



*“FRUITFUL CHRISTIAN LIVING”

Biblical Text: Galatians 5:22-26

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Today’s message is ***“Fruitful Christian Living”** - based on these familiar words:

**“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”* Most Christians, if we have been on this faith journey for a little while recognize those *characteristics as the list of the ingredients for fruitful Christian living. *There have been hundreds of books, probably thousands of them*, written about Galatians 5 and the “Fruit of the Spirit.” So - it’s hardly new.

*But this may be. You won’t read this in any book. My first thought whenever I read this list of the elements of a genuine Spiritual Life is this: *“Well, crud.”* It’s true. Well, I did have to clean up my language a little to bring it to Church - but it’s true!

On my best days, I display several of those virtues, but on my worst days not even my own mother would have used 8 of those 9 attributes to describe me. It’s true.

*Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? That’s who I’d like to be. But that’s not me, if I’m honest. It’s not that I don’t get anything right. Loving? Joyous? Most days. Kind? Often. Patient? Not even on my best day. Not ever. But hey, 8 out of 9 isn’t bad!

That would be great if the “Fruit of the Spirit” was multiple choice. But the word fruit in the original Greek is singular not plural. I checked. I hoped it was “fruits of the Spirit” so there was partial credit for the easy ones for me. **Nope.** Fruit, singular.

That’s why Jesus said ***“By their fruit you shall know them.”** In Matthew 7:20¹

I’ve been a Christian for over fifty years. I have a degree in religion and 2 graduate theological degrees. I have a thousand plus books on Christianity. But if Galatians 5 is what a genuine Christian looks like, I’m just sc... well I’ll just say *“far off the mark.”*

Another way to put it is this. The Holy Spirit’s work on me has been slower than road construction in Johnson County. And know I’m not alone.

*This series, **“Fruitology,”** is about identifying and living into the elements of a life transformed by the love of Christ. The new life that is ours in Christ should result in observable behaviors that others can see, like the ones in our text, love, joy, peace, kindness, etc. But the sad truth is that those things are often not observable in us.

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I have stopped engaging in Facebook posts or other discussions about current topics of debate. Why? Because little is accomplished other than good and well-meaning people shouting at one another, and demonstrating bad behavior with no filters.

*The current raging controversy over whether athletes and others have the right to boycott the National Anthem illustrates the point. I stand and sing the national anthem out of respect for America and those who fought and died for freedom. On the other hand, our Constitution guarantees our citizens the right and freedom not to stand or even protest, for reasons of conscience. ***Go check. It's in the first amendment.**

We live in such a divisive time. People rarely exhibit civil, let alone Christian behaviors. We just settle for shouting at one another over the fence of our political opinion or ideology. And Christians are often no better. I wish that weren't true, but it is.

I long for a time when conversations are respectful and assume that others are people of worth, with good hearts, who may differ in conviction or position. I long for a time when the fruit of the Spirit is evident in the lives of those who call ourselves Christians.

Evidently so did the Apostle Paul in our morning Scripture. He begins with these two words, "BY CONTRAST..." Consider their power. By contrast to treating one another with disrespect... By contrast to angry profane tweets about other human beings...

And what follows is Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23: ***"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."**² And where it says *"there is no law against such things,"* in verse 23, in the Greek it actually says *"there is no shortage of such things."*

And of course, that is still true. Left on our own, we revert to our natural inclinations, and those are rarely *"the better angels of our nature."* Thank God, we are not left there. With our feeling of always failing to live up to our calling.

* Galatians 5:1 reminds us that, ***"For freedom Christ has set us free..."**³ The Good News is that we are set free for a new way of living. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: ***"Anyone in Christ is a new creation..."**⁴

Look at Galatians 5:24: ***"...those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."**⁵ Sometimes *The Message Bible* really clicks for me. Verse 24 in that translation says: *** "...everything connected with insisting on our own way ... is crucified for good."**⁶ Jesus lived and died so we could live better lives.

² Ibid. Galatians 5:22-23, New Revised Standard Version.

³ Ibid. Galatians 5:1, New Revised Standard Version Bible.

⁴ II Corinthians 5:17, paraphrased by the author.

⁵ Ibid. Galatians 5:24, New Revised Standard Version.

⁶ Galatians 5:24 in The Message, Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson

And Jesus said that he would be praying for us, even now, that God would give us the Holy Spirit, and that Spirit would fill in the gaps for us, give us strength where we are failing on our own. In John 14:16-17, Jesus said: * ***“I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...”***⁷

And, despite my tendency and yours to be stubbornly Holy-Spirit-resistant, Pentecost-flame-retardant. God’s Spirit persistently shows us how to live and does not fail us.

So, in Galatians 5:25 God’s Word calls to us saying: * ***“... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”***⁸ Pay attention to the better angels of your nature, they come from the power of the Spirit of God! Let the fruit of the spirit be visible in you.

As verse 26 says: * ***“Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.”***⁹ We could add, thinking the worst of one another, being uncharitable toward one another, disrespecting one another.

And the promise, the incredibly good and still believable news is this. We can live better than the lower angels of our nature. We can. The world is watching. So are the children who come after us. We can do better than we have done.

We can lead amazing lives if we don’t try to do it all on our own. And we don’t have to! Remember: * ***“... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”***¹⁰ Lean into the power of the Spirit. That’s what it’s there for.

And if you’re like me – we need all the help we can get! Amen.

⁷ John 14:16-17, Revised Standard Version, Copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁸ Op. Cit. Galatians 5:25, New Revised Standard Version.

⁹ Op. Cit. Galatians 5:18. New Revised Standard Version.

¹⁰ Op. Cit. Galatians 5:25, New Revised Standard Version.