

Called to be Fruit Bearers
 “The Fruit of the Spirit” – Part I
 September 4, 2016

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

² *Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.* ³ *I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.* ⁴ *You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.* ⁵ *For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.* ⁶ *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

⁷ *You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?* ⁸ *This persuasion is not from him who calls you.* ⁹ *A little leaven leavens the whole lump.* ¹⁰ *I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.* ¹¹ *But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.* ¹² *I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!*

¹³ *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.* ¹⁴ *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* ¹⁵ *But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

¹⁶ *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* ¹⁷ *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.* ¹⁸ *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* ¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,* ²⁰ *idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,* ²¹ *envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* ²⁴ *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

²⁵ *If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.* ²⁶ *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.* Galatians 5:1-16 (ESV)

This morning we are beginning a new series looking at the *Fruit of the Spirit* listed here in Galatians 5:22-23. It seems to be a very good series to follow up our series on “How to Handle Conflict in a Christian Way.” During that series we concluded by looking at how the early church handled conflict and one of those ways was to eliminate the Old Testament, the Old Covenant requirement of circumcision. The apostle Paul tells us in our passage this morning that circumcision is of no value to the New Testament, the New Covenant believer in Jesus Christ. In fact, not only is circumcision of no value, neither is observation of the entire law. That is the observation of the law as our means of salvation or justification. None of us are saved by keeping any part of the law. If we accept salvation by keeping any part of the law, or circumcision, then we need accept the entire law – all of the 613 requirements of the law that Alex talked about last week. If that were the case none of us would be saved since it is, and always has been,

impossible for sinful human beings to keep the entire law. It is faith and only faith which justifies and saves us!

The apostle Paul wrote in his companion letter to Galatians, in Ephesians 2:8-9 -

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

Last week Pastor Alex concluded our series on How to Handle Conflict in a Christian way with Romans 14. And in Romans 14 there is one particular verse which is a very good tie in to our series which we are beginning this morning. It is Romans 14:17 -

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17 (ESV)

Why does God save us? Why did God go to all the trouble, pain and sorrow to offer the gift of His own Son, Jesus Christ to save fallen, sinful, evil human beings? Well, contrary to what our very individualistic Americanized culture tells us, that which I saw in the title of a book, referred to by the author as “Me-Ville”, God does not save us for our benefit, He saves us for His. The primary purpose that God saves us is to bear fruit for His glory and His honor.

In Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 7:16-20), while specifically speaking about how to tell the difference between true prophets and false prophets, by extension he was also telling us how to tell the difference between false followers of Jesus and true followers of Jesus:

¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

And in the Gospel of John, in the middle of one of Jesus’ teaching sessions regarding the future coming of the promised Holy Spirit, we find these words of Jesus:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

So, we have the vine owner and the vine dresser – they are one in the same, we have the vine, and we have the branches:

The Vinedresser/Vine owner

Who is the vine owner and the vine dresser? It is none other than God himself. He is the owner of everything! And he is the vine dresser. The branches that do not bear fruit he disposes of and the ones that do bear fruit he prunes. For vineyard owners pruning is a very serious business. Without serious pruning, often well over 50% of the previous year’s branches, the vines will not bear good fruit. Those who raise grapes say that pruning is the most important part of bearing good fruit. I have personally witnessed God do some pretty serious pruning of the people who belong to Him. Sometimes it’s the death of loved ones, sometimes it’s a serious illness, or a serious accident, sometimes it’s serious relationship issues – perhaps even resulting in divorce. God will do some pretty serious pruning to get His people, those who are called by His name, to bear fruit.

The Vine -

Jesus is the vine. It is the vine which contains the life of the plant. Without the life that is in the vine, the branches will wither up and die. Jesus says, “I am the vine.”

⁴ *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

The Branches –

We, believers in Jesus Christ, God’s people of today, are the branches. We cannot bear good fruit unless we are closely connected to the vine. As followers of Jesus Christ, why were we chosen? Jesus says, “we have been chosen and appointed to go and bear fruit and that the fruit that we bear should abide.” Abide where? Abide within Him, as He abides in us.

The trouble for many Christians today, especially in our culture of doing more with less, we are busy trying to do lots and lots of things, even lots and lots of good things, but we are not taking the time to abide with Him, Jesus, the only true vine, and hence we are not bearing much fruit, or the fruit is not very evident.

While the fruit can be and is the things that we do, even more importantly the fruit is that which is displayed from within us. The fruit described here there in Galatians 5:22-23 – “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Professional golfer Payne Stewart was tragically killed in a very bizarre plane accident on October 25, 1999. At the time of his death at age 42 he was one of the top ten golfers in the world. He had won 11 PGA tour events and 3 major championships, including the U.S. Open. He had won over 12 million dollars. For those that watched on television he was most known for his flamboyant attire. He had by far the biggest wardrobe of all professional golfers.

Just as eccentric as his clothing style was the way he died. He and five others departed in a Lear Jet from his home in Orlando, Florida en route to the last tour event of the year in Houston, TX. Shortly after take-off radio communications were lost and the plane began to drift off of its original route. U.S. Airforce jets were dispatched and while flying next to the jet they observed that all the windows on the jet had condensation and there was no movement inside.

Investigators would later learn that the cabin of the plane lost pressure shortly after take-off and all six people on board, including Payne, most likely died almost immediately. But the plane continued on, on auto-pilot, escorted by the U.S. fighter jets until it ran out of gas and crashed several hours later in South Dakota.

For those who knew Payne Stewart best, even more tragic than the way this great golfer died, was the loss of a person for whom they had personally witnessed a complete transformation take place in his life in the year just prior to his death. While the other professional golfers were always respectful of his ability on the golf course, they were even more amazed by his changed life. After a private decision to surrender his life to Jesus Christ, they noticed a drastic change in his behavior. He went from a very impatient, restless and uncaring man to one who became very patient, peaceful, gentle, and caring of others. His own sister said she couldn't believe the change that took place. She said prior to his conversion her brother would get very easily irritated with the press, often was rude to others, and at times even vulgar. A man who had become Payne's surrogate father said he was proud of what he had become just before his death. He said all his priorities had changed - going from what many had seen as a very selfish, impatient, rude immature man to one who many looked up to. Most everyone who knew or followed Payne Stewart noticed a difference in him the year before his death.

Some said it was just the fact that he had finally matured, others credited it to his wife Tracey and the public relations class she made him take to improve his image, but those who were the closest to him knew what the real reason was – Payne Stewart had returned to the faith he learned as a child and recommitted himself to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His pastor, J.B. Collingsworth said, “people prayed for him for a very long time and I told them that it would probably happen for him in a hotel room some night while he was on tour, but with him, it almost crept up on him. All the people who knew him well noticed the change that had taken place. He changed when he made the decision to give Jesus Christ total control of his life.” One of his other friends said, “there was a calm about him you only find in someone who has found what life and joy are all about.” The change that took place in Payne Stewart could only be explained by the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit.

But, my own personal experience and that which I have witnessed in the lives of other believers, is that change in behavior, that transformation into the character traits of Jesus, “the fruit of the Spirit,” does not often come as instantly as it did for Payne Stewart. And for some it doesn’t ever seem to happen. Why is that?

Was Jesus not telling the truth when he said that the Holy Spirit would come into the lives of all believers?

Well, first, we need to recognize that we cannot force the change to happen. Yes, we can put ourselves in positions for the transformation to happen, but we cannot cause it to happen anymore than we can cause God to save us. Sanctification – the change that takes place in believers that causes us to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ is a gift from God, just like salvation or justification – it is by God’s grace, in His time and in His way!

But, (lots of buts in my message this morning), we can put ourselves in a position for God’s grace to work. First and foremost we need to abide in Him, in God’s word and in Jesus Christ. All our busyness, all our good service and good works, take away our time to abide in Him.

My one devotional this week, from Oswald Chambers’ “My Utmost for His Highest” was reflecting on Jesus telling his disciples (Luke 10:19,20) to rejoice, not because of their works or because of all the things that were going on around them, but to “rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

Oswald Chambers writes:

“Jesus Christ, says in effect, don’t rejoice in successful service, but rejoice because you are rightly related to Me. . . The tendency today (and this was written almost 100 years ago and it is even more so today, 2016) is to put the emphasis on service. Beware of the people who make usefulness their ground of appeal. If you make usefulness the test, than Jesus Christ was the greatest failure that ever lived. The lodestar of the saint is God himself, not estimated usefulness. It is that work that God does through us that counts, not what we do for Him. All that our Lord heeds in a man’s life is the relationship of worth to His Father.”

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, August 30th

But it’s also important that we hold one another accountable. If the fruit of the Spirit is not evident in our lives, then we need to ask ourselves the question, why not? What are we doing that is preventing the Holy Spirit from working in our lives – that the nine fruit spoken about in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control is not so evident. Bearing those fruit in an ever increasing manner is one of the primary litmus tests to determine if one is maturing in their Christian faith or not.

So, as we begin our series this morning it’s important that we examine ourselves. If someone who knows you well, or maybe it’s just the first time they have met you – in a business transaction, or maybe the long line in the Wal-Mart, or at the restaurant when they don’t have your favorite food or it’s not cooked to your liking, or they just cut you off in traffic – would that person describe you with any of the fruit of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control? And which one(s) do you need to grow in.

Which do you need to ask God for help with? Because on our own accord we cannot grow in any of these qualities, they are the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the result of His work in us.

Prayer -

Lord God, we are your chosen ones. Chosen and anointed by you to go and bear fruit. Yet, we are also fallen, sinful, human beings who are often guided by the flesh. We can only bear the fruit of your Spirit to the extent that we are abiding in the vine, your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to find the time to abide in Him and in your Word – that which is the only true and living water, that which gives life, that which allows us to put off our sinful, human, fleshly nature and to put on our new nature – that for which we were originally created, all for your glory, your honor, your praise. In Your Name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.