

Fruit of the Spirit - Conley Memorial - 2/11/18 - Rick Leissner

OT Reading: Ezekiel 36:25-27 / NT: Galatians 5:14-26

Paul is a pretty amazing guy. We talked about how he was a good model for gratitude. It is easy to forget Paul wrote his letters before the Gospels were written. Galatians is relatively short, but is not really an easy read. It is full of Christian theology, & it shows Paul's passionate, even angry - side. In Galatians, Paul aggressively refutes the Judaizers – & even Peter - & making it clear Gentiles do not have to first become Jews - follow Jewish Law - & be circumcised, in order to become Christians & receive salvation; Rather, Paul teaches justification & salvation is attained by true faith in God's grace & the power of Jesus Christ's death & resurrection. He urgently defends that central doctrine - justification by faith alone thru grace alone.

But as is often the case, Paul also makes it clear that - while Christians have been freed from the wages of sin by the unmerited grace of God through Jesus Christ – they still need to use their new found freedom to choose to love and serve God, as well as loving and serving one another. This freedom is not the same as secular, political freedom, by the way. It is freedom from the pain and punishments from our sins – it is freedom to cling to God, which means freedom to love. The Jews were slaves to sin and slaves to their 613 Laws.

In his letters, Paul basically defines Christian freedom as being enslaved to Christ, through the Holy Spirit. In the first part of today's reading, he bluntly presents a long laundry list of behaviors exhibited by those who are led by the ways of the flesh rather than the ways of the Holy Spirit.

Then, Paul emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit. He tells us to 'live by the Spirit', 'be led by the Spirit', and 'be guided by the Spirit'. In the course of his letters, Paul's teachings tell us the Holy Spirit:

- dwells in us if we are true children of God.
- intercedes for us and moves us toward the will of God
- helps prevent us from falling away from our faith in God.
- knows the thoughts and will of God & helps reveal them to us
- helps us in our weaknesses
- helps us use our free will to make good choices
- fills us and helps us transform us to be more like Jesus.

So, we have every reason to believe the Holy Spirit intercedes for us! You may remember that, since the 80's there has been a series of famous TV commercials about Prego Spaghetti Sauce. Basically, the commercials repeatedly assure us that all the good, special ingredients needed to make a complete, wonderful spaghetti sauce are already in Prego's sauce – stating "it's in there" (*Italian accent*). Remember those?

The Fruit of the Spirit is kinda like that - God, in His infinite wisdom and love, has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, along with all the Christian virtues we need to be more Christ-like. Indeed, the Fruit of the Spirit is in there – that is, ‘in us’ - all we need to do is let it out.

This morning, I want to focus on The "**Fruit** of the Spirit", noted in verses 22 & 23, outlining the major attributes of a true Christian. The Fruit of the Spirit is evidence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, helping us be the people God wants us to be.

Here are some things to note about the Fruit of the Spirit.....

Note that “Spirit” has a **capital** “S” – the fruit comes directly from God’s Holy Spirit - not from ourselves; not from our human “spirit”. So we must **not** be **prideful** because we possess the Spirit’s Fruit – it had nothing to do with our own efforts.

Also, the FRUIT of the Spirit is **not** the same as the GIFTS of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, He brings **all** the Fruit of the Spirit with Him.

We are **also** given individual special personal talents and gifts, as noted in passages like 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. For example, a few special people are given the gift of preaching – unfortunately you are stuck with me in the pulpit this morning! Anyway, today we are focusing on the **Fruit** of the Spirit.

The Greek word for "fruit" used here is "karpos" and it is in the singular, not plural. It is ‘fruit’, not ‘fruits’....Now, am I a Greek scholar? NO! But can I read a Bible commentary? YES!.....Anyway, it is FRUIT of the Spirit - this little tidbit of trivia is actually quite important - this means that all 9 of these graces go together as one unit. A wonderful package deal – like bundling.

As Reformed Christians, we believe God is totally sovereign. But God has also granted us some freedom - to choose whether to be more self-centered or more God-centered. Today’s reading notes we have that choice. Let’s take a look at some examples illustrating what it’s like to be **God-centered** rather than **self-centered**.....

<u>SELF - CENTERED</u>	<u>GOD - CENTERED</u>
I am very self-confident	I am confident in God
I want to understand people, so <i>I can manipulate them</i>	I want to know God
I make my own decisions	I include God in my decisions
I have initiative & ambition	I try to be humble & self-effacing

I like to do things “on my own”	I cannot do anything without God.
I enjoy commanding others	I delight in obeying God’s laws
I’m motivated by my personal agenda	I’m motivated by love of God & others
I feel independent	I am totally dependent on God
I am in control	God is sovereign & in control.
“ <i>I did it my way</i> ”	I seek to know and do God’s will.

Obviously it is crucial that we make good choices. So, when you hear Frank Sinatra sing “*I Did It My Way*”, go ahead & appreciate his talent & artistry. But it is probably not a good choice for your theme song.

Let’s look briefly at the nine parts of Fruit of the Spirit:

JOY is a gladness of heart as we realize the many ways God has blessed us. It is deep rejoicing from knowing, loving, and serving God. Joy allows us to embrace life, stay positive, and be hopeful.

Unfortunately, we FROZEN CHOSEN Presbyterians sometimes seem to forget about joy - almost avoiding it. It is time for us to show the joys of being a Christian!

PEACE is submitting ourselves to God’s control - God is ultimate peace! Peace lets us be a calming, non-anxious presence - bringing harmony & unity - crucial to resolve conflicts. Peace helps us show **mercy, forgiveness, & reconciliation**. This is important, because as flawed humans, we can tend to seek vengeance & retaliate.

FAITHFULNESS is trust in God. It is a firm belief in the sovereignty of God, the power of the cross, & the glorious Resurrection. Faithfulness believes God uses all things for good. Faith makes us true to God, committed to doing His will, and being true to our promises to others. It is steadfast reliance on God rather than on our own understanding. It is **“letting go & letting God”** – *clever. huh?*

GOODNESS is consistently seeking to do what is good and right. It is clinging to righteousness. This is also often translated as **GENEROSITY**, which is having a strong sense of stewardship and charity. It is willingly sharing what you have - being as generous with others as you are with yourself.

I am combining GENTLENESS & KINDNESS, which are similar. These virtues give us a benevolent, considerate nature. They give us a desire to do what is best for others. However, it is **not** weakness or lacking strength, nor being a doormat - it **is** being humble & compassionate toward others. They show the world we are Christians. As the beloved Presbyterian minister Mister Rogers once said, “There are three ways to **ultimate** success: The 1st way is to be kind. The 2nd way is to be kind. The 3rd way is to be kind.”

I am also combining FOREBEARANCE – also often translated PATIENCE - & SELF CONTROL. These virtues help us endure hard times and put up with others who "get on our nerves". They bring discipline into our lives, helping us make good decisions. They prevent distractions from God's will & His plan. They help us avoid extremes or lashing out at someone in anger. They help us master our desires & passions, resist temptation, & "be **in** the world but not **of** the world". **Patience also helps you maintain your attention during this whole sermon !**

The final part is LOVE. As we talked about a couple weeks ago, Scripture tells us love is the greatest Christian virtue. Love is the glue that binds the other parts of the Fruit of the Spirit together. Love cares about the needs of others, without expecting anything in return. Agape love is self-denying & self-sacrificing – a Christ-like approach to life. Real love has purity of heart, choice, action, & intention, and helps us display goodwill to others.

Isn't it wonderful to encounter someone who is truly loving? Think about a time when you had such an encounter & how it made you feel.....A person like that is a renewing oasis in a desert of hate, ego, & self-centeredness. The Fruit of the Spirit dwells in each of us, so we also have the opportunity to be an oasis of good.

God intends us to use the Fruit of His Spirit - He wants to mold, shape, and transform us to be more like His Son Jesus Christ. In theological terms, that is basically what sanctification means.

The more we abide in Jesus & grow closer to Him, the more evident the Fruit of the Spirit will be in our lives. His thoughts become our thoughts, His words become our words, His will becomes our will - we become more like Him, bearing more fruit.

Think about it - the Fruit of the Spirit is yet another huge blessing from God. Not only does God love us unconditionally; not only did God make us in His image to be His children; not only did God send His only begotten Son to earth to die for our sins..... but God also sends His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, along with the Spirit's Fruit.

We just need to let it out & share it with others. Some FOOD for thought during Lent !

May it be so for you and for me.

In the name of the Father, & of the Son, & of the Holy Spirit. Amen.