging the flesh and doing whatever I want? **Or – if I know I have a guaranteed A in my class, why would I bother to study for the final?** It’s the difference between taking music appreciation in school and listening to Bach because I want to. It’s the difference between taking Japanese in school to get a good grade and taking it because I fell in love with a Japanese girl and I want to be able to communicate with her. One is a chore; the other is a delight. One is something I have to do; the other is something I want to do.

You know that you are saved and are a new creation and have the Holy Spirit in you when you find your desires and motivations changing. Not because someone told you to, but because you have been born again; you have the Holy Spirit in you, and as the words of Ezekiel say, His Spirit is moving you to follow His decrees and to keep His laws. To be sure, the flesh is still there, battling against the Spirit. Read Romans 7 if you want to understand more about that. But the underlying motivation and desires are changing. The truly saved person will begin to live the Spirit-formed life. They will begin to look more and more like Jesus.

Listen: what is the evidence that you are saved? Is it that you prayed a prayer of salvation when you were 10 or 50? No. The evidence is that you are growing in the fruit of the Spirit. The evidence is the work of the Spirit in you. An increasing hatred of sin and love for God. An increasing desire to know and honor and please Him. And an increasing holiness, Christlikeness. **And this only happens through cooperation with the Spirit.** We can not make ourselves holy by our own effort. But the Spirit will not make us holy apart from our cooperation.

Philippians 2:12–13 - Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

It is not either-or but both-and. It is not “let go and let God” and it is not “God helps those who help themselves.” It is “work out your salvation, for it is God who

works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” It is giving ourselves fully to the Lord while depending completely upon God’s strength.

Colossians 1:29 - To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Philippians 4:13 - I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

During this series, we will be diving deep on how we cooperate with the Spirit in order to live the Spirit-formed life, so that we might increasingly become more like Jesus, people of **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**.

Lord, we confess that we have fallen short of your holy standard. We have rebelled against you, sinned against others, and can not save ourselves by our own efforts. But you loved us so much that Jesus died on the cross for us, taking the punishment we deserve and giving us His righteousness. This morning we turn from our self-centered life to trust you as our Lord and Savior.

And for those of us who know you, we recognize that is always has been and always will be about your grace. It has never been about what we deserve or have earned. Help us to not fall away from grace to trusting in our own righteousness, but to always be overcome with wonder at your amazing grace for us, that we might live in your freedom, loving you supremely and love others as you love us.

And for those of us who have responded to your grace by treating it as a license to live however we please, presuming upon your forgiveness and grace, we repent of that this morning. We ask that your love would transform our hearts so that our desire would become increasingly to know and honor you and to make you known to others.

Let us close with a prayer that John Stott prayed every day:

Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.