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Title: “The Fruit of the Spirit”

Key verse: Galatians 5:22-25 (NASB) – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

Good morning everyone. It’s good to see you all again. My previous two sermons here have been on the theme of the Holy Spirit: last month, I did a message on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and then two weeks ago I did a message on living the Christian life by the power of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit has been given to us to indwell us and to empower us for Christian life and service. After I delivered that second sermon, I realized that there is still more I desire to say on this crucial aspect of the Christian life.

Two weeks ago, I shared with you some key aspects of how we Christians are to live our lives: the Holy Spirit indwells each believer, empowers us for service, and enables us to live our lives in a way that honors the Lord Jesus Christ. I repeated many of the Apostle Paul’s exhortations to us that we should, quote: “walk according to the Spirit” instead of walking “according to the flesh.” The flesh – that old manner of life that we are supposed to throw off when we become Christians and which we continue to throw off as we live out our lives. This can be difficult to do, since we still live in these bodies and we still, sometimes, fall into old patterns of sin and selfishness. But we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit and through exercising some self-discipline, live lives that are guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In today’s message, I am going to begin where I left off two weeks ago: In Galatians chapter 5. The Epistle to the Galatians is written to a group of Christians who were not only needing general instruction on forsaking the sins of the flesh, but there was another problem among the churches in Galatia: somebody had convinced many of these Christians that they needed to follow the Old Testament Law. The Apostle Paul quite strongly argues against that. He does point out that there is some usefulness in the Old Testament Law, since it shows us not only God’s standards for His people but it also highlights mankind’s inability to live up to those standards in our own power – we need God’s power in our lives in order to follow His ways.

In the first half of the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul chastises the Christians for trying to live by the Old Testament Law. In chapter 3, he outlines how the Law is inadequate to produce righteousness. In verses 24-25 (NASB), he writes this: “Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” The Law was our tutor to lead us to Christ, but now that the

message of justification by faith in Christ has come, we do not need to be under that tutor anymore.

In chapter 4 of Galatians, Paul explains that living by the Law is a type of slavery. But we are now *set free* from that slavery. However, *Christian freedom* is not freedom to do anything we want. In fact, what Christian freedom is about is this: we are now *set free to be all that we can be*, to live by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by the rules of the Law. In Galatians 5:1, Paul says, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” We do not need to follow the old rules.

In the first half of Galatians, Paul is contrasting life lived by the Law (which is inadequate) and life lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the remaining two chapters, Paul transitions to a discussion of a life lived by the flesh versus a life lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The flesh versus the Spirit.

I said a moment ago that Christian freedom is not the freedom to do anything you want. That could lead to an undisciplined life of indulgence and sin. Paul cautions against this in Galatians 5:13 – “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

A minute ago I said that Christian freedom means that *you are made free in order to be all that you can be*, to live to your full potential, in the power and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And a major aspect of that can be seen in verse 13 here: instead of using freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, we should use it *to serve one another... through love*. This is the essence of the Christian life in our relationships with others: to love one another, to serve one another.

Paul continues in verses 14-15 – “For the whole [Old Testament] Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”<sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”

The whole Law is fulfilled in this one statement: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” That is from Leviticus 19:18. Love your neighbor.

In previous sermons, I have quoted for you an important command that Jesus gave to His disciples. In John 13:34-35 (NASB), Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.<sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.”

It is by our love for one another that the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let's go back to Galatians 5:14-15. Immediately after Paul tells us that the whole Law is fulfilled in the statement "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*," he gives an admonition to the church. I find this admonition rather interesting. Immediately after telling the church that love is most important, he then admonishes the church by telling them that they should not bicker and say mean things to their Christian brothers and sisters. Evidently, this is a problem in churches. Yes, indeed: I have witnessed that myself in the contemporary church, and I have seen it play out in my readings of church history. In verse 15, Paul gives us this admonition: "But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." Bickering and criticizing other people just leads to reciprocal action from those other persons, and that is something that is really self-destructive to our community – self destructive to the Christian community and destructive to our Christian witness to the world.

Let me read the next few verses. You will hear something familiar from my message two weeks ago. Galatians 5:16-17 – "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."

Your flesh, my flesh, is often in opposition to the Holy Spirit. Our sinful nature often continues to beckon us to engage in behavior that is sinful and selfish, to go against the leading of the Holy Spirit. I often encourage myself with what the Apostle John says in 1st John 4:4 (NASB) – "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." We can overcome worldly temptations because the Holy Spirit of God dwells in us, and the One living inside of us is greater than Satan or any evil spirit or any temptation that would entice us into sin. God Himself is inside us, and we can prevail over any temptation. Two weeks ago, I quoted for you a verse that has been tremendously important to me: 1st Corinthians 10:13. God always provides a way of escape when we are faced with temptation. By taking advantage of that way of escape and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome any temptation and escape from it.

[*Unspoken in the sermon*: 1 Corinthians 10:13 – "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."]

Let's go back to Galatians 5:16-17. If you diligently put into practice a habit of walking by the Spirit, you can avoid the temptations of the flesh. Flesh and Spirit are opposed to each other, and although we see in verse 17 that we will often find it difficult to do the things that we should, we can win the spiritual battle if we stay disciplined and keep on walking by the Spirit.

Let me continue. Verses 19-21 give a list of the deeds of the flesh – “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions,<sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Let’s ponder this list for a few minutes. The first three deeds of the flesh listed here are related to each other: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality. These have to do with sexual activity outside the purpose for which God created sex. Sex is to be enjoyed between a husband and a wife. Any sexual activity outside those bounds is considered sin. Sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality describe a misuse of your body that is not only very physical, but affects you deep down within your soul, since the sex act is a union of two persons and that deeply affects you emotionally and spiritually. Thus, these items are on the top of the list of the “deeds of the flesh” that Paul mentions here.

The next two items Paul mentions are idolatry and sorcery. These have to do with our allegiance to God, with our faithfulness to God. Idolatry is the worship of idols, the worship of anything other than God. This is the worst form of unfaithfulness to the God who created us. Sorcery is the manipulation of dark spiritual forces to gain what you want. Dabbling in these dark forces is dangerous. In English Bibles, this word is often translated as witchcraft.

After these two items come a list of eight items which are all related, in one way or another, to some selfish ways in which we relate to other people: enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envying. These things happen when we fail to love others and when we selfishly focus on our own ambitions to the detriment of other people.

The last two items in this list of the deeds of the flesh are drunkenness and carousing. Although you can find positive references to wine in the Scriptures, when you misuse alcohol by indulging too much in it, this can bring much sorrow and destruction. Destruction to self ... and to family and friends.

At the end of verse 21, Paul warns us that those people who practice these things “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” That should concern any professing Christian who is compromising in any of these areas. Is your life currently characterized by any of these vices? I’m not talking about a season of falling into sin for a short time – if that happens, you can come to your senses and repent and return to the Lord in such a case. But if your life is characterized by long-term practice of any of these vices, then it would be legitimate for someone to question if you are really a Christian. Paul here warns you that such persons will

not be a part of the Kingdom of God. That is a scary thing. If ever you fall into any of these vices, don't stay in it for long. Repent of it – the Holy Spirit will help you. None of us is perfect, but the Lord does want from us a life of repentance and obedience.

Let us continue with our reading of Galatians chapter 5. We now come to “The Fruit of the Spirit,” which is the title of my sermon today. I have finally come to the main topic of my sermon after I have passed the halfway point in today's message. Galatians 5:22-25 (NASB) – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.<sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Two weeks ago, I pointed out to you this quilt that decorates the podium. We have been setting this up every week for the past ten or twelve years, I think. You see here depicted the nine items mentioned as “the fruit of the Spirit” – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I would like to make four observations about the attributes listed here:

1. This is not a list of attributes you should aim to acquire. You don't focus on these attributes and work on acquiring them.
2. Do you want to acquire these attributes? Please note that this list is *the fruit of the Holy Spirit*. It is the Holy Spirit doing the work. What you are to do is to walk according to the Spirit, to live your life in obedience to Christ's commands and to walk according to the Spirit and not according to the desires of the flesh.
3. Do you want to grow fruit? Then you need to make a garden where the conditions are conducive to productive growth. You need to prepare the soil. You need to plant the seeds. That means: you need to prepare your heart; and to fill your heart and your soul with life-giving material: read the Scripture, be involved at church.
4. And pull up the weeds. Every garden is going to have weeds spring up. These need to be plucked up. What I mean by this is that you need to be diligent and forsake those deeds of the flesh that I've been describing for you in my two sermons this month. Refuse to walk by the flesh: rid yourself of those old sins and bad habits.

Let me expand on these four observations. Don't focus on acquiring these attributes. Instead, simply walk every day in accordance with the Spirit and obedient to Christ's commands. The Holy Spirit will then develop godly character in you – He develops these attributes in you.

If you want to grow fruit, then you need to prepare the garden. You need to break up the soil and make it ready for the seed. You cannot plant the seeds in hardened ground. If you have a

hard, stubborn heart, you need to soften it. In fact, one of the things we must do is to transform our minds. Romans 12:2 (NIV) – “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Do not be conformed to the habit patterns of this world. Growing up in this world, there have been many influences on the development of our thought patterns – influences from parents and school and TV and internet. A lot of this is ungodly. We need to transform our minds, to renew our minds. How do we do this? You can start by *filling your mind with Scripture* – read and meditate on it ... and *read some good Christian books* as well. In addition to that, you should *develop positive habits of behavior*.

Galatians 6:7-9 (NIV) – “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup> Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” This is one of those verses that has left a big impression on me. If you indulge in fleshly things, you reap destruction – you damage your life. Let us “sow to please the Spirit,” because then what we reap is eternal life, God’s will for us. And verse 9: don’t give up, don’t get tired – that is something else I have sometimes been tempted to do: to get tired of doing the good things and to start backing off and halting my progress in the Christian life. If we don’t back off but keep moving forward, we reap a fine harvest in the end.

A moment ago, I said that in order to make a productive garden, you need to *pull up the weeds*. My father taught me how to pull up the weeds in our yard. You don’t just grab the plant and pull at the green part that lies above the soil. No: if you do that, you leave the roots behind and then the weed easily and quickly grows back. Instead, what you do is dig your fingers down into the ground and make sure you pull up the roots as well. This is a far more successful way of ridding your garden of the weeds. This is an illustration of how we must rid ourselves of those deeds of the flesh that Paul mentions in several of his epistles. You can’t rid yourself of fleshly sins in a superficial way. You can’t avoid the big sins but keep on indulging little sins. You have to dig deep and deal with all sins and remove them thoroughly.

Look again at what Paul says right after his list of the fruit of the Spirit. Verse 24 – “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Crucify the flesh. Get serious and say No to any sinful indulgence you get involved with.

In order to gain the fruit of the Spirit in your life, you must properly prepare the garden. Break up the hardened ground, plant the seed, give it nutrition, pull up the weeds ... and in

the end, you can gain the harvest. But you must stay close to God, close to Jesus, close to the Spirit.

Let us read the Fruit of the Spirit again, verses 22-23 – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” There is no law against these things. In fact, the Christian who is able to display all these qualities is truly fulfilling the Law.

My ESV Study Bible has a very good, concise description of these nine attributes. Let me close today’s message by reading this section for you:

**The Spirit** fights against sin not merely in defense but also in attack by producing in Christians the positive attributes of godly character, all of which are evident in Jesus in the Gospels. **Love** appears first because it is the greatest quality (1 Cor. 13:1–13; 2 Pet. 1:5–7) in that it most clearly reflects the character of God. **Joy** comes in at a close second, for in rejoicing in God’s salvation Christians show that their affections are rightly placed in God’s will and his purpose (see John 15:11; 16:24; Rom. 15:13; 1 Pet. 1:8; Jude 24; etc.). **Peace** is the product of God having reconciled sinners to himself, so that they are no longer his enemies, which should result in confidence and freedom in approaching God (Rom. 5:1–2; Heb. 4:16). **Patience** shows that Christians are following God’s plan and timetable rather than their own and that they have abandoned their own ideas about how the world should work. **Kindness** means showing goodness, generosity, and sympathy toward others, which likewise is an attribute of God (Rom. 2:4). **Goodness** means working for the benefit of others, not oneself . . . **Faithfulness** is another divine characteristic; it means consistently doing what one says one will do. **Gentleness** is a quality Jesus attributes to himself in Matt. 11:29; it enables people to find rest in him and to encourage and strengthen others. **Self-control** is the discipline given by the Holy Spirit that allows Christians to resist the power of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:17). **Against such things there is no law**, and therefore those who manifest them are fulfilling the law—more than those who insist on Jewish ceremonies . . . (Excerpt From: Crossway. “ESV® Study Bible.”)

All of the attributes we see here are God’s attributes. He is forming His character in you. Do you want to have this fruit of the Spirit in your life? Then make a garden that is conducive to productive growth: break up the hard ground, plant nurturing seeds such as regularly reading the Scriptures and other Christian literature, and pull out the weeds of sin from your life. Live with self-discipline and obey Christ’s commands. And let the Holy Spirit produce His fruit in you.