

So, we have come to the end of this sermon series. I enjoyed taking a leisurely walk through this text from Galatians this summer. We are often going through Bible texts so quickly. It makes me think of the expression, “We can’t see the forest for the trees.” This means we lose track of the big picture because of all the details.

But I think it also happens the other way around. We can’t see the trees for the forest. We move on so quickly. We want to simplify texts and their meanings into sound bites. It was nice to stop and look at the trees—or maybe the fruit—that we find here—with some depth.

This list—that is the fruit of the Spirit—isn’t just an ideal life. This is the life that God has for us in Christ. It comes near to us in Christ. And we have looked at each of these qualities that Paul includes on his list of the fruit of the Spirit.

Of course, none of us has lived this list perfectly. We all need the grace of God to cover our failures. But the list is still noble and full of God’s will for us. And the grace of God also brings growth in us regarding such things.

This is what happens when we immerse ourselves in God’s Word—when we let it take deep root in our lives. We give up on our excuses. We find ourselves growing more and more like Christ. And to that end, we cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. We embrace each virtue. And we let such things become our habits.

Habits. We all have them. Some helpful—some not so helpful. Last week we talked about some of those habits. The ones that Paul calls the desires of the flesh—the desires of our sinful nature. And we are called to set aside such things as strife, jealousy, fits of anger, envy, and drunkenness. We are called to crucify such things.

Paul says it again in Colossians 3, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

And then he goes right back to the new habits he calls us to form. And it sounds a lot like the fruit of the Spirit. He says, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Today, I want us to rehear and rehearse our list. Maybe even listen to this list with new ears. And I also want you to pick one to cultivate. And don’t look at that virtue that comes easily to you. Pick the one you struggle with the most. And then make it your own personal project. Let the Spirit work in your heart through the Word. And then make this virtue your new habit this week.

The Fruit of the Spirit begins with *love*—ἀγάπη. We learned that Greek word. It is the steadfast, gracious love with which God loves us—exemplified in the work of the cross. We talked about 1 Corinthians 13 just a couple of weeks back. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”

And perhaps we can say that the rest of the list is just an explanation of what love looks like for a follower of Christ. All of the virtues listed here are manifestations of love.

Love is the word that characterizes God's relationship to His chosen people. For God, the cross is the way in which He loved His own. Love is a decision to seek the good of others. And so, love is sacrificial—it isn't just sentimental.

*Joy.* This was a common name in first century Greek culture—much as it still is today. We often connect joy with happiness. But like love, I want us to think of joy in terms of God's promises in Christ. Joy is something like confidence about the future—based on the goodness and faithfulness of God.

That is why Paul can write from prison, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand." Whatever the present circumstances, we know who we are. And we know what God has prepared for those who love Him.

*Peace*—שלום. And we learned that Hebrew word. It is a life rightly ordered—put together on God's terms and with His blessings. It is walking on the path of life that God intends—and for His glory.

Peace is a relational word—it is always about a relationship between two parties. So, it isn't just relaxing in your backyard with coffee and romance novel. It is this beautiful balance between the two tables of the law—because we have been reconciled to God in Jesus Christ. We have harmony with God and that peace flows out in peace with one another. It is as Paul says in Romans 12, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

*Patience.* Maybe this is the virtue all of us struggle with the most. The Greek word can also be translated as *forbearance*. It indicates a *slow* rather than a *short* fuse. It is the opposite of anger and rage—and obviously—impatience. It means to bear with one another—even when people test us. The word also comes with the connotation of loyalty, steadfastness, and longsuffering.

It is important to remember this as an attribute of God. He patiently bears with humanity's sin—at least for a time—so that we might come to repentance. It is in this sense that Paul asks the rhetorical question in Romans 2, "Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

*Kindness.* The world is cruel. Just look at how we handle one another on social media. And in response to all of this, kindness feels like a breath of fresh air. We have all experienced it from time to time. It is unexpected help. It is thoughtfulness rather than selfishness. It is a gentle word that diffuses tension.

We know it best in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. But Paul is calling us to embrace it as a way of life. Kindness shows up in your words, your facial expressions, your responses to others. It is as Solomon says in Proverbs 31, "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue."

*Goodness.* Now remember, with all of these virtues, we are simply learning to reflect the character of God. No matter what the circumstances are—or appear to be—God is good. And He does good. And if God is utterly good, then it's not surprising that when we spend time with Him, He rubs off on us. People who live close to God reflect His character and are marked by the same qualities.

Goodness is a commitment to doing the right thing—even when it costs you something—even when it hurts. In fact, probably the nearest synonym for goodness isn't niceness—but righteousness. The righteous person is the one who responds to the love, grace, and salvation of Jesus Christ by seeking to live in His way—to do what is right in God's eyes. Not in an effort to earn His favor—but out of grateful response for His blessings and guidance.

*Faithfulness.* The kind of faithfulness that matters most is God's faithfulness. His character is consistent and constant. And it too is a trait He works in us. Faithfulness is a byproduct of faith in His saving grace. And so, we live with honesty and integrity—according to His Word. Faithful people keep their word. They do what they promise. They don't make life more difficult than it needs to be.

And faithfulness also means exercising that kind of trustworthy behavior over a long period of time. Faithful people have proved they can be trusted. They are low maintenance. You don't have to check up on them. You don't have to worry. Faithful people have proved that they are routinely dependable in all kinds of ways and circumstances.

*Gentleness.* This is another of those virtues that does not come easily in our times. In Ephesians 4, Paul advises Christians to “walk with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.” Gentleness bears with others' weaknesses, difficulties, sins, and arguments. Even when people tax our patience—we are not defensive, or harsh, or quarrelsome. We don't make demands of others. As I said several weeks ago, gentleness is strength of character.

Gentleness can also refer to an internal disposition. It is not just about our outward reactions. It is something inside our hearts and minds as well. It is a calm spirit that then leads us to respond to others by diffusing a difficult situation. It is calm spirit that puts others at ease. Gentleness is even an internal virtue that adds peace to our own lives.

And finally, *self-control*. This Greek word literally means holding or restraining the self—especially emotions, impulses, and desires. *Self-control* is a good translation. It refers to getting in control of our passions and appetites—especially those that originate from our sinful nature. Self-control is foundational to what James says in his epistle. You hear this verse from me often. It is an important one for us. “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

And self-control means that the desires of the flesh—as Paul calls them in Galatians 5—what we talked about last week—no longer have mastery over us—because of Christ. He says, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Self-control means that we aren't manipulative or passive-aggressive or narcissistic. Self-control is living life deliberately and faithfully—with all godliness and holiness—in the power of the Spirit.

So, that's our list. And these nine virtues make up the singular fruit of the Spirit. Think of them as a package deal. God works them all in each of us. Now, each of us will find that we struggle in different areas. So, let's each pick a virtue to work on.

Have you got one in mind? Good. And let me send you home with some homework. I want you to go back and listen or read the sermon on that particular virtue. You can find them all on our church website and on YouTube.

And in addition, I want you to look up Bible references that you can find on that topic. You can use a concordance or search with a Bible app on your phone or kindle. Now, these are huge themes in the Bible. There will be hundreds of references for some of them. Others will just have a few—but there will be synonymous words to consider. Maybe just pick 20. But start to get a sense of what the Bible says about your virtue. And then let the Spirit mess with you through the Word. Let Him work in your heart. Let Him give what He requires.

And if you haven't learned the fruit of the Spirit by heart, it is not too late. Set this list to memory. And carry it with you for the rest of your life. And then, talk about such things. And think about such things. These ideas should be part of our everyday conversation. And maybe some accountability would actually help us along the way—as we etch these virtues upon our hearts.

It is as Paul says in Philippians 4, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Throughout this series, I have spoken a lot about being like Christ. The character we have talked about is meaningful in our lives because it is the character of God. We desire Christ to be our example—at least according to His human nature. And that feels overwhelming.

It is a little like telling you to go home and write a play like Shakespeare. I think most of us would quit before getting through a page. And maybe we think the same about the fruit of the Spirit. We can't do this—we aren't like Jesus—so we quit.

But what if God gave you the genius of Shakespeare. I am guessing you could write something pretty clever. And, of course, He is not going to do that. But He is going to give you His Holy Spirit. And if the Spirit of God lives inside of us, we can live a life in His steps. God's purpose is to make us like Christ. And God's way is to fill us with His Spirit.

So for one last time, let's recite the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace—patience, kindness, goodness—faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—against such things there is no law. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*