MESSAGE FOR NOVEMBER 8, 2026, FROM GALATIANS 5:22-24

We continue this morning with our series of messages from **Paul's letter to the churches he planted in Galatia, which is part of modern-day Turkey**. We remain in chapter five. Up to this point in the letter, Paul has mainly been addressing **the teaching of a false gospel where obedience to God's law is necessary for salvation**. At this point in the letter, Paul has established the truth that **sinners are not only saved by grace alone through faith alone, believers must also *live* by faith and not obedience to the law.**

In this section of the letter, Paul turns to explaining what that looks like. That is, he answers this question: ***since the gospel of grace liberates believers to live by faith and NOT under the enslavement of the law, HOW do believers live or walk in this liberty made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus*?** If the Christian life is not a matter of following the Old Testament rules and laws, what does it look like?

Paul's answer to that question is an extended one that begins back in verse 16. So, as we did last week, **let's briefly review the outline of Paul's argument to get the context.** Since believers are NOT to live under the Old Testament law, **God's will for living out the gospel of grace is that we** "**walk by the Spirit**." That is, we must walk under the influence of the Spirit. In John 14 and 15, Jesus calls the Spirit "the helper" and so the Spirit helps us by giving us **both the desire and the power** to say "no" to sin and its pull on us, and "yes" to God's will.

We've seen that now, within this newest era of salvation history brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ, believers have been given **both** the desire **and** the spiritual power by the Holy Spirit to obey God and follow his will. Paul says that one reason we must walk by the Spirit, under his influence and his power, according to verse 16, is because **that is how we overcome our sinful desires that Paul says come from our "flesh."**

Because Jesus has not yet returned to completely perfect believers and remove all the fallen vestiges of this sinful world, we exist in **this interim period of salvation history where both the power of sin and the power of the Spirit seek to influence believers to yield to them.** According to verse 17, **those influences are opposed to one another.** Verse 18 reveals that **believers can, by God's grace, choose to yield to the desires of the Spirit.** Those desires are in agreement with the desires of our own new hearts given to us by Christ in the New Covenant.

We saw last week that **the desires of our sinful flesh are not hard to discern.** They're seen in all their sinfulness whenever we give into them or act on them. Paul lists 15 representative sins (or what he calls "the works of the flesh") **to help us know what it looks like when believers yield, NOT to the Holy Spirit, but instead, to the fallen desires of our sinful flesh.**

After revealing what the desires of the flesh look like through this representative list of "the works of the flesh," Paul next lists nine expressions of the Holy Spirit in a believer and that is what we'll be looking at this morning. These virtues or character traits are **what characterize a believer's life when he/she yields to the desires of the indwelling Holy Spirit**. As Chuck read earlier, that list of what Paul calls "the fruit of the Spirit" begins in verse 22.

These are expressions of the Holy Spirit's influence in believers who are walking by or yielding to the Spirit. Paul writes, "**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." Before we begin to examine this list of virtues or character traits produced when a believer yields to the Spirit, let's first make two general observations about them.

First, **this list of the fruit of the Spirit, like the list of the works of the flesh, is not exhaustive.** Humility and mercy are not here, nor are forgiveness and thankfulness, among others. Paul is again **giving a representative list of fruit that was originally tailored to speak to the needs of the Galatian churches**. The second and more important observation is rooted in Paul's name for these virtues. That is "the fruit of the Spirit."

You'll notice that this is different than "the *works* of the flesh." He calls those "**works**" of the flesh because they're the ***working* out** of the sinful inclinations of that fallen, unredeemed part of us that Paul calls "the flesh." **When a believer manifests any of the outworkings of the flesh, those sinful works originate in him/her.** When believers give way to the sinful desires of their flesh resulting in things like "fits of anger" or sexual sins or impatience, they can't blame that on anyone else—**it is their *work.***

The devil didn't make them do it. There is nothing supernatural about this—it's a thoroughly explainable work or expression of ***my own*** sinful flesh. Though other people's troubling behavior may tease it out of me, those sinful behaviors that are teased out were already present in my flesh. **The troubling behavior of other people cannot *create* (**for instance) **impatience in me. My inherent impatience is already resident in my flesh—ready to be teased out.** When I lose my patience, it's not the fault of the person who teased out my impatience—the problem was that **I yielded to my sinful flesh's resident inclination toward impatience.** The sin of impatience is **a work** of something within me, in my sinful flesh.

In verse 22, Paul implies a contrast between "the *works* of the flesh" and "the *fruit* of the Spirit." The difference in terminology is intentional and its crucial in helping us understand **the difference between how Christian virtues are expressed versus how our sinful vices are expressed**. The two important words in verse 22 are, of course, "fruit" and "Spirit." What Paul means by "the fruit of the Spirit," first and foremost, is that, ***unlike the "works of the flesh" the fruit of the Spirit – these outward expressions of the Holy Spirit's work are supernatural.***

By "supernatural," I mean that **in order for them to be manifest**, **they require the active work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.** They're NOT expressed independently by the believer. They are GOD the Holy Spirit's character traits expressed in and through the believer. **They're also part of the believer's new nature in the sense that the Spirit created our new nature in the new birth,** and we know from verse 17 that the believer's new nature *wants* to express these virtues. However, **our new nature requires supernatural help to war against sin and produce this fruit.**

It's so important for believers to know that ***the Christian life, from start to finish, is purposed by God to be a supernatural life***. The faithful Christian life, as Howard Hendricks used to say, is one that "*demands an explanation.*" If you can, by natural means, explain the Christian character traits you're expressing, **they're *not* distinctively Christian character traits.** This is because **the only explanation for the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of a believer is that *God is supernaturally working in and through you.***

Among other things, that means that **these virtues are not the product of a believer's personality**. Some believers, in their own native personality— (even before they were saved) are, for instance, remarkably gentle people. They wouldn't harm a fly, have a long fuse and tend to be very gracious people who treat others with gentleness. We all know many UNbelievers who don't even have the Spirit, yet who act in very virtuous ways. If manifest in an unbeliever who doesn't have the Holy Spirit, those virtues **cannot** be an expression of the fruit of the Spirit. Those unbelievers are expressing what theologians call "common grace."

God's common grace is expressed in many ways through unbelievers including **ways that can outwardly look like the fruit of the Spirit in a believer**. But (for instance) ***the gentleness of common grace in an unbeliever is produced very differently than the fruit of the Spirit called gentleness.*** If a lost person expresses remarkable levels of gentleness, that IS an expression of God's grace to them. This grace is present in them because ***they are created in God's image*** **and God creates some people to express his (in this case, gentle) image in powerful ways**. God has sovereignly chosen to give certain people personalities that in some ways point to him and his gentleness.

Common grace expressed in unbelievers glorifies God because he gave it to them *through his image* which they bear as human beings. His common grace of gentleness in them points to his gentleness ***but it is NOT the result of supernatural activity by the Spirit of God.*** The difference between an unbeliever's **naturally gentle personality through common grace** and **the supernatural fruit of the Spirit in a believer,** *though not necessarily seen outwardly*, is very significant. **The gentleness of common grace** in an unbeliever, though it points to God, **is NOT expressed by the person with any desire or motivation to glorify God *and* it is totally corrupted by their fallen, self-centered motives.**

These gentle people "by nature" can and do express gentleness in some perhaps outwardly impressive ways, but like everything else any lost person does, **it's ultimately expressed for their own benefit**. Again, the same could be said of *any* unbeliever whose personality is very "loving" or "kind" or any other virtue. It still points to God, but it is not a supernatural phenomenon.

By contrast, with the fruit of the Spirit, believers who may have very little gentleness in their own native personality can be supernaturally acted on by the Spirit to behave in very gentle ways. Also, **when the Holy Spirit is actively producing his fruit through believers, those virtues are much more God-centered—done for his glory.** The motivation of a believer showing the fruit of the Spirit is much more Godward, not self-centered. Again, **You cannot explain the fruit of the Spirit in terms of personality.** When a *believer* is a naturally gentle person in the first place, the fruit of the Spirit makes them *even more* gentle. Its also a gentleness that perseveres even under tremendous opposition, unlike a personality trait.

Finally, in the fruit-bearing believer, **the Spirit's gentleness is expressed for the glory of God—its intended to make GOD look great, not the believer.** If someone says to a believer who is showing the fruit of the Spirit, "*My, what a gentle or kind or loving person you are,"* the Spirit-controlled believer's first response is to thank God because ***they know*** **that their gentleness is NOT a function of their personality, it's a supernatural enabling of the Spirit of God in their life.**

Paul's choice of the word "fruit" is instructive in another way. It helps us see that **not only is the virtue that a believer expresses NOT a product of their native personality, neither is it the result of great exertion on their part to produce this fruit.** The fruit of the Spirit, because it is produced supernaturally, is NOT the result of the believer "*summoning up strength within them*"[1] or exerting great effort. Fruit is produced on a fruit tree or other fruited plant as *a natural outgrowth of a healthy plant.* If an apple tree is healthy, part of the natural outgrowth of that health is the production of fruit.

Likewise, no owner of any orchard or vineyard worker walks out to his plants and beats on them or otherwise coerces them to produce fruit. Neither does he talk nice to them to get them to produce fruit. Nor is fruit produced by the plant straining or exerting great effort. When you walk through an apple orchard the trees aren't groaning to produce fruit. No, *fruit is simply the natural byproduct of a healthy plant.* An important caveat to this is that this does NOT mean that we don't have to do things to spur our faith through which the fruit of the Spirit are produced. For instance, if your patience is being tried, you may need to stoke your faith with a promise from Scripture like James 1:2, "**2** Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." That's not a work to earn merit. Its simply a way to stoke our faith to trust God.

The **fruit of the Spirit** are not ultimately the product of our willful efforts to be loving and kind and gentle. The fruit of the Spirit is produced as believers *yield to, trust in, look to* God to produce his fruit in them. ***Like everything else that honors God in the life of a believer, the fruit of the Spirit is produced NOT by works but by faith.*** As we've said before, when we trust Christ to produce spiritual fruit in us, **our child-like, God-dependent faith glorifies him, and the Spirit, *who was sent to glorify Jesus,* works through our faith to bear fruit.**

Here's an example to illustrate what this can look like in the life of a believer. Let's say that a particular individual rubs you the wrong way—you just can't seem to generate any love for him because his personality or his immaturity or the fact that he reminds you of someone who hurt you makes thim seem like a porcupine to you and you have no desire to hug this porcupine. But they're a coworker, a neighbor, or an in-law so you have frequent contact with them. You know God sovereignly sent them into your life, and you want to obey his call for you to love them.

So, you repeatedly come to God, confess your lovelessness for them and you repeatedly, persistently cry out for him to help you love him/her. You claim a promise like Galatians 6:9 "**9** And let us not grow weary of doing good, for *in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*" Over time or perhaps in an instant, your heart softens toward this person, and this porcupine seems far more huggable to you. You begin to genuinely care about him and pray for him. Ok, **that's the fruit of the Spirit being produced in you**. The Holy Spirit is giving you a love for him that is supernatural—completely inexplicable apart from his work.

We all have people like this in our lives and **God wants us to go through this process of recognizing our sin and crying out to him to cause us to love them so that, when we do begin to love them, we'll know that this is the fruit of the Spirit, not ourselves.** This same dynamic is

[1] This phrase is from Schreiner, ECNT *Galatians*.

seen in situations where we have no native joy or native peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness or self-control.

When we meet people like this, those are glorious, heaven-sent opportunities for you to learn to look to, trust in, yield to God **so that he can produce in you what you could never produce in yourselves, the fruit of the Spirit**. This glorifies him and allows us to see him work in our lives in powerful ways. Our fallen tendency is to grumble about these people and try to avoid them or other difficult trials that stretch us. **God, however, sovereignly places those people/circumstances in our lives to teach us how to trust him and how to show his power through the fruit of the Spirit.**

The first fruit Paul lists here, predictably enough, is "love" or "agape." We saw earlier from Romans 13 that "love is the fulfilling of the law." That means that if I am loving someone, I am not only NOT hurting them, **I am also showing them everything the moral law ever could ever intend for me to show them.** Paul says in Romans 5:5, "**5** and hope does not put us to shame, because *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit* who has been given to us." When believers show genuine love to anyone, we're simply expressing God's own love that has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit. Again, this is God's love—supernatural, self-sacrificing love.

The fruit of "joy" is also a work of the Holy Spirit. We saw this from Romans 14:17 a couple of weeks ago where Paul says, "**17** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and ***joy*** *in the Holy Spirit*." If your understanding of God does not include that **he is a God of infinite joy**, your understanding is profoundly lacking because this is HIS joy that he expresses through believers by his Spirit. **Joy is not the same thing as happiness.** The root word from which the word happiness is derived literally means "*good fortune*." So, by definition, **happiness is unbreakably connected to your good fortune.** If you're experiencing good fortune, you're happy. But if your fortune changes, your happiness vanishes.

By contrast, joy is **not at all** rooted in our circumstances or good fortune—its rooted in our relationship with God. Philippians 4:4 says, "**4** Rejoice *in the Lord* always; again I will say, rejoice." **Our joy is in God and what he's done for us through the gospel**, **not in our circumstances**. We also see this in Second Corinthians chapter six where Paul says as a servant of God that he commends himself "**10** *as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing…"* **Paul's joy was so disconnected from his circumstances and his emotional life that he could be sorrowing and at the same time… rejoicing**. If you are rejoicing in God, his goodness and favor to you in Jesus, then the joy will never run dry because *the source of joy* never vanishes. Joy is a "fruit" of the Spirit, not a personality trait or a response to our circumstances.

"Peace" is another expression of the fruit of the Spirit. Romans 14 again helps us see the connection between peace and the Holy Spirit. "**17** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and ***peace*** and joy *in the Holy Spirit*." Like the Spirit's joy, the Spirit's peace is not dependent upon circumstances. If your peace evaporates when the storms of life come, it's not the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus had perfect peace in the midst of violent storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Paul says in Colossians chapter three, "**15** And let ***the peace of Christ*** rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful." That tells us that, by the grace of God, **we can, through the Spirit, choose to let *Christ's own peace* rule in our hearts.** Anxious hearts in

believers are hearts that have **refused to let the peace of Christ, the peace of the Holy Spirit, transcend whatever the anxiety-generators are**. Like all the other fruit, showing the fruit of peace is impossible apart from the helping ministry of the Holy Spirit.

"Patience" is another expression of the fruit of the Spirit and again, it's not dependent upon circumstances. Tom Schreiner defines this fruit of patience as something that "*endures difficult situations and people without losing equanimity."*[2] That is, without losing **calmness, composure, and an even temperament.** Patience is like many of these virtues. You aren't necessarily conscious of it until it is tested. Like when you're in a retail store and you're forced to wait 15 minutes for an incompetent and rude employee to finally wait on you. That's when you know if you're showing the fruit of patience. Or when you're on the phone trying to resolve a computer tech problem with a person who barely speaks English and who keeps putting you on hold. The fruit of the Spirit in the area of patience will not blow up or return fire when you are mistreated but will suffer long in that situation without becoming annoyed.

"Kindness" is the next expression of the Spirit's fruit. Kindness is used most often to describe God in the New Testament. One commentator says this. "*The Greek word translated "kindness" in all major English versions is employed only by Paul in the New Testament. He often uses it to denote* ***God's gracious response to his rebellious creation***[3]*"* This is similar to patience, but it is more. It is God's gracious generosity toward his rebellious creation.

To help someone respond to a difficult co-worker, we might tell her to, *"kill him with kindness*." What we mean by that is to **be generous and gracious to someone who is not being good to you.** Again, this is how GOD is and it's how believers respond who are expressing the fruit of the Spirit. Again, this is NOT accomplished through human exertion. This is not done by the sweat of your brow or your heroic efforts. This is GOD displaying his character through you and therefore He gets all the glory.

"Goodness" is very similar to kindness when you trace how it's used in Scripture. You could equate this with "*moral beauty*" or "*decency*."[4] **God shows his goodness in that he sends his rain on the just and unjust. His goodness is not just given to those who love him.** He does good to people who hate him and who have turned their back on him as their Creator. Likewise, believers showing this fruit are good to those who do evil against them. Like all the fruit, this is supernatural goodness.

This is not being "nice." Nice is the fleshly counterfeit to many of these virtues. Many lost people are very nice people, but niceness and biblical goodness are categorically different. Being "nice" simply means being "pleasant and pleasing to be around" when things are going well. Goodness is showing God's goodness to anyone, irrespective of how "nice" they are to you.

"Faithfulness" is another expression of the fruit of the Spirit. **This is divine loyalty and dependability.** Believers showing this fruit will fulfill their responsibilities even if it hurts them. **There are many believers who are dependable on a human level but are not showing the fruit of the**

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[2] Schreiner, ECNT, *Galatians.*

[3] Moo, D. J. (2013). *Galatians* (p. 365). Baker Academic.

[4] Schreiner, ECNT. Galatians.

Spirit. Natural human faithfulness is often motivated by **a desire to please people and/or be admired or well thought of**. We can be faithful because we love hearing things like*, "That Bill, when he commits to doing something, he always follows through on it."* If we're faithful because we want those kinds of accolades, we're not showing the fruit of the Spirit. Faithfulness as the fruit of the Spirit **is manifested for God's glory** and **the advancement of his kingdom** without regard to what people might think about you.

"Gentleness" is another expression of these supernatural manifestations of the Spirit in a believer. It's interesting that one of the only times Jesus describes himself he highlights **his gentleness**. He says in Matthew 11 **28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** 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. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." We are seldom more Christ-like than when we are being gentle.

The fruit of gentleness is seen when you're suffering the painful consequences of a sin, and someone helps you without judging you. We see this later in chapter six when Paul says, "1Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him *in a spirit of gentleness*. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." When you're in trouble, when you've messed up and are feeling terrible about it, you want someone showing this fruit of the Spirit.

Finally, is the expression of the Spirit's fruit Paul calls "self-control." This word is very seldom used in the New Testament so we can't get a deep understanding of what Paul means here. It obviously includes showing restraint—not allowing your emotional response or the desires of the flesh to dominate you.[5] Again, this is supernatural. This goes well beyond "biting- your-tongue" self-control. **This is showing restraint when every fallen impulse in you wants to respond in ways that don't honor God—when you feel the perfect right to let someone have it, but instead, refrain and instead pray for the offending person.**

Paul concludes this list with the statement, "Against such things there is no law." What does Paul mean by that? Scholars debate this but in light of the fact that we saw from Romans 13 that "love is the fulfilling of the law," Paul is probably saying that **if you live like this—showing the fruit of the Spirit, you are doing all the moral law could possibly require**.[6] That is a very abbreviated treatment of this list of Spirit-produced virtues. As we close, what are some takeaways we can be thinking about?

As I trust you've seen, the main point of the text is that **the Christian life is a thoroughly supernatural life.** In light of that truth, the diagnostic question every believer must ask him/herself is, "***Does my life demand an explanation?"*** Am I showing levels of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control that, apart from God's help, I could never show on my own? One of the scourges of contemporary Christianity is **that we settle for lives that, though outwardly nice and maybe even "very nice," do not even approach the level of virtue that begs for an explanation.**

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[5] Schreiner, ECNT, Galatians.
[6] This is Douglas Moo's view in his commentary, and it makes sense to me.

Most contemporary believers in the west set the bar well below the supernatural standard revealed in Scripture. In the west, if we avoid scandalous sins or public outbursts that humiliate us, we're doing all right. If we blow up at home where no one can see us, that's not ok, but as long as we're thought of by others as "nice" or friendly, we're doing ok.

That's not the kind of life Jesus died and sent the Spirit to produce in us. He died and sent the Holy Spirit so that his people would be so different from the world that lost people would wonder "*what could possibly be going on with them?"* One writer quotes the Roman Emperor Julian in the fourth century as he was sharing his frustration at the rapid growth of the church. He said, "*Atheism [i.e., Christian faith] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them."*[7]

The church should always show such inexplicably selfless virtue and spiritual fruit so as to humiliate the world's compassion by comparison. **This fruit goes lightyears beyond being a group of nice and friendly people.** And we must remember the context within this letter. Paul's context of Christian liberty means that he is saying in this section, *"this is one reason believers are not under the law—because life under law cannot produce this supernatural living. This is one reason believers* ***have been liberated by Christ*** *on the cross—this is why believers* ***have been given Christian liberty****—this is why* ***they've been given the Spirit****—so that they might demonstrate this supernatural quality of life."*

Does your life demand an explanation? Jesus died and sent the Spirit so that it might. May God give us the grace to **repent of living on a purely natural plain of existence** but to instead show the fruit of the Spirit for his glory and our joy. Let's pray.

[7] John Piper, *A Godward Life: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1997), 253. Found by AI in my Logos software