

Walking in the Spirit: Fruitfulness

Galatians 5:22-6:10

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FBC Waynesboro

We are all born with some very basic desires. God has made us in His image which means in part that those desires cannot be satisfied except by Him. As Augustine put it, "God has made us for Himself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him." Our problem is that those desires are directed through our flesh so that Paul calls them the desires of the flesh and our flesh is by nature sinful or self-centered from the very moment of birth. We want these desires gratified in a way that satisfies us and we seek that from birth. That is why Paul calls these desires not only desires of the flesh but also works of the flesh. The word for "works" suggests the investment of time and energy for the purpose of satisfying those desires in a way that brings pleasure to us. Now we looked last week at the four basic desires that are found as the foundation for the works of the flesh: we desire relational intimacy, we desire religious stability, we desire to feel good about ourselves and we desire freedom. And we work for these on the basis of what we see we need so that we invest time and energy in seeking satisfaction for these desires. And it always leads us deeper and deeper into domination by the sinful expression of these desires.

Let me just look with you briefly at the beginning this morning at two of these so that we can see how this works. We all desire relational intimacy. Now as sinners we do not seek that from God. He is the only one who can satisfy that desire but no sinner seeks God. We by nature turn away from God toward ourselves to seek this intimacy on our own terms. And we come to believe at a fairly young age that it can be found in a member of the opposite sex in a sexual relationship. That is the first work of the flesh. Paul uses a word here that means sex in any form that is outside of marriage and he makes it plain that sex outside of marriage is sin that is engaged in by sinners. And these sinners are seeking something far deeper than be found in sex so that when the sexual relationship outside of marriage does not satisfy, we turn to other forms of immorality and that in the end will produce a lifestyle that is lived without restraint, all the while longing for real intimacy. Or look at the last two words here that show what happens when we are looking for freedom in the way we define it: drunkenness and orgies. Both these terms describe a life that is lived without any boundaries

in an attempt to be free but is in fact a life that is the worse form of bondage. Ask any addict about how free they are when they are addicted to alcohol or drugs or how good they feel after they have been on a long binge and they won't talk about how happy they are. This is how the desires of the flesh operate in every single human being on planet earth.

And Paul brings this way of living to a focus with a very clear warning, 21. The word for "do" is a word that means to practice as a part of the fabric of life. If you are living this way, you do not belong to God. He is not Your King and you are not in His Kingdom. It is here that Paul makes a radical transition to the characteristics of the child of God. The child of God is one in whom the Spirit of God lives and through whom the fruit of the Spirit is alive. Notice the beginning of verse 22: the fruit of the Spirit could be, should be, might be or ought to be—absolutely not. The fruit of the Spirit is—present form of the verb to be which describes ongoing and increasingly evident activity. The fruit of the Spirit is. It is that which is produced by the presence of the promise of the power of God in our lives.

Now the issue for interpretation is how we organize this fruit as we examine it. One way is to look at the fruit sequentially and according to the way Paul wrote this would likely mean that first is foundational, the last is the pinnacles and the rest are the outcome and expression of the first and last. So reading it this way would mean that love for God expressed as the result of the experience of the love of God is the foundation, Self-control so that we are dominated by our desires is the pinnacle and then there are seven essentials in between. Another way of organizing the list is to see them in contrast to the works of the flesh so for example the first work of the flesh is sexual love driven by our desires expressed outside of marriage and the first manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit is deep love for God that would show sexual expression in the context ordained by God. But I want to invite you this morning into another way of looking at the fruit of the Spirit. It is not the only way and it may not be the best way but it is a way I like and it is a very common way of constructing a list like this as found in the literature of the period. I want us to look at the fruit of the Spirit in three groups of three with the middle word in each group of three being the focal point toward which the other two are pointing.

Looking at the fruit of the Spirit this way means that we see first that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. The focal point is joy. Jesus wants us to know His joy and He wants His joy in us to be complete. Paul calls us to rejoice in the Lord always and he says it again as he calls us to rejoice. Joy is the internal artesian well of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. It is the gusher from which goes forth the power of God to flow over and around the people in our world. So how we get to this joy: reading the fruit of the Spirit this way would suggest that joy is the result of our experience and expression of the love of God. We experience the love of God in Jesus and we express it in the love of His Name declared in worship, the love of His Word declared in Study and the love of His glory as declared in witness. And we can live this way because our experience of the love of God has brought us to the place of deep and abiding peace. Paul calls it contentment and calls it a gift of God that comes to us through His Spirit. When you are confident in the love of God for you as seen in His Son and you are content that your God reigns over all the earth and over every minuscule molecule of your life then you are free to be joyful. This is the internal essence of the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

It leads to patience, kindness, and goodness. The center is kindness and this word is used of the compassionate care of God that is expressed through His people. It is those who have been recipients of grace giving grace to others; it is those to whom mercy came running who run with mercy to others. And we get to that place because we have learned patience that comes through the Holy Spirit. The word for patience literally means "to suffer long." It portrays a person in the middle of great trials who is pure in their perpetual praise of God and they are there because they know God's goodness. The word for goodness comes out of the Hebrew word for goodness which is used in the opening account of the Bible for that which God makes and that over which God has control for the glory of His name. God looked at all that He had made and it was all good. It was His and it was for Him. This expression of the fruit of the Spirit is the external manifestation of the truths that come out of experience that teach us that God sustains us in our suffering and that His sovereign plan through our suffering is the best good that could ever be. We are patient in the midst of pain. We persevere in the midst of pressures. We praise God because we know deeply the reality of Romans 8:28 so that we can show and share His mercy and His compassion with others. This fruit enables us to go into the church and the world

not with clinched fists and pointing fingers but with open hands and outstretched arms.

So the first three show us what is the result internally of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The second three show us what is the result externally of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. And the final three show us what is the result eternally of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Faith means that we give ourselves to trust God and to obey His Word. Self-control means that we are not dominated by what we want to do; we are under the discipline of the Spirit of God as manifest in the Word of God and the leadership of the Church of God. That is why by the way no true believer would ever live his life in detachment from the body of Christ because of the need for being taught God's Word and being held accountable by those who are raised up by God to lead His church. To think that we can live in trust of God and in obedience to God in a way that keeps ourselves in check apart from the body of Christ is truly the pinnacle of pride. It is arrogance. And what this faith and self-control produce is a life lived deliberately under the control of the Spirit of God as the Spirit of God governs our lives through the Word of God. Here is the eternal essence of living in the Spirit that is seen in joy inexpressible in our hearts and compassionate care for others as we live out our lives in the world. And Paul concludes this list by saying that there is no law that can stop this kind of life. Nothing outside of us can hinder this happening. Because nothing outside of us can hinder God. So how does it happen? How do we experience the fullness of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Paul gives us two directives. The first is found in 24 and 26 and the second is found in 25. The first forms a frame for the second or another way of viewing it is that the second is the center of the first. The two intersect in reality to make one point. So that what Paul is giving us here is the key to a Spirit filled and Spirit controlled life. It is the kind of life in which we know that real life comes from the Holy Spirit and that this life is really lived out daily in the world. This is not myth. This is no ideal that cannot be reached. This is the way we live as the children of God. We are controlled by the Spirit of God who speaks to us through the Word of God so that we want our lives to be lived out biblically. We want our lives to reveal the glory of God. Now to know whether you are there I want to ask you the same question in two different ways: are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Are you faithful to the reading, studying, and listening to the Word of God? To walk in

the Spirit is to bring our lives among the people of God as we gather under the authority of the Word of God to be taught the truth of God. Now there may be some who rejoice in that and can say, “yes” that is me. But there may be others who resist these words and reject them. They make you bristle. Why? I know people who can spend all day discussing and debating doctrine who do not know the full counsel of the Word of God because the God they know is the God they choose to know who is defined and described by them based on their understanding and not based on what the Bible says. That is why we must hear the second word here: if you are going to be filled with the Spirit so as to be a good tree producing good fruit you must put to death your flesh with its passions and desires, a phrase that could mean desires that when coddled create that about which we are passionate. Don’t entertain fleshly desires. Kill them. Kill them as soon as you sense them. But we won’t do that unless we recognize that such destruction of fleshly desires requires that we kill our pride----wanting to be in control of our lives in every way, our provocation---wanting to push away those who point out our pride---and our pity-parties----wanting to excuse our sin because of something that someone said to us or did to us.

If we are going to be filled with the Spirit so as to be avenues for the fruit of the Spirit, we must submit ourselves to the authority of the Word of God to shape our walk and we must be willing to subject ourselves to careful scrutiny which begins in our relationships to one another in the body of Christ. Here is where we will focus next week.