

Fruit of the Spirit

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Galatians 5:1, 13-25; 6:1-5

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. . . .

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.



The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

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.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.

It's been calculated that if all the people who sleep in church during the sermon were laid end to end, they would be more comfortable. Happily, here at First Christian Church I don't notice anyone dozing off during the message. I believe there's an eagerness here to hear the Word expounded, for which I'm grateful. Your attentiveness each Sunday morning is an encouragement to me to work hard on sermon preparation, in order to bring out the depth and breadth of whichever portions of the Bible have been selected as the base for the message. Thanks for being such a supportive congregation during these interim days between pastors.

Now, as you know, the typical sermon has three or four points, and often these points are alliterated — that is, they all begin with the same letter. For example, if the preacher delivered a sermon about the gospel of God's love in Christ, the four points could be:

- The *Need* for God's Love
- The *News* of God's Love
- The *Nature* of God's Love
- The *Nurture* of God's Love.

That's called the Perry-Kohler method of preaching. I'm familiar with it because I took a seminary class in preaching with Dr. Lloyd Perry. But I'm not going to follow that method today, because here in Galatians the apostle Paul gives a list of *nine* of the fruit of the Spirit. So this message will have nine *non*-alliterated points. (But don't be concerned; I won't spend more than thirty minutes on each one!)

Let's start by reminding ourselves these are the fruit of the Spirit — the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our life. As you know, in both of the biblical languages there is only one word that covers all three meanings

we give it in English: wind, breath, and spirit. The Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma* cover all these ideas, and the translator has to decide which English word to use. The Holy Spirit is the wind, or breath, of God and it signifies his *life*. The fruit of the Spirit are the outcome of the *life and work of Jesus* in our midst, both as a body and as individual believers.

I get concerned about folks who want to define Christianity in terms of doctrines, beliefs, or institutions. Those things are important, but Christianity is really nothing other than the *life of Jesus* working through his people, and *our life in him*. I recall the time Shirley Anne and I had a conversation with two young men who were trying to break out of alcoholism and addiction into faith. Part of our advice to them was to read the Gospels, because we meet Jesus there. The work of the Spirit is the work of Christ. So let's look at Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit.

(1) The first entry in Paul's list is love, *agape*. Love is probably the most misunderstood term in the Christian vocabulary. Our culture associates love with *feelings*. People seek love as a way of finding "happiness" for themselves, and if a relationship doesn't make them happy they discard it. I've been through that scenario myself, but after I began to grow in Jesus I saw how wrong I had been. I was looking selfishly for my own satisfaction, so when some things happened that made me feel worthless and inferior I walked away. Biblical love is a commitment. I know now that I can't say, "I love you" and then walk away ignoring the need of the other person. Love is obedience — it's doing the right thing whether it feels good or not.

• Love (*agape*)
Commitment to God's covenant with us

Agape in the New Testament is based on the word *hesed* in the Hebrew Bible. The word is translated "lovingkindness" in older Bibles, or just "love" in some newer ones, or "steadfast love." It really means "covenant-love," the love God has for us — and we have

for him — because of his *covenant* with us. God made an agreement with his people, "I will be your God and you will be my people." Love is holding to that commitment, and keeping our side of the agreement — to be God's people and live by his plan for us.

This may sound harsh and austere, more like *law* than love. Isn't there some kind of "good feeling" in love, for the Christian? Yes, for God's loving covenant is, "*I will be your God and you will be my people.*" The Father always keeps his part of the bargain, and knowing *that* ought to give us a good feeling! Even God's laws for the conduct of life are based on love. He gives us a way to live obediently, because otherwise a sinful lifestyle will destroy us.

(2) Paul's second word is *joy*. I will never forget worshiping in a prestigious church in Boston during my graduate school days. The preacher mounted the high pulpit with great ceremony and began his sermon, [*scowling*] "I want to speak with you today about the *joy* of being a Christian." Sometimes we mouth joy but we don't show it, or live it.

I'm not going to get deeply theological here, but there are two sides to joy — the inner and the outer. Both are the work of the Spirit of Jesus in us. Outward joy is a good thing and we do well to follow the apostle Paul's admonition: "Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:18-20). This isn't mindless, Mardi-Gras-type hilarity. It's obedience to God's directive, which is so much more satisfying.

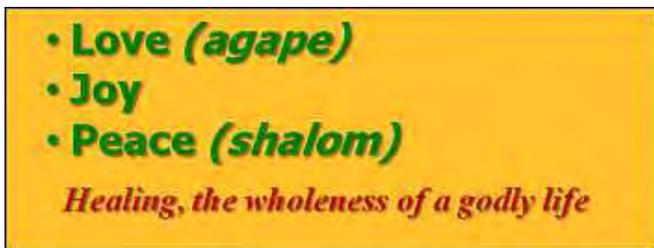


• Love (*agape*)
 • Joy
Obedying God's invitation to praise him

When we sing hymns in church, it might be a good idea to listen to ourselves and see whether our singing really reflects that *inner* joy we have in the Lord. For, on the inside, joy is a deep satisfaction with life as God has laid it out for us. And that satisfaction just has to spill out. Isaiah called for the people of God to “put on the garment of praise” (61:3). The joyous life of praise is a kind of uniform we wear as members of the Lord’s work force, or soldiers in his army.

Yes, we have problems — we run into things that begin to convince us we have gotten a raw deal in life, and try to steal away our joy. When we put ourselves into the center of the universe, joy goes away. When we see the Lord in the center, joy returns. You’re familiar with Joni Eareckson Tada who was paralyzed in a diving accident as a young woman. Having that happen to you would rob anyone of joy. But she once wrote, “I now *will* to be the way I am,” because it’s through what happened to her that she found how God could use her to help others, as a speaker and writer. That’s real joy, and it’s even greater joy to meet with the Lord and give him praise.

(3) *Peace* is the third quality in Paul’s list. After love, peace is probably the second most misunderstood word. Francis Schaeffer used to say that the big goals of Americans are personal peace and affluence. There are two “standard” definitions of peace: (a) the absence of fighting or war, and (b) having our perceived needs met. Neither of these ideas conveys the fullness of the Bible’s understanding of peace.



• Love (*agape*)
• Joy
• Peace (*shalom*)
Healing, the wholeness of a godly life

The Hebrew word is *shalom*, and it means “completeness” or “wholeness.” Peace is *health*. The New Testament equivalent is *soteria*, “salvation.” Our English word is related to the word *salve*, something you put on a wound to help it heal. We’re at peace when we are *healed* of those things that keep us from being what God wants us to be.

Most of the conditions that rob us of our peace come from violating God’s covenant, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” When we try to solve our problems by ourselves, we’ve reversed the formula by making *ourselves* into gods. We lose our peace because we’ve shut out the Prince of Peace. For us to be healed, *God has to be God*. We can’t take refuge only in ourselves and our own resources, or in the help we get from outside sources such as the government — as though the Creator of the universe had no concern about our welfare, nor any involvement in the issues we deal with. As the apostle Peter urges us, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

(4) The next fruit of the Spirit that Paul lists is *patience*. Don’t ever pray for patience. In Romans 5:3, Paul says that “tribulation worketh patience.” If you pray for patience, you may get tribulation!

In a perfect world everything would go our way, and nobody would cause problems for us or make demands on us. Of course, such a perfect world wouldn’t be so perfect for anyone else. It wouldn’t be so perfect for people with a different agenda, or people who need us even at some inconvenience to ourselves. Because other people have their own needs, we’ll never have our perfect world, and we’ll just be miserable if we keep hoping for it.

I’m sure everyone has his favorite story of things that have tried his patience — especially, perhaps, with children. The day I moved from a college position in Texas to a pastorate in Illinois my two oldest boys, both teenagers, were going barefoot. Too late, I learned their shoes were somewhere in the inner depths of the moving van. The only solution was a hurried trip to the shoe store. Then there was the time the kids got up on the parsonage roof and threw tomatoes down on Hallowe’en trick-or-treaters. I found out about it during a church board meeting, when a neighbor came in to tell us. At times like that my patience was sorely tried and found



• Love (*agape*)
• Joy
• Peace (*shalom*)
• Patience
Recognizing that God is at work in us

wanting. But, over the years, I developed more patience with my kids; I finally learned to “cut them some slack.”

The fruit of the Spirit only grows in us when we get ourselves out of the center and let Jesus take his rightful place there. When that happens, things like the exasperating behavior of other people don't bother us like they used to. We understand we have the life we have because God has assigned it to us, and he's in charge of every circumstance. Patience doesn't mean that we excuse the poor behavior of others, or just ignore whatever difficult circumstances we might find ourselves in. Patience doesn't mean we acquiesce to evil and do nothing to overcome it. But patience is the power to endure difficult or disheartening situations in the knowledge that the Lord is at work both in us and in the circumstance we face to bring about the fulfillment of his plan for us. As Paul reminded the Philippian church, “It is God who works in you to will and to act

according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” (Philippians 2:13-16).

(5) The next quality on our list is *kindness*. I don't need to say much about this. We all know a kindness, or a “mercy,” when we receive one. I couldn't tell you how many times people have been kind to me when I certainly didn't deserve

any favors. Jesus told us to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. If you look at his illustration, you find that God shows his perfection through his impartial mercy: “he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” There are lots of people out there — and maybe in here, too — that need our merciful kindness. Paul reminds us to “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

(6) *Goodness* comes next on Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit. There's more to goodness than being good. The Bible words for *good* also carry a certain sense of being *beautiful* and *satisfying*. In the creation God saw everything he had made “and behold, it was very *good*.” Of course we need to be good in the moral sense, but we're also to be good in the sense of, “Wow, this is really *good* food!” Is this why Paul says, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt?” Jesus told his followers they were the salt of the earth.

I think there's nothing more boring than a bland Christian — and nothing more tiresome than a Christian who wants to talk about himself all the time and never asks you anything about yourself. Over the years I've been invited to eat out, or in the home, with many Christian acquaintances and it's amazing how often, afterwards, I have reflected on how much I learned about *them* and how little they found out about *me*. (Of course, sometimes that was just as well.)

It's the work of the Spirit of Christ in us to make us not only decent and upright people, but also *interesting* and *interested* people — colorful, thoughtful, and responsive, the kind of folks other people like to have around. Getting close to God makes us *both godly and good*. Are we good in the biblical sense — Hebrew *tov*, Greek *kalos* — not only virtuous and blameless, but also creative and considerate, so that when our conversation with someone has ended they leave with, so to speak, “a good taste in their mouth”?

(7) Number seven on the list of the fruit of the Spirit is *faithfulness*. Some older translations call this *faith*, but in the Bible faith is primarily faithfulness. Protestants and Catholics have debated for centuries about the relationship between faith and works. That whole issue goes away when we understand *faith* as *faithfulness*.

- Love (*agape*)
- Joy
- Peace (*shalom*)
- Patience
- Kindness

Mercy toward all, imitating God

- Love (*agape*)
- Joy
- Peace (*shalom*)
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness

Being creative, interesting as well as godly

I'm going to say something here that may shock you. How do we know somebody is a Christian? Is it because they said a certain prayer one day, or because they believe certain things about God and Jesus, or because they behave a certain way? I'm suggesting we're Christians if we *stick with Jesus*. Christianity is *Jesus*, and being Christian is *knowing him*. We can believe all the right stuff and make all the right moves, but at the end of the day we don't want to hear Jesus say, "Depart from me, I never *knew* you."

- Love (*agape*)
- Joy
- Peace (*shalom*)
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness

Sticking with Jesus and his people

Again, it comes back to the covenant God made with us: "I will be your God and you will be my people." Faithfulness means sticking with our brothers and sisters in the faith. In a day of distractions there are lots of things that could pull us away from our Christian community and send us off to do our own thing, like the Lone Ranger. Did you ever try to fire up your grill with just one charcoal briquette? You see the point — to have any fire in us we need to stick with Jesus and those who belong to him. The loyalty we have to the body of Christ is a fruit of his Spirit at work in us. Faith is the loyalty we have to Jesus that causes to exclaim, with the disciple Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

(8) The next-to-last word is *gentleness*. This is often translated as *meekness*. Being meek isn't a highly prized quality today, but maybe we misunderstand what the Bible means. Do you remember who the meekest man in the Bible is, other than Jesus? Numbers 12:3: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth." Some translations say *humble*, but that hardly describes Moses, the man who stood up to Pharaoh, stood up to the Israelites, and even, in effect, stood up to the Lord — that was the time he told him, "Either forgive this sinful people or 'blot me out of your book'" (Exodus 32:32).

God had called Moses to do a job and Moses wasn't going to be stopped by circumstances. That was his meekness. Psalm 37 says, "The meek shall inherit the land," a verse Jesus quotes in the Beatitudes. In 1911 Charles Kennedy wrote a play called "The Terrible Meek" (I saw it in a church once). If the meek are going to inherit the land there is certainly something terrifying about them.

Some years ago I befriended a K-Mart checkout clerk named Dhiru. He and his family were from India. Dhiru had three jobs: he worked for K-Mart, he worked as a chemist, and he worked for the Postal Service. His wife also worked for a small manufacturing company where everyone spoke their language, Gujarati. Their oldest daughter also worked as a clerk for K-Mart. Dhiru invited us twice to share a meal with his family; the first time it was in their rented apartment, the second time in a brand new home in a Chicago west suburban development. Both times we sat on the floor because they didn't use chairs or even have them. Dhiru and his son, who was planning to become a doctor, took me into the little "chapel" room in their house where they would "play their guard" — pray to their god, a figure with an elephant's head. There are lots of meek people like Dhiru in our midst. They come here, they take the lowest-paying jobs, they work day and night, and in five or six years they own their apartment building, a business, or a new home.

- Love (*agape*)
- Joy
- Peace (*shalom*)
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness

Living by God's plan instead of the world's

People like Dhiru and his family are destined for eternity without Christ unless they meet him *here*. But they show us how powerful meekness is, even in the life of an unbeliever. The principles of God's kingdom work for everyone who follows them — not just Christians — because they're built into God's management of the universe. So the meek of any kind are *terrible*, because they will take over the earth.

Meekness is living by God's plan instead of trying to invent your own — acting in humility and responsibility and determination, instead of from resentment or competitiveness or trying to take the easy way out. Meekness is doing things God's way with the help of his Holy Spirit.

(9) Now we come to the last quality on Paul's list, *self-control*. Paul begins his list of the fruit of the Spirit with *love*, and he ends with *self-control*. When it comes to living the Spirit-filled life, *self-control is the bottom line*. When we can't control ourselves, all sorts of destructive things creep into our lives — resentment, jealousy, self-pity, defensiveness, self-justification, anger, vindictiveness, all the "works of the flesh," the sour and rotten fruit of our emotions gone haywire.

- Love (*agape*)
 - Joy
 - Peace (*shalom*)
 - Patience
 - Kindness
 - Goodness
 - Faithfulness
 - Gentleness
 - Self-control
- Getting the focus off ourselves*

As long as I was in the center of my own universe, that was my life — if you could call it one. I had to get to that place where I could begin to get the focus off myself and put it on Jesus. When that happened, things began to change — a process that's still going on, as I move closer to that wholeness, that healing, that salvation God wants me to live in. I think I've finally "got a life."

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." And Paul adds an interesting line — "*Against such things there is no law.*"

It's amazing how easy it is to behave as if there *is* a law against love, against patience, against joy, or against self-control. But that's a lie of the enemy of our souls, who wants to snatch away our victory over the tyranny of our self-centeredness. Jesus comes to make us free by binding us to himself in a death to all of the false values of our sick world, and then lifting us with him to a higher level in his resurrection from the dead — not just somewhere, some day, but here and now.

So I come back again to that shocking statement: Christianity is *Jesus*, working in us through his Spirit to grow and mature this fruit in us. It can be summed up in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." If you're here today and you know Jesus, but you want to open your life anew to the fruitful work of his Spirit, we can talk that over with you at a convenient time and pray with you about it.



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