



Galatians 5:22-26

The Fruit of the Spirit

2/12/2023

We are going to Galatians 5 today. The first section of Galatians that lasted until chapter 5 was all about what we believe. And this section is all about how that changes us.

True belief in Christ is not only assent to truths that doesn't go anywhere from there, but knowledge of Christ, assent to truths, and trust in Christ that shape our lives.

There is an expectation in the Bible that Christians are people who do change.

Romans 12: 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

2 Peter 3:18 ...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

We aren't to be people who live in a perpetually defeated rut, but who grow.

In last week's passage, Paul introduced the idea that there is, in every Christian, a conflict between our old self and our new self, between the part of us that hasn't changed yet (the flesh), and the Holy Spirit of God living within us.

And we are always deciding who we will be led by (verse 18). We will be led by the Spirit of God, or we will be led by the old nature. We have conflicting desires within us (verse 17), and we are daily deciding which gets to lead.

Both the flesh and the Spirit are calling for our allegiance, and both want to rule over us.

And it is in following the Spirit that we experience a changed life. And if we are only producing the kinds of works that come from the old self and not producing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul said we are not on the road to the kingdom of God.

Because everyone who is a Christian has Christ as Lord and begins a process of sanctification - of continuing change that God works in us. It isn't an instant eradication of sin - we still sin daily. But it is a real transformation.

It is God's work in us, a gift from God that we would be sanctified. But we are not passive - we make efforts, and God's Spirit works in us in such a way that our efforts are His effort.

Listen to how Paul describes it here:

1 Corinthians 15:10 "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

So God's grace saved him. And then he worked hard. But in looking back, he knows that even his hard work was God's gift to him - it was God working in him and through him.

And over time, the changes God makes in us are major. CS Lewis said it's kind of like this:

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

So today we are looking at the fruit that God produces in our lives as we are being sanctified and changed, as we're being made into his house, and as we apply the right efforts toward living for Him and growing in Him.

And we will try to answer today what the fruit of the Spirit is, and how we grow it in our lives as part of this continual process of change:

Galatians 5 [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

So this is the fruit of the Spirit.

Now last week's passage described the works (plural) of the flesh, while today's passage is describing the fruit (singular) of the Spirit.

So there are a couple of important differences:

Works plural, fruit singular

People who follow the flesh might perform *some of* the works of the flesh, but not all. They're listed back in verses 19-21, and include sexual sins, religious sins, and social sins. But we shouldn't take comfort in the fact that we don't do *all* of those things, because there are a variety of works that might be produced by a person following the old nature. You don't have to check every box to be living for the old self.

But the fruit of the Spirit is singular. So these virtues, love, joy, peace - they are all growing as part of a whole in the life of the Christian. They may be growing slowly, and some may be more present than others, but they are all there.

They're different virtues, but they're interconnected like a bunch of grapes. Because that word fruit is singular, we should expect to be growing all of them together.

And, in calling these virtue fruit, he is telling us that we can use them to assess the health of the whole tree and its roots. Healthy fruit grows on a healthy tree with well-nourished roots.

Fruit allows us to assess the health of the tree and the health of the root.

You can't see the roots of the tree, but you can assess their health by the quality of the fruit. Likewise, you can't see our hearts and our minds. But you can assess what is in them by the fruit we are bearing.

Jesus said this:

Matthew 12:33–35

[33] “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. [34] You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. [35] The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Someone quick with a dirty joke has a dirty mind.

Someone who says things that are envious and angry has a seething discontent within.

Someone who is encouraging and thankful and more aware of God’s grace in people than deficiencies is aware of the grace they’ve received themselves, and the roots of their hearts are soaking in gratitude.

We can know what’s going on in our hearts by looking at what is produced in our lives.

So that tells us something about how we grow and change.

We grow organically, not mechanically. (as various authors have noted over the years.)

You know that if you want to make a tree in your yard healthy and growing, you will go out and nourish the roots and branches - make sure they have enough water, make sure it gets enough sun, make sure the roots aren’t having their nutrients stolen by other plants.

And as the roots are nourished, the tree is pruned, fruit grows on the tree - It’s organic growth, which is much different than mechanical growth.

Mechanical growth would be where you look at an almost dead tree that is losing limbs and is basically a stump, so you take living limbs from other trees, cut them off, and nail them to your tree. It might look ok while those branches still had the old life in the leaves, but it wouldn’t take too long before the tree looks worse than when you started and is actually hurt by the nails. And you know that once you stop applying the hard labor of nailing branches on, its not going to keep growing.

But sometimes we try to grow and change as a Christians in a way that is similar to nailing branches on the tree. We make our commitments and resolutions, “I am not going to lust anymore” and then we work really hard and stay real diligent about watching our eyes and avoiding temptation and controlling our thoughts - we nail that branch on to our lives. But it only lasts a little while and we’re right back to our old ways.

Or we say, “I am going to give more.” So we begrudgingly write that big check and put it in the offering box to force ourselves to obey.

Those things we are doing are good: we have nailed some good, healthy branches on the tree. But we have done nothing to nourish the tree, so soon those branches will die.

Or, we take the healthy branches from our past experiences of commitment to Christ, and we nail them to the tree with rotting roots. There was a time when we were in the Bible and prayer, there was a time we were serving Jesus, there was a time when our thoughts and affections were for Christ, and it was a fruitful time in our lives. But we stopped nourishing the roots at some point, we stopped learning, we stopped praying, we stopped depending on God. And we still have some good patterns we established back then: church attendance, ministry involvement, some decent morals. But the energy is gone, and those things are still there, but now accompanied by resentment and fear of loss. The branches are drooping.

We have to learn to address the health of our tree at the source. At the heart level. That’s how we really change.

The source of our sins and bad habits and lack of good habits is not external where all we need to do is address the behavior. The root of those sins is in our hearts:

The way to change external behavior is to change the heart.

And our hearts are changed initially when we come to faith in Christ. And the message of all of Galatians is that the thing that got us started in the Christian life is the thing that keeps us growing:

Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

We began in our Christian lives by recognizing our sin and helplessness, believing in Jesus and what He did for us on calvary, repenting - turning to God by faith. That was the Spirit's work within us.

And the way that we grow, the way we move on, the way we are sanctified is the same. It's a continual process of confession of our sin, believing in Jesus, repenting.

That's what Paul seems to be saying in verses 24 and 25 here:

Galatians 5: [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Paul is saying here that this is how we started: we crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. That was what the Spirit did in our hearts when we believed.

And if we are now living by the Spirit, we keep in step with the Spirit - we keep walking in the same way we started.

The way we grow as Christians is by working to increase our faith in the Gospel that got us started.

One way to say it is how John Owen said it, "Holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing, and realizing of the gospel in our souls."

We grow more holy as we believe the Gospel more fully, as we allow its message to be written on every facet of our lives, as we are shaped and formed and impressed by it deeply.

The key to keeping in step with the Spirit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit is to nourish the root of our faith. And we do this by saturating our thoughts with the scriptures (the sword of the Spirit), thinking about Jesus and how He lived (because we become like the one we worship,) reminding ourselves of the emptiness of our old way of life, that we became Christians for a reason. It's in looking to Jesus that we grow, not to our works, because looking to Jesus nourishes the root.

And to make that concrete -

John 5:39 “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me”

The Bible is the place we see Jesus most clearly. So looking to Jesus is heavily centered on reading, studying, thinking about, memorizing, discussing, and praying the Bible. Alone in our personal devotions, across a table with a friend, and when we all gather together.

And you really can't have too much of that. I've never met the person who has just too much Bible.

There are crazy Christians, for sure - but not because of too much Bible. Maybe too much MSNBC or Fox News. Maybe too many conspiracy theory websites. Too much twitter. But not too much Bible. That's really never our problem.

So let's look at the fruit of the Spirit:

Tim Keller helpfully¹ goes through each part of the fruit of the spirit and defines it, contrasts it with its opposite, and warns of its counterfeit. I'll draw from that a bit this morning, but won't work through all of it, so I posted a PDF in a footnote on the sermon manuscript.

But Paul starts by saying, “The fruit of the Spirit is love.”

Love

We talked about love for most of the time two weeks ago, but it is essentially serving someone else for their good, not with selfish motives, out of overflow from needs being met by God.

We can tend to protect ourselves from being hurt so we don't get close to other people - but that's out of fear and need - what will happen if they reject me, or if they become a burden? But if we believe that we have all we need in Christ because we are nourishing the root and looking to Him, if we believe there is no future for me without Jesus, then I can serve others, even when there's risk to doing so.

Joy

¹ <https://www.harvestbarrie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Fam-1-Keller-Fruit-of-the-Spirit-chart.pdf>

Keller defined joy as delighting in God for the beauty and worth of who He is.

This isn't the same as the temporary elation that comes from experiencing blessings. And it isn't the same as a mood being affected by some good thing happening in our lives.

Today is Superbowl Sunday, or as Bills fans call it, Sunday.

And if your team is in the game today, and you care a lot, you'll experience either elation or disappointment tonight. But elation isn't joy, and disappointment doesn't mean there is no joy. Joy is the deep undercurrent of our lives.

And it also doesn't mean we don't grieve or weep.

Remember Jesus bore the fruit of the Spirit perfectly, He was perfectly joyful. But he wept and grieved and was righteously angry at times, too. Sorrow is not a sin.

But underneath it there is an undercurrent of solid joy in God.

Peace

Definition: confidence and rest in the wisdom and sovereignty of God.

It's the opposite of anxiety and worry, but not because we're apathetic or not caring. It's because we trust God.

In Jesus's days on earth, we see stories like in Mark 4 where He is in a storm in a boat, but he's asleep on a cushion - totally at peace with God's rule over the world. And as we worship Him, we dwell on Him, we become like Him. And His character gets imprinted on ours.

Patience

This is the ability to endure - to endure people, to endure life's trouble, to endure attacks even, without becoming resentful and bitter against God.

You see in Jesus's life one attack after another aimed at a guy who only always did good. Jesus heals and teaches truth, and he faces the normal problems of life (hunger, weariness,) but also demons interrupting Him, religious teachers wrecking his reputation and plotting his destruction, a friend that He had only served in love stabbing Him in the

back, and finally Roman soldiers nailing Him to a cross.

His whole life was one thing after another. And He didn't sin, He didn't get bitter or cynical, He continued to do His Father's will.

And patience, as part of the fruit of the Spirit, is His character being imprinted onto ours.

It's a sight to behold when you see a Christian who has gone through it: family sorrow, loss, grief, financial struggles, embarrassment, failure, disappointment, exhausting burdens - and they aren't becoming cynical or bitter, but are trusting God all the more.

There are some well-nourished roots underneath that.

Kindness

This is seeking the good of another, the opposite of envy.

When your heart is full, it can overflow into genuine joy at the good of another and genuine efforts to bless another.

Notice that many of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit are oriented toward other people. Whoever loves God must love others. There isn't any such thing as a person who really loves God but doesn't exhibit kindness toward people.

"A candle is not lighted for itself; neither is a man. The light that serves self only, is no true light; its one virtue is that it will soon go out." - George McDonald

Because there's so much overlap between all of these we don't need to belabor the definitions:

Goodness

This is being true, honest, transparent, not phony. It's integrity.

Faithfulness

Is loyalty, courage, being reliable and true to your word.

Gentleness:

Humility, self-forgetfulness. It's the opposite of being self-absorbed.

Self-control

Ability to choose the important over the urgent, resist temptation.

Opposite: impulsive and uncontrolled.

As we know Christ better, a steadiness and strength is imprinted on us. You see Jesus doing things like having a crowd of 5000 people demanding his time, but He goes off and prays instead of doing everything they wanted. You see Him perfectly resisting temptation toward self-exaltation before the time, toward riches, toward power.

In the most chaotic moments you see steadiness - Jesus is being arrested, Peter chops off the ear of a Roman soldier named Malchus, and Jesus takes time to go heal that ear before going to the cross.

And as we become more and more enamored with Him, we will become more and more like Him, and his character will be imprinted onto ours. We'll never measure up, we'll always fall short, our fruit will always be small and pathetic compared to His, but bearing the fruit of the Spirit is becoming more and more like Jesus.

So let Jesus change your heart to make you like Him.

For those who don't believe.

For those who do believe.

Prayer of Confession:

Father, we confess that we are often led by the flesh and produce works of the flesh instead of being led by Your Spirit and bearing his fruit. We don't nourish the roots of our lives with scripture and prayer, but we soak in our anxieties, in our fears, in our temptations, in our resentment, and you can tell by our fruit. Forgive us.

Jesus, we are amazed at how you perfectly lived. In your life there is always the fullest measure of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And that you that you took all of your perfections to the cross, where you fully paid for all of our works of the flesh. What love to lay down your life for us. What

patience and kindness. What self-control to give your life for those who spit on you, slapped you, and crucified you. We are amazed at the love you showed in the Gospel.

Spirit, take the character of Jesus and allow it to grow in us. Help us to keep in step with you. Help us to soak the roots of our lives in the scriptures where we see the character of Jesus, and let the fruit in our lives be the character of Jesus.

Assurance of Pardon:

Romans 5:1 “1 Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Questions for Sermon Discussion:

- 1) Discuss the difference between “works” and “fruit.”
- 2) How do we grow the fruit of the Spirit?
- 3) In what ways do we hinder the growth of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives?
- 4) Discuss this chart where the aspects of the fruit of the spirit are defined and contrasted:
<https://www.harvestbarrie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Fam-1-Keller-Fruit-of-the-Spirit-chart.pdf>
- 5) Which of these aspects of the fruit of the Spirit are weaker in your life? Can you think of times where Jesus showed Himself to be strong in those categories? How can dwelling on his character in those moments help you where you are weak?