

Big Idea - We are inwardly changed by the power of the Spirit within us.

Opening Illustration - Birding

I have recently taken up a passive hobby: birdwatching. My family spends a lot of time at Barnes and Noble because we like books, and one day, I saw a little field guide on birds of Alabama. So, I bought it, and as I go about my day I keep my eyes peeled for birds. In the introduction to this field guide, there is helpful advice on identifying birds. Color, size, beak shape, what is the bird eating, is it near fresh water or salt water? There is a number of things to assist in accurately identifying the correct bird.

In a similar fashion, there are certain qualities given to look for when attempting to identify the fruit in your own life. These three weeks, we have sat in Paul's words regarding the fruit of the Spirit, unpacking the vice and virtue lists of

Paul to the Galatians. And it seems fairly straight forward to identify the fruit in the lives of the others, but we tend to be less skilled in correctly identifying fruit in our own lives.

As we turn to our last set of virtues, our inward perspective, let's invite the Holy Spirit in to convict our hearts of any of the opposing vices that are at risk of becoming habitual action instead of ongoing temptations.

Reviewing the past two weeks

We have addressed how the Christian is empowered by the Spirit to love one another, bearing fruit that points us upward to God who first loved us and gives us His peace and joy that we may in turn love one another by His gracious love moving through us outward to one another. There love flows with patience being slow to anger. In our patient enduring alongside one another in love, we show kindness and generosity to one another, striving to serve one another instead of seeking to be served.

And this week, we turn to the last three virtues of the fruit of the Spirit which turn inward.

Inward Fruits

I argue that these last three, faithfulness, gentleness, and

self-control are inward virtues as they relate directly to personal character and occur within a person not outward towards one another.

Faithfulness

Faith or faithfulness can be understood in two different directions, neither of which would be inappropriate as a virtue for the fruit of the Spirit. The first understanding of faith contrasts idolatry. That is faith is knowing and trusting in God with confidence in who He says He is. Faith is keeping one's eyes heavenward in all things. Faith is the foundation by which one walks by the Spirit, and as I have said many times in the past few weeks, faith is the root and love is the fruit. For that reason, interpreting the word *pistis* here as faith is unlikely. The second understanding is faithfulness. Faithfulness relates to one being trustworthy, reliable, and loyal. Since the context of Galatians is Paul's exhortation to fulfil the law by loving one another, this inward characteristic better fits the virtue list.

Faithfulness is an inward reality of being true to who one claims to be. In contrast to faithfulness, we see drunkenness and revelries. The one who is faithful is alert and ready to be called upon. The loyal Soldier does not give himself over to drinking and partying, but stands ready for war. The drunken Sailor who partied too hard the night before finds himself thrown in the brig until he gets sober.

These are inward traits as drunkenness and partying directly impact oneself and indirectly impact society around you. A faithful citizen obeys the law and has a clear mind to fulfill her societal role, whatever that may be. The man who spends all his time drinking and sleeping around at parties does a disservice to himself and to those around him.

Gentleness

Gentleness is a word that does not reflect the human will. Our natural inclination is not to be kind and gentle but to desire what serves us and fight for that. It is not a manner of attitude but a means of being. Gentleness is a humility and meekness that is a sign of salvation, calling, and election.

I want to focus in on two of those ideas, humility and meekness. Gentleness as humility is not making more of oneself than they ought. One Greek lexicon explains humility as “not being overly impressed with one’s sense of self-importance.” We see this in Jesus Christ who constantly points his importance back to the one who sent him, his Father in Heaven. Jesus never attempts to make himself greater than the other two persons of the godhead, he does not even count equality with God something to be grasped in his human state, even though he is Himself God. This is how Jesus can say that he is gentle and lowly. He is perfectly humble and meek.

Gentleness as meekness can be best understood through the image of a warhorse. I believe it was John Piper who preached a sermon series on the beatitudes of Matthew 5, where he explains that the word meek never meant weak. That meekness was the ideal attribute a good warhorse, strength under control. I love that: strength under control. Gentleness is not having one's wings clipped so that one cannot fly. It is having a bit in one's mouth so that one's strength may be guided by one's master. And a good master will not abuse their horse but harness the power of the horse for good works. This virtue is one about living humbly and to your full potential. Not unharvested and uncontrollable power. Not undisciplined talent, but humble, faithful utilization of one's gifts and talents.

The opposition of gentleness is dissension and division. In particular it is dissension and division that stems from pride. Gentleness is humility and strength under control. Dissension is pride creating disunity for the sake of oneself and division is pride breaking apart unity and fracturing stability. Gentleness is something that I don't know that we necessarily see a lot of in the American church. We like the capitalistic structure of the American church where I can shop around and identify the church I like the most. We have a sort of revolutionary spirit that pushes back against what we don't like instead of submitting and creating something new if we can't find what we like. That schismatic

spirit is very unchristian but it is very American and at times very protestant.

But we need more humility and meekness in the Church. We need leaders who can say, I may disagree but here I am. We need churches who can live out the EPC motto in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.

[Before you condemn me for praising our denominations motto, it should be noted that it is cited to Peter Meiderlin, a Lutheran theologian in the 17th century and has been stated by Pope John XXIII as a position of the catholic church.] We need spiritual humility lest we bite and devour one another resulting in a chewed up and fractured church (as we see within the modern church).

Self-control

Lastly we come to self-control. Within the culture of virtue lists, it was common in the philosophical virtue lists to place the most important virtues first and last. Self-control is not the last one to come to mind, but intentionally placed at the end. Love is first because all other virtues in the Christian tradition stem from love, and self-control is last because virtue cannot exist outside of a self-controlled person. Self-control is understood as the ability to restrain one's emotions, impulses, or desires. In contrast to the Greco-Roman philosophy though, self-control in the Christian sense is not a matter of mind over matter, but it is a spiritual

reality. Self-control comes out of the Spirit at work within you, not from the self! Self-Control means being spirit-controlled and not self-centered.

Paul's essential position: being "other-centered" is the ultimate guiding principle of life in the Spirit or having the mind of Christ.

The law is fulfilled by loving one another, and in order to love one another you must be self-controlled, which is inherently being other-centered. Love is the beginning and the end of Christian virtue! Self-control is an inward reality worked out by love.

In contrast to self-control is the majority of the vice list. Paul begins the vice list with sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality. Sexual immorality is a coverall term for sex outside of marriage, unfaithfulness in marriage, or any illegitimate sexual act. Paul condemns sexual sin as sin committed against one's own body.

Impurity likewise reflect immoral and unclean living. It must not be understood that purity according to the law is what is to be expected, but instead that purity will result from walking by the Spirit. Sensuality is a lack of self-control and self-respect, and one does not have self-control or self-respect what is to keep them from giving themselves over to drugs (sorcery), alcohol (drunkenness), and partying (orgies).

[In the first week, I addressed sorcery as it reflects attempting to take control into one's own hands, but there is another layer that fits into this inward perspective. The word translated sorcery is the word *pharmakon*, from which we get our word pharmacy. Now, using pharmaceutical medicine is not what is in view here. What Paul is referencing is the use of drugs for the purpose of knowledge and control. Hallucinogenic drugs were utilized and still are utilized to connect with the spiritual realities of the world and transcend this life. That is sorcery, and it is blatantly condemned here by Paul. Really any recreational drug use falls into this list of vices because it is a lack of self-control and faithfulness especially.]

These inward virtues reflect a readiness and ability to serve God and serve neighbor, and Paul is making the case that the greatest version of freedom comes in self-giving service for the glory of God and the good of one another.

Perseverance of the Saints

So let's unpack the rest of this section that we have not yet gotten to.

Galatians 5:19–21 **ESV**

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife,

jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Why does Paul issue this warning to the covenant community of the churches in Galatia? Let's remember that Paul issued another warning to these churches in Galatians 5:4 "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace."

Let's not simply dismiss these warnings about rejecting or falling away from grace. Paul's words here are echoed by the author of Hebrews:

Hebrews 6:4–6 ESV

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

These are truly difficult passages, and I do not want to make light of them. Paul presents the Galatians with these vices that reflect the failure to fulfill the law by loving one another, and he tells them that if you create habits of vice, if the fruit in your life is works of the flesh and not fruit of the

Spirit, you will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Let's be honest, this is a scary thought. Yet Paul does not dwell on these warnings, but points to the solution.

Galatians 5:22–23 **ESV**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The solution is walking by the Spirit so that the Spirit, not you, may produce fruit. And one of those virtues of the fruit is patience.

Another aspect of Patience - Endurance

When we looked at patience last week, we primarily looked at it outwardly as longsuffering and being slow to anger, and that is definitely the primary meaning in this context of loving one's neighbor, but it also carries the idea of enduring in faith.

I have constantly returned to love as the heart of the fruit which comes from the source of God. From love, comes joy and peace in God's salvation, and from love comes patience to endure with one another in kindness and generosity as well as patience to endure in faith.

In the patience to endure comes faithfulness to God and to

one another through humility and self-control. Endurance requires self-control to hold onto Christ and not give oneself over to one's own desires.

Clement of Rome, in the second century, emphasized the faithfulness of God that empowers us to be faithful and obedient to God.

Ignatius of Antioch, a contemporary of Clement, encourages the people of God to be in Christ, to be in the Church, and to be under sound teaching of faithful pastors.

The emphasis of the early church is to put the emphasis on Christ, not on us, and that is exactly what we should do too. We must begin with eyes heavenward as the Lord's Prayer models for us, and allow God's love to descend down upon us and through us and into us.

I believe that God will give the gift of perseverance to those who are called in Christ, and I encourage each and every one of you to hold onto the assurance found only in the Spirit.

Assurance of living by the Spirit

Galatians 5:24–26 **ESV**

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become

conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Our assurance is not in ourselves, but in the one who was crucified for us, in the Spirit whom the risen Savior sent to lead us in all things. We have our assurance of salvation not in our doing but in our being. Not by doing these virtues attributed as the fruit of the Spirit but by being in Christ and by participating in Christ, naturally producing the appropriate fruit.

We cannot persevere in our own strength. We must walk by the Spirit and allow the God who called us, redeemed us, and dwells within us to work in us to crucify the desires of our flesh and walk according to the Spirit. With right steps and a humble heart to not live for myself but for one another. To set aside my personal desires for the good of the body of Christ and His glory. When we do this, we will not provoke one another, or envy one another, but we will rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. We will not be without hope, but wait in the hope of righteousness in the faithfulness of our God in heaven!

Application

So today, I encourage you to do some birdwatching in your own heart. Does your life walk like a duck and talk like a duck? It's probably a duck! Scripture tells us that a tree is

known its fruit. Take time to reflect on your thoughts and actions and ask yourself, are my motivations coming from the flesh or the Spirit? Am I doing this to look like a good Christian to those around me or am I actually mortifying my flesh out of love of God and neighbor? Seek the Spirit's voice in your life to convict you through the Word of God and humble yourself to receive that correction. Allow the Spirit to prune your heart so that you may bear the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Not by working harder, but surrendering your will to God more that the Spirit may empower you to walk rightly and bear fruit.