

The fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23

Pastor Tim Melton

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

(Galatians 5:22-23)

If you could change one thing about your character, what would it be? It is very likely that for some of us more than one character trait came to mind. For others we chose to think of nothing, because we don't really believe that change is possible. In Galatians 5:22-23 we see that change is possible.

Throughout scripture we see this idea of bearing fruit. Fruit is seen as the words, the actions, the emotions, the thoughts and the desires that come out of our lives. In Matthew 3:8 it instructs us *“to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.”* Psalm 1:3 talks of the blessedness of a man who delights in the law of the Lord: *“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”* In Luke 6:45 we learn that the good person bears good fruit out of the good treasure of his heart, and that an evil person bears bad fruit out of the evil in his heart. Biblically speaking, the words, actions, emotions, thoughts and desires that come from our lives originate from our hearts. Good heart, good fruit. Bad heart, bad fruit.

God desires that our hearts and our lives will bear righteous fruit. In Galatians 5 the Apostle Paul writes of a war that wages within each of us. It is between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is our old godless sin nature. The Spirit is the new life of Christ that now indwells us. The old nature has been defeated,

and yet when we do not submit to the working of the Spirit, when we do not believe the truths that are found in God's Word, the flesh seeks to draw us back to our old sin patterns, our old ways of trying to meet our own needs.

As we walk in the flesh we seek to meet our own needs. We are driven to selfishness, jealousy, covetousness, pride, greed and the manipulation of others. Walking in the flesh results in many types of sin. In contrast, as we walk by the Spirit we have been freed from the power of sin and are now compelled by love to serve Christ and to serve others. Our needs are now met in Christ. Our desires are drawn to holiness and godliness. As we submit to the Spirit He works in us *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."*

This type of **love** is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. It is a beautiful picture of selflessness, sacrifice and purity, but it often seems impossible to achieve.

This type of **joy** was resilient enough to be Christ's motivation to endure the cross, but yet it is so foreign for those of us who lose our joy as soon as we are inconvenienced (Hebrews 12:1-2).

This type of **peace** promises to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7). It removes the need to worry as we place our concerns in the hands of God through prayer.

This type of **self-control** that can be ours is the same that Christ possessed in the midst of his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus could have called legions of angels to come to his aid, but he didn't. He could have defended himself against accusations, but he didn't. He only answered the questions that would insure his crucifixion. He could have drunk the sour wine that was offered to him on the cross to deaden the pain, but he didn't because it would have impaired his decision-making abilities. His self-control was unbelievable.

Now some will read this listing of fruit of the Spirit and respond, "That was possible for Jesus because he is the Son of God, but I will never be able to bear these types of fruit." Scripture would agree with you. You will never be able to bear this type of fruit, but the Spirit of Christ who dwells within every believer can. It is Christ in us, who is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Did he not say that *"whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father?"* (John 14:12)

Probably one of the best known passages in scripture about bearing fruit is found in John 15:5. Jesus said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* It is as we walk closely with Jesus in obedience that we are empowered to bear fruit. The moment that we draw away from his lordship and his resources we are drawn towards selfishness and sin once again.

As one reads this list of fruit of the Spirit it is not meant to bring condemnation, but a longing for more of God and more of the life He has provided for us. As we see our failings may it drive us back into God's arms of grace where once again the gospel comes alive to us.

We need to be mindful that religious works are not the same as fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit are not, "attending church regularly, serving on the hospitality team, paying for your children to attend

a Christian school, witnessing, or even studying your Bible every day.” Those can be done by a person who has no relationship with Christ. The fruit of the Spirit are the supernatural characteristics of your life that can only be present through the workings of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Our fruit will either give testimony to our walking in the flesh or our walking by the Spirit.

We will never become like Christ in our own power, will or discipline. We will never become like Christ if we are motivated by fear, guilt and shame. We will always return to our sinful ways and our old sin nature. The external motivation will never be enough. Something has to change on the inside, at the deepest level of who we are. Our nature has to change, and that can only be done when the Spirit of Christ comes to live inside of us. In that moment everything begins to change.

Some might ask, “What if I am not experiencing what Paul is describing?” One of three options is occurring. The first is the possibility that you are not walking by the Spirit because He does not live in you. If you have never turned from your sin and believed in Jesus Christ, then the Spirit of God does not live in you. He is the only one who can bring the fruit of the Spirit to pass in our lives. You might consider reading Luke 8, where it describes different types of people who have received God’s Word. Some have heard it and disregarded it immediately. Others have at first rejoiced in hearing the good news, but once tested they turn away. Others continue in the Word of God for a while, but are drawn away by the cares, riches and pleasures of this world. Only those who receive God’s Word and “hold it fast in an honest and good heart” are truly in the faith. Have you ever repented of your sin and believed in Jesus Christ? If not, please consider it today and be saved.

Others might ask, “What if I am a follower of Christ, but I am not experiencing the Fruit of the Spirit?” One of two options is occurring. One is that you are not experiencing the Fruit of the Spirit because you are not abiding in Him. Abiding is similar to the child who stays near the father and benefits from all the resources that the father offers for the child’s care. But it is also more than this. It is the child’s heart becoming like the father’s heart. It is more than just receiving gifts from the father. It is becoming like Him. If a person is a child of faith, but is not bearing the fruit of the Spirit, it is likely that they are not walking near to God on a daily basis.

Another possibility is that a person is a child of God and they are walking near to God, but they are still not experiencing all of the fruit in their lives. In Philippians 2:12 we are told to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. It is not saying to earn your salvation. It is saying that now that you are in Christ learn how to walk it in. It takes time. It is a process. It would be similar to a slave becoming free for the first time. They are free, but they now must learn how to live as a freeman. This could be said of each of us. We have been counted righteous through the blood of Christ. Now, day by day we grow in our faith, seeking to bear more and more righteous fruit.

Drawing near to Christ will often be characterized by a humble heart that is convicted of sin and confesses sin often. It will be a person who spends time with God’s Word and in prayer daily. It will be true of a person who is walking in obedience and submitted to the will of God in his or her life. Like the prodigal son, may we each turn towards home and surround ourselves with the truth of God’s Words and the love of the Father. As we walk by the Spirit we will bear the fruit of the Spirit.