

Text: Galatians 5:19-25 – The Fruit of the Spirit

Exegetical Big Idea: Those who are in Christ produce good fruit that leads to life, but those who are enslaved to sin produce bad fruit that only leads to death.

Homiletical Big Idea: **The kind of fruit your life is producing reveals what's in your heart.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Humans always act according to their identities. Sinful deeds come from sinful people. What is needed is a new identity.

Background:

Paul has just reminded the Galatian church that freedom in Christ doesn't just mean freedom from having to obey the whole law, but freedom from sin and the freedom to obey Christ. Freedom to obey Christ, as Paul put it, looks like walking with the Spirit. He lays out two options, you are either walking by the Spirit, or walking by the flesh. Everyone is doing one or the other.

But what are the indications that a person is walking by the Spirit, or walking by the flesh? And what exactly does it look like to walk by the Spirit?

Today we see just what a life of walking by the Spirit of God looks like.

Intro:

A few years my wife and I had the idea of taking a corner of our yard and turning it into a small vegetable garden. So we dug out the grass and laid down some soil, and I put up some boards as a boundary around the garden. We planted different vegetable plants, and put some stones down to step on between the rows. Throughout the summer we were careful to weed the garden and water the plants and eventually we were picking bowls of tomatoes and cucumbers, peas and beans and things like that. It was fun, and the kids got to participate and pick the vegetables off and eat them. But it was work too. And in the fall when all the plants had stopped producing, we had to go out there and pull up all the dead plants and put them in the yard waste bags and put them at the end of the road for pickup.

Well this year for whatever reason, we never really got around to planting any vegetables in that garden. But that doesn't mean nothing grew. Sure, we didn't plant anything useful and good, but it didn't change the fact that the soil was still rich with nutrients and perfect for other things to grow. As it turns out, weeds don't need the attention and care that tomatoes do to grow. Slowly but surely, weeds started spring up, and one in particular I've been keeping an eye on. At this point it's more of an experiment than anything. This particular weed started out small but now is about four feet high. And it's prickly. Which means if I want to get rid of it now I have to get my gloves and probably dig it out because who knows how deep those roots are, and find a yard waste bag because something that big I can't just throw on the lawn and chop it up with the lawnmower (something I do with the smaller weeds).

In these verses Paul likens the human heart to a garden. The human heart is a nutrient rich garden that is perfectly suited to grow this. Something is growing in your heart, the question is "what is growing"? The fruit that we are talking about today is not literal fruit of course, but our actions and behaviours.

Either Christ is planted in your heart and you are producing fruit that is a reflection of him and glorifying to God and that ultimately leads to life, or sin and pride is planted in your heart and you are producing fruit that is selfish, hurtful, and ultimately leads to death.

This is the contrast that Paul is holding out for the Galatian church, and the contrast that he holds out to us today. Which fruit is evident in your life?

The kind of fruit your life is producing reveals what's in your heart.

(Vv. 19-21) Fruit of the flesh reveal a love for the flesh

Before talking about the good lifestyle, or fruit, that is characterized by God's people, Paul first draws our attention to the evil lifestyle, or fruit, that characterizes those who are *not* God's people. He calls these in verse 19 "The works of the flesh". We had talked in previous sermons what Paul means by the word "flesh". We need to know a few things about this term. The first thing we need to know is that "flesh" as Paul means it is not your muscles and skin etc. but the part of the person that wants to disobey God. That part of you that pulls you away from obedience and towards sin.

The other thing to understand here is that the "works of the flesh" are in direct opposition to the other list of characteristics that Paul will lay out for us in just a few verses, and what he calls the "Fruit of the Spirit". The two can never work together. They are opposites like a magnet, or oil and water, or fire and water.

With that said, Paul lays out for us what exactly are these works of the flesh, and what they ultimately lead to. We don't have time to look at all of them in detail, but we will see some themes in them.

The first three (sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality) all seem to have a common theme of the pursuit of pleasure. Idolatry and sorcery seem to be related in that they ascribe to other things what should only be ascribed to God. Then there are a number that all have to do with relationships with other people, namely, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy. Finally drunkenness and orgies seem to have at their base a notion of loss of self-control.

Now this is a long list, and though we could certainly look at all of them in detail, Paul himself doesn't even consider this list complete, because he says at the end of the list in verse 21 "and things like these". I don't think Paul is giving us a grocery list of sins, but rather a snapshot of that gives us an idea of what it means to be following the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

But we can see some themes here. Firstly, everything on this list is hostile towards God. Living such a life is directly against God's design for life in general, but no less a life that is lived in Christ.

Consider that impurity for example has the idea of loving things that are unholy, and opposed to God's perfection. Idolatry, is the love of anything more than God. Dissensions and divisions are a picture of breaking relationships because of sinful pride. So we can see that not only are these things hostile towards God, but they are also based on selfish pride.

You might be thinking right now "yes, that obvious", and that actually makes it worse! Paul himself says these things are evident at the beginning of verse 19. Everybody knows that a lifestyle like this is in opposition to how God wants his people to live. Even pagans know that!

And what does such a lifestyle lead to? Paul says very clearly in verse 21 that those who do these things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. In other words, these things lead to death.

Now I have to be very careful here to point out a distinction. When Paul says “do these things”, he has in mind the person who *lives out* this kind of life. He does not have in mind here the Christian who has had a fit of anger in the last week, or impure thoughts, and as a result has been broken and grieving of their sin, and so has turned to God for forgiveness and is pleading to God to help them. That’s not the person Paul is talking about. Paul is talking about the person whose life is described by this list. The live in this list of sins. Or putting it another way, Paul is talking about the person whose life is full of this fruit, because that’s what’s planted in their heart.

It’s such a person who needs to hear that this only leads to death. Paul writes elsewhere that the wages of sin is death. Not inheriting the kingdom of God, clearly means everlasting torment in hell.

If the fruit of an evil heart is evident, and it leads only to death, then why on earth would anyone want to choose that? And Paul has even said he has warned them multiple times! The answer is because the person who has the fruit of sin as their lifestyle, has the love of sin planted in their hearts. Either the person will die an eternal death in hell, or the love of sin itself has to die.

[A few weeks ago my neighbor texted me asking if I wanted some wood that he had in his garage. He knows I enjoy woodworking and this wood was still good to make a few projects. So I went over and he had some beautiful pieces of wood of two different kinds actually. So I gratefully accepted it and was dreaming of all the different things I could do with this wood. I had all these projects in my mind. A few days after I got the wood I cut into one of the pieces. I noticed however that there were little holes in the wood, and inside those little holes were little bugs. I looked at the rest of the pieces that I got, and all the large pieces of that kind had those same little holes. I googled it and sure enough they were a kind of beetle grub. I was so disappointed. I wanted to keep them so bad. I tried to think of different ways to use the wood despite being full of these bugs. I so badly wanted to keep them. But keeping them would only mean that they would hatch and destroy the other wood that wasn’t bad yet. The only think I could do was throw it away.]

Humans love our sin. We know it’s bad. We know it’s against the law of God. It’s no different today when Paul says that these things are evident. It’s the nature of the flesh to hold on to sin and try and make it work because we think it’s so valuable and satisfying. But the reality is that keeping sin only leads to death. Either love for sin has to be destroyed, or you will. If you choose to keep the love of sin as the idol in your heart, then the consequence is hell for eternity.

The gospel calls us to die to our love of sin. The Good News of Jesus calls you to smash that idol and turn to Jesus for true and everlasting life. Your sin will lead you to death, but coming to Jesus and trusting in him for the forgiveness of your sins leads to everlasting life. If you’ve not done that, you need to do it today. Believe that Jesus took the penalty for your sins as he died on the cross, and rose to life again. And you will receive forgiveness, and the hope of eternal life in his perfect presence. Christ can break your service to sin and death. He rips out the love of sin that is planted in your heart, and plants instead a love for him. That love does not disappoint.

Here’s the sober reality of these verses however. Though they are calling unbelievers to repentance, we can’t forget that Paul is writing to the church. He’s writing to people who are in the community of the

church, and call themselves Christians. We can't take that lightly. We need to ask ourselves "does this list describe me?" Paul in a moment will describe an opposite list, and we have to ask ourselves which list best describes our lives. If you are being honest, and the fruit of the Spirit is lacking in your life, and this list here better describes who you are, then that's not ok! It's not ok to dismiss it as a personality, or just "who you are". Paul doesn't leave room for that excuse, but instead it may be revealing what is planted in your heart. If the fruit of the flesh marks your life, it is an indication that you are in service to the flesh. You will know a tree by its fruit Jesus said. Let Paul warn you in these verses as he warned the Galatian church.

The kind of fruit your life is producing reveals what's in your heart.

(Vv. 22-23) Fruit of the Spirit reveals a life in service to the Spirit.

It's vital that we understand the bad news if we're going to see the glory of the good news. Paul starts off by says "But", which means what he is about to say is in direct contrast to what he just said.

But there is another type of fruit. And this type of fruit reveals something else that is planted in the heart. This fruit does not reveal a love for selfish sin that is contrary to God, but instead it reveals a love *for* God and his design and will.

Instead of a love for sin and selfishness that is planted in the heart, it is a love for Christ and his Spirit. Just like the list of the works of the flesh (or the fruit of the flesh as we've been calling it), this list is not an entire list, but is meant to give us a snapshot of what it looks like to honour God with our lives. There doesn't seem to be an obvious order to this list, except for the fact that love comes first. I think Paul does that on purpose.

Why start with love? I think because all the other attributes are wrapped in love. Paul doesn't specify whether he means love for God primarily or love for each other, but if you take into account the rest of the Bible, it's clear that those two loves cannot be separated. Love begins with God. We love because he first loved us. The only reason we are able to love God or love anyone else for that matter is because God demonstrated his own love for us in this; while we were still sinners Christ died for us. While we were enemies with God and loving our sin, God sent Christ into the world to live in perfect obedience on our behalf, to take the wrath of God upon himself for our sake, to die, and conquer death once and for all. And the love of God is such that forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life is ours by grace through faith. That's love. If you grasp that, then the response is always love for God and love for his people.

In light of that look at this list starting in verse 22. A person has joy in all circumstances because they know they have eternal life in Jesus. Peace in all circumstances because of the same reason. Patience and kindness in life with others because God was first patient and kind with them. Goodness means the love of all things that are righteous and honouring to God. Faithfulness could mean faithfulness to God or to others in a general sense, but likely means both, reflecting a desire to keep one's word because God is a God who keeps his Word. Gentleness reflects a person who deals with people in a kind way, again because God was gentle with them. And finally self-control reflects an attitude of perseverance in doing what pleases God and refraining from the pleasures of sin.

Just like we found a similarity in the fruit or works of the flesh, there is one big similarity in the list here. They all describe Christ. Christ loves the Father and out of that love he gave himself as a sacrifice on the

cross for the world. Jesus was full of Joy even as he endured the cross for us. Jesus was at peace with the Father's will in the garden, though he was in agony. Jesus was patient with the slow understanding of the disciples, and kind to the sinner. He loved goodness and all the things of God. He was faithful to his heavenly Father and remains faithful to us today. He deals gently with us in our stubbornness, and demonstrated absolute self-control when he *did not* call down legions of angels to fight for him at his crucifixion.

And this makes perfect sense. If you are united to Christ by grace through faith. You are dead to your sins and alive in Christ. It is not just that you are in Christ, but the Spirit of Christ is *in you*. And if the Spirit of Christ is in you, what do you think his work is going to be? To turn you into the image of Christ! He is going to grow in you're a lifestyle (or fruit) that reflects Christ!

Jesus says this himself in John 15. Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the Vine and you are the branches. If you remain *in me* and *I in you*, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing". So being in Christ, and the Spirit of Christ in you, are together working to transform you into the image of Christ.

Now at first glance this seems like a list of many things, and in one sense I suppose it is. But there's something interesting Paul says about this list that the English doesn't capture all that well. The word that Paul uses for "fruit" to describe these characteristics is not a plural word (meaning lots of fruit), but singular (meaning one fruit). I think Paul does this on purpose to show the Galatians that you don't pick and choose which fruit you'd like to work on this week. I remember that's exactly what a well-meaning Sunday school teacher asked me when I was younger one time. I remember we had gone through the list and she asked me if I thought I needed to work on joy, or peace, or self-control, or any of the other ones. And I know she was being a faithful saint and serving to disciple us kids, but she missed something that Paul is trying to teach.

All of these will grow in the genuine Christian! They are connected together as one fruit! I'm not trying to say Christians don't struggle in different areas, but I am saying that as joy in the Lord increases, so does peace, and kindness, and self-control. As goodness grows, so does gentleness and faithfulness.

Which means that as this fruit grows in the Christian, all areas of life are affected. John Owen, who was a puritan pastor and teacher says about this "intend universal obedience". Which is to say that all of the Christian life is one of striving for obedience and honouring God. There are no "off limits" parts of the Christian life where fruit should not grow. And this is good news for the Christian. It means that as you grow in your joy of the Lord, you are also going to grow in your patience with other people. As you grow in goodness and love for God's ways, you will also grow in kindness and self-control.

That's good news.

And because God is faithful, it is not a matter of *if* God will do it, but *when* God will do it. Growing fruit takes time. Nobody wakes up in the morning to sinless perfection. That's what I want, but it's not the reality. The fruit often grows slowly, but it will grow.

[A few years ago I built a raised planter for our yard. A raised planter just makes it easier to get to the plants. I built this because we thought it would be fun to plant strawberries plants. So after it was done we filled the sections with dirt and went to the store in the early spring and got strawberry plants. We planted them and watered them and they grew. In fact they grew a lot! They became pretty big, but you know what never happened that summer? They never grew any fruit. Apparently the first year you plant

a strawberry plant it won't produce any fruit. Now I could have been frustrated with them and forgotten about them, but instead we continued to water them and take care of them. In the fall I covered the plants in some leaves and straw to insulate them from the cold winter. And next spring I removed all the straw and leaves and pruned the plants so they weren't overcrowding each other. And finally, after more than a year, we got a handful of strawberries. It took time, and effort, but they did eventually produce fruit.]

You may be a new Christian, or you may even be a seasoned Christian and are frustrated by the persistence of sin. Don't give up on seeking the Lord. Don't give up on finding your joy and delight in him. Don't be ok with the sin in your life. Keep spending time in your Bible, and calling out to God in prayer. Keep coming to church and Bible studies. It may take time, but it's never a matter of *if* God is going to produce fruit, but *when*. If you're frustrated with your sin, let that frustration push you to God.

Do you know why it's certain that the Holy Spirit will produce the fruit of the Spirit in you if you belong to Christ? Because in a supernatural way, that's the *natural* thing that the Spirit of God does.

You know what I didn't have to do to those strawberry plants? I didn't have to convince them to grow strawberries instead of apples. I also didn't have to go out there and yell at them and command them to grow strawberries. Why? Because it was natural for the fruit to grow.

I think that's what Paul is getting at in verse 24 when he says "against such things there is no law". Now admittedly this verse is hard to understand, but I think he's pointing out an irony that exists here.

Paul was so clear throughout this letter to the Galatian church that the law simply cannot produce obedience to God. The law cannot transform us into the likeness of Christ. But according to these verses what can? The Spirit of God! The irony is that what the law could not produce, the Spirit of God does as we are united to Christ by faith.

So, do you want the fruit of the Spirit to be displayed in you? You want your life to be described and marked by the Fruit of the Spirit? It's not the fruit itself to focus on! It's Christ. If you want to look like Christ, you need to know and delight yourself in Christ, the fruit comes from that.

The kind of fruit your life is producing reveals what's in your heart.

(24-25) Consistent fruit comes from ongoing communion with Christ.

There's one thing that's hard to escape when talking about fruit, and that is that harvest is seasonal. I don't know of many (if any) naturally growing plants that produce a crop all year round. But as God's children who are called to bear the Fruit of the Spirit, we should in fact *not* be seasonal fruit bearers.

We had just talked about how the Fruit of the Spirit comes about by delighting in and beholding Christ as our highest affection. This of course is not a seasonal thing for Christians!

What we want is the consistent growth of the Fruit of the Spirit. Paul has already written in this chapter about the reality of the Spirit that is in us that battles against the flesh. And we are seeing more of that right here in verse 24. Paul writes that those who belong to Christ have "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." This is strong language. And what's a little bit confusing is that Paul writes about crucifying the flesh in the *past tense*. Meaning it has already happened! But how can Paul write that if

there are still passions and desires within me for my flesh? How can Paul write that when the Christian will battle the flesh up until the day he or she stands before Christ in his presence?

The answer is that I don't think Paul is meaning that the desires for the flesh are altogether gone. But what is altogether gone is the power of those passions and desires to make us obey them. The sinful identity that I was born with and that enslaved me to obey it and produced in me all kinds of sinful desires like the list of sins in the previous verses is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.

But Christians live in a reality of what we call the "already and not yet". In one sense God's people have already inherited the Kingdom of God because of our union with Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. And yet we wait still for the fulfilment of all of God's promises.

I think we are seeing that here when Paul says that we have crucified the passions and desires of the flesh. The chains of slavery are broken, even if we still try and go back to them from time to time. One commentator gives what I think is a helpful picture of this. He reminds us that crucifixion was a slow process, but it was a final process. Meaning that once you were condemned to be crucified you may be up there for a long time, but you were certainly not coming down alive.

So it is with our sin. It has been condemned to die. It is a slow death, and our sin tries and calls us to help it down so it can reign again in our lives, but by the grace of God we can say to that sinful flesh "you have no power over me".

But this is only true for "those who belong to Christ Jesus". Because it's only in Christ that there is the freedom from the power and slavery of sin. But there's more than that, because it's not just a matter of getting rid of sin, but at the same time being filled with the Spirit. Paul reminds of that in Ephesians 4 when he says don't get drunk on wine but instead be filled with the Spirit. It's an ongoing process.

[If you want to be healthy, it's not enough just to cut out the junk food in your life. If you eat a bag of Doritos for breakfast every morning, it's not going to make you healthy just by cutting that out. It's a good start and a necessary one, but it's not the end of the story. You still need food! It's a matter of replacing the bad with the good. Instead of a bag of Doritos, you need yogurt and apple slices.]

It's the same thing here that Paul says in verse 25. Paul is assuming a "yes" answer to the "if" statement he makes. In other words, since the Galatians are living by the Spirit, they must also keep in step with the Spirit. Which means actively fighting the passions and desires of the flesh, while at the same time being obedient to God and delighting in that obedience. It's fighting *against* sin, and *for* communion with Christ.

If you are in Christ, and the Spirit of Christ is in you, then the love of God is planted in your heart by the Gospel of Christ. And for that person, you want above all else to be producing the Fruit of the Spirit. I want this, and I know every Christian does. Because not only do I want sweet fellowship with my God. but I want the glory and goodness of my God and saviour to shine from my life so that his glory is displayed throughout the world. Is that not what we long for? We want God to be glorified throughout all of his creation, and ourselves to share in the joy of that glory.

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