

GAL 5:22-26 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

Last week, you might remember we delved into different aspects of what the deeds of the flesh are. Paul had given a list to the Galatians so as to remind them of what they were and what they are to flee.

Now, obviously it is not an exhaustive list, for the deeds of the flesh involve every aspect of man which is manifest in his sinful nature, be it from something as mundane as having a bad thought to mass murder.

But Paul is trying to point out that if we are new creatures in Christ than it stands to reason that we would walk as those people with a new nature in the power of the Spirit who gives us this new life in Christ. And so, his list of the deeds of the flesh are to have a sobering effect on these Galatians.

We might use the illustration where a group of adults are in an auditorium for a marriage seminar and are shown a slide presentation where only slides of toddlers involved in every conceivable selfish act are shown, from stealing another child’s toy, to a tug of war where each child is not willing to share a toy.

Without the instructor having to say a word the message is quite clear to these adults in this auditorium.

In a similar way, without Paul having to elaborate on how individuals in Galatia might be succumbing to such sin, he simply gives a list of things believers should not be involved in. And now, in a positive way he reinforces what it means to walk in the Spirit as he contrasts the spiritual life with the life of the old man, or old nature.

And so, we come to our text this morning where Paul gives a list, again, not exhaustive, on the fruit of the Spirit.

GAL 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Now, when we talk about the fruit of the Spirit we need to understand that this is different from the gifts of the Spirit. Both come from the Spirit of God, but ultimately it's the fruit of the Spirit which shows the mark of a true mature Christian.

The gifts of the Spirit are meant to be used in the Christian's life for the edifying of the body of Christ, but the gifts are not always an indicator of a spiritual believer. We know this from Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian believers as they were certainly using the gifts of the Spirit but were anything but spiritually mature.

Unfortunately today, there are many “Christian” groups who use the gifts of the Spirit, being manifest in a person's life, as the measure of spiritual maturity.

And so, within some of these groups it is seen to be spiritual to manifest such gifts as tongues or prophecy, when in fact some of these same people may not be manifesting love toward their neighbor, or patience toward other believers and so on.

Never are we told that you will know Christians by their gifts, but rather, you will know them by their fruit, their actions, their obedience to the Lord, and above all, by their love for the Lord and one another.

And so, when we discuss the fruit of the Spirit we are talking about the character of the Holy Spirit of God. This by the way, is the reason the word fruit is in the singular where the gifts of the Spirit are obviously in the plural.

There are many gifts within the body of Christ and not everyone has them all, which is clearly seen in the rhetorical question Paul asks of the Corinthians when discussing the gifts of the Spirit.

1CO 12:29-30 “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?”

The implied answer is, no, not all are apostles, or prophets. Not all are teachers or work miracles. Nor do all have the gift of healing or speak in tongues or interpret tongues.

When it comes to the gifts of the Spirit it is at the discretion of the Holy Spirit what believer gets what gifts.

1CO 12:11 “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”

And so, when we look at a list of the gifts of the Spirit we may only have one or two or three as the Spirit is the one giving us such gifts. But when we come to the fruit of the Spirit we are not talking about aspects of the character of God which are dispensed individually.

In other words, it is not as though one Christian gets love, mercy and patience, while another Christian gets joy, peace and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit is a combination of attributes which are Godly in nature and are given in full to every believer.

And so, no believer can use the excuse that he can't love his neighbor because that's not a part of the fruit he has received from the Holy Spirit.

On the contrary, every believer is indwelt with the Holy Spirit and therefore has all that the Holy Spirit is in the sense that the Holy Spirit's life is now a personal part of that believer. It cannot be escaped. And the nature and life of the Holy Spirit is nothing short of holy.

And so, in essence that is what we are talking about when we discuss the fruit of the Spirit. It is another way of describing the nature of the Spirit who is pure perfect holiness and who now indwells each believer and prompts each believer to be an imitator of Christ who is holy.

This also leads us to the next issue which is the source of this fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is just that. It is of the Spirit. We can't conjure up this fruit, nor can we fake it for very long. If we are truly walking in the Spirit we are in fact simply walking in love and obedience to the Lord which shows itself in this fruit we have before us in our text.

And so, it's not a matter of do we have patience given to us by the Spirit, and should we pray for more. We have all the patience we need because we have all of the Spirit of God whose fruit it is.

It's not a matter of thinking that my make-up is such that I'm not naturally very gentle. I'm a little rough around the edges and so no one should expect me to change, but should accept me as I am. Well, then the Spirit of God becomes a liar because the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness in every believer, since every believer is indwelt with the Spirit.

Unlike a gift of the Spirit where I can truly say that my gift is this or that, I cannot say that any aspect of the fruit of the Spirit either has not been distributed to me by the Spirit or that it's only been given to me in a teaspoon portion rather than a bucket portion as given to other believers.

On the other hand I cannot say that my ability to love or be merciful or faithful is something I have honed over the years without the power or aid of the Spirit who is all of these things.

And so, I guess what I'm trying to say is that every believer has all of the fruit of the Spirit; not a part of it, but all of it. And no believer can claim this fruit as though he or she was the source of such fruit. Because it is the fruit of the Spirit, it is also necessary we give God the glory for such fruit as we walk in it as we depend on the Spirit.

Now, this does raise the question, if every believer has all of the fruit of the Spirit why don't we all walk in the fruit in the same way to the same degree? Good question. And the answer is that though the Spirit of God indwells every believer and empowers every believer and prompts every believer to be holy, each believer still makes his or her own choices.

And so, the reason we study the fruit of the Spirit is to kind of do a spiritual check on ourselves to see if we are being imitators of Christ as we pursue a holy life which is seen in the fruit of the Spirit.

Now keep in mind that Paul assumes that a born-again Christian is one who has the desire to flee from the old nature and desires to pursue that new life and nature we have in Christ.

But this is where our wills come into play. A few moments ago I mentioned that for the believer it's not a matter of praying for more patience, because when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit we have all of the patience we need in Christ. Rather, it becomes a matter of praying for the power of the Spirit to walk in the patience we already possess.

We get a glimpse of this when Paul addresses the Colossian Christians and prays for this very thing in their lives.

COL 1:10-12 "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that

you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.”

Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience should be our prayer as well. But praying for power and then not obeying in His power is where we usually fall short.

You see, power is also a fruit of the Spirit. It's not listed here in our text, but it is no less a holy attribute of God which is part of His character. And since He indwells us we now have all the power we need to walk in such a way as to bring honor to His name.

When we talk about the power of God we're not talking about some anemic strength, but a dynamic living power, who is God Himself. It is this power of God we are to walk in by faith and obedience.

ROM 8:11 “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

What Paul is saying is that we need to understand our position in Christ and walk accordingly. We are no longer without power from on high. We are no longer without a faithful God who desires that we honor Him. And we are now indwelt with the Spirit of God who will make that happen if we look to him in faith and then act on that faith in obedience to His word and His promises.

ROM 6:4-8 “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

Paul is saying that we need to get a grip on where we stand before God. We are no longer slaves of the old nature and death. Death has been swallowed up in victory and we are more than conquerors in Christ. This is a reality, not wishful thinking.

We need to view ourselves from God's perspective which is what Peter records for us in his first epistle.

1PE 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

It seems that it's so much easier to see our weaknesses in this life because we are weak. But in Christ all of that has changed. We are viewed by God as ambassadors and representatives of the Creator of this universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

And because we have the Spirit of God indwelling us we can actually demonstrate who we are as we rely on the power of God by faith.

Now, having said all of this, maybe we should take a look at the fruit we already possess in the power of the Spirit.

GAL 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love..."

This is not a bad place to start since it can be said that all of who God is emanates from this aspect of His holy character. The apostle John makes note of this in 1John.

1JO 4:16 "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."

It is true that God loves, but what the Scriptures teach is that the reason God loves is because that is who He is. God is love.

And if this is true and He indwells us we have a love which is beyond anything this world can produce, because we have the true source of love, God Himself.

The word love here in our text is agape, and though it has been sometimes used in Koine Greek, in ancient writings, to express brotherly love, it has been used in the Scriptures to describe an unselfish love which emanates from God; this kind of love which is expressed in Christ who died for us despite the fact that we hated Him.

ROM 5:8-10 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son,

how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

What Paul is saying is that while we were actively rebelling against the Lord He was pleased to show His mercy and love so that we might be reconciled back to the Father. How else could He say, while the Roman soldiers were torturing Him on the cross, Father forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing?

Christ's love breaks through our hate and our despising Him. He chose to love when He certainly didn't feel like loving. We're told that our Lord prayed to the Father, while agonizing in the Garden of Gethsemene, if it is possible let this cup pass from me.

As a human being our Lord Jesus dreaded the idea of dying on the cross, but His love for us would not keep Him from loving us to the end, which is why He also prayed, but not My will Father, but Yours be done.

You see, the kind of love that God gives is a love which acts according to His will. It is a love which acts despite how we may feel. I've shared this story before, but it's worth repeating because it expresses what love is designed to do, not just how it may feel.

A friend of mine is a Pastor and years ago he shared how he had a couple he was counseling who was having marital problems. And he asked this couple what the problem seemed to be as they perceived it. And without hesitation they both said in so many words that they didn't love each other any more.

Since both of these people claimed to be Christians, and he had no reason to doubt the validity of their faith, he proceeded to give them the answer to their problem since they were obviously interested in solving it as they were open to his counsel.

In fact, they had asked him if there was any hope and what direction they should take in getting this love back into their relationship.

And I'll never forget the answer he gave them as it is probably the last thing they expected. He said to them, if you want the love back in your relationship, the both of you need to be about loving each other.

And they both looked at each other like he had two heads. They said, look we don't love each other anymore and we need some

help in restoring it. His answer again, was the same. Then you need to be about loving each other.

He then went on to explain that if you're not loving each other, then you've made a conscious choice to stop loving, for whatever reason, because love is a choice, not simply a feeling. God's love always works in conjunction with who He is according to His will.

God's will for these two people was that their marriage remain intact. How do we know that? Well, His word spells this out.

MAT 19:6 "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Now, without going into all of the in's and out's of divorce and the reasons for it and whether or not Christians should participate in it, we know that God's will from the beginning was that when a couple was joined in marriage it was originally designed to last for life.

But because of sin God permitted Moses, for example, to allow a couple to write up a certificate of divorce.

But, when it comes to God's word and will, and where a couple desires to seek His will in remaining together, as this couple was, then the answer is to start loving as God loves. In other words, to put self to the side and consider the other person as more important than yourself.

To consider the other person in such a way where instead of reacting or being ugly, you make a conscious choice to act as Christ would act, to love as Christ would love. And remember, Christ loved us while we were yet His enemies.

And unfortunately, that is how many couples view themselves in a relationship which has gone south. But getting back to our couple who is in counsel. The point my friend was making and which he explained to them was that the reason they didn't feel like they were in love is because they had confused God's love with only feelings.

God's love is action with others as the beneficiary of it. And what my friend then went on to explain is that if they would make the conscious choice to start giving to the other person without expecting anything in return the other party would naturally begin to reciprocate. And what they would find is that over time as they



began to love each other, the feelings of love or romance would return.

Now, there are certainly exceptions to this when one or both parties choose not to follow through with God's command to love your neighbor as yourself, but the point to all of this is that love [agape], whether it's found in a marriage relationship, or any other kind of relationship, always looks out for the interests of others in an unselfish way.

And if we are Christians then we have the Spirit who indwells us and therefore we are indwelt with His love. And so, none of us can say, I just can't love that person, or I just can't love that group of people, or that I just can't love people in general. What we're really saying is that I won't love.

Now, the case might be made that we won't love for good reasons, humanly speaking. And I could probably give you quite a few scenarios that we could all agree on as to why we choose not to love someone.

I have had people dump on me over the years for no good reason, and believe me I've struggled with the idea of loving them. I personally know people whose spouse did some pretty terrible things to them and had to agree that if someone didn't deserve their love it was that person.

And so, I'm not discounting how we are tempted to choose not to love, all's I'm saying is that we can never say I can't love, if we are believers indwelt with the Spirit. And the reason is because the fruit of the Spirit is love.

And so, the Spirit of God is always prompting us to love as Christ loved us, and when we choose to love we are demonstrating that we are a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1Pet.2:9)

In other words, we are showing ourselves to be people who have been loved by God, a people who have accepted this love by faith, and a people who have essentially said we would follow Christ who is love as we in turn love those in this world with the truth through our actions as we are empowered by the Spirit who is love.

The love of God is one of those things which is meant to be tasted by the world. We've all heard the expression which David records

for us in PSA 34:8 “Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”

One of the ways for the world to taste and see that the Lord is good is for the world to taste the fruit of God in our lives. As the world considers the life we have in Christ and as we live that life out in the power of the Spirit we become living love letters of our great God and Savior for the world to read.

And it is in this truth that we can take heart as we know that we are truly being used by God as God intended, and that is to bring glory to His name.

Do all Christians have this love of God? Do all Christians have the ability to express this love in faith and gratitude? The answer is, absolutely.

If we are in Christ then we are in His love and His love is made manifest in our lives as we submit to Him and desire to obey Him. Paul put it this way.

ROM 5:5 “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

The fruit of the Spirit is love and we as a believers have it all. It's just a matter of living it out in our lives and making the choice to love as God has loved us. And it starts by loving God above all, and then it will naturally find its way to our neighbors.