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Living By the Spirit

Galatians 5:16-26

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

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There is no law against such things.”

Paul founded the churches in Galatia during his first missionary journey (see Acts 13-14). After he left the area, apparently some other Jewish Christians arrived who accused Paul of omitting crucial parts of the Gospel. They told the Galatians that they needed to submit to Jewish laws and customs in order to be truly Christian (see also Acts 15). Having been raised a devoted Jew, Paul was willing to accommodate Jewish sensitivities (Acts 16:3); however, he vehemently opposed the idea that one had to become a Jew in order to be a disciple of Jesus. The theme of Galatians is that salvation is God’s free gift that cannot be earned, only accepted. *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free,”* (Galatians 5:1) and our freedom is to be used to serve one another in love. *“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (5:6).”* This happens when we are led by and live by the Spirit of God. Paul describes vices (nonphysical as well as physical) as the works of the flesh; and virtues as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25). Fleshly behavior leads to death; behavior according to the Spirit leads to eternal life (Gal. 6:7-8; Rom. 8:1-17).

“Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you **are led by the Spirit**, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: **those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

By contrast, **the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we **live by the Spirit**, let us also **be guided by the Spirit**. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.” Galatians 5:16-26

The importance of living by the Spirit to me can't be overstated. It is in precisely those circumstances that we find it most difficult to practice the fruit of the Spirit in which we most need to demonstrate their presence in our life.

Can you think of someone in your life who exemplifies love? How about joy or peace? Patience, kindness, can you picture a person who embodies each of the fruit of the spirit? How do you feel about these people?

As we review the fruit of the Spirit, I encourage you to ask yourself which one, two, or three of these does the Lord want you most to cultivate. Which ones need the most attention in your life? Let me also say that the fruit of the Spirit are a description of the character of Jesus.

LOVE, JOY, and PEACE

Paul contrasts "the flesh" which refers to our fallen, tainted human nature that is filled with self-centeredness with "the Spirit." Paul says the fruit of the Spirit is love. **Love** is the result of the work of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the God's Spirit (Romans 5). In many ways, all the fruit of the Spirit are different manifestations of love. Love, as I have said before, wills the good of someone else and seeks to serve others. We have spoken of this rather extensively so I am not doing to dwell on it today.

Jesus speaks of **Joy** in John 15:11 and 16, he says to his disciples, "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.*" Having the joy of Jesus does not spare us from the hardships of life, for some people in certain circumstances following Jesus increases the hardship they face. All of us have pain in our lives of varying degrees and intensities, but my thoughts have been drawn this Memorial Day weekend to the families of the almost 1000 service men and women who have died in Iraq since Memorial Day of last year. The words of Jesus, "So you have pain now" are heartbreakingly real to them and they must find a way to endure through their suffering.

Henri Nouwen in his book, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*, wrote: "I have a friend who radiates joy, not because his life is easy, but because he habitually recognizes God's presence in the midst of all human suffering, his own as well as others'...My friend's joy is contagious. The more I am with him, the more I catch glimpses of the sun shining through the clouds. Yes, I know there is a sun, even though the skies are covered with clouds. **While my friend always spoke about the sun, I**

kept speaking about the clouds, until one day I realized that it was the sun that allowed me to see the clouds.

Those who keep speaking about the sun while walking under a cloudy sky are messengers of hope, the true saints of our day.”

Each of us makes the decision, dozens of times a day, about whether we’re going to speak about the Son/sun or about the clouds. Jesus speaks these words about joy shortly before he is: abandoned by his friends, arrested, beaten, whipped and crucified. When we have experienced the love of God and received the joy of Jesus then we will have a sense of peace that will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Peace is a very significant word in the Bible. The dictionary has many definitions for peace including those describing agreements between nations, to public order, to harmony in personal relations, to freedom from fear. In John 14 and many other scriptures, we discover that Jesus wants us to have his **peace**. *“Peace I leave with you; my **peace** I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”* (John 14:23-27). Passages in the NT frequently use peace as a synonym for gospel, summing up all the benefits that the coming of Jesus brought to humanity.

When Peter summed up the gospel in Acts 10, peace is at the heart of his proclamation. *“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, preaching **peace by Jesus Christ** – he is Lord of all (10:36).”*

It is through our full acceptance of and obedience to Jesus that we can have peace with God and ourselves. It is interesting to note that

Surrounding Jesus there was almost constant turmoil: demanding crowds, supporters and opponents, demonic activity, and stormy seas.

Within Jesus there was a peace and calmness that attracted others to him. Peace is both a gift of God and a fruit of the Spirit for us to cultivate.

Jesus came to bring peace on earth and once we have received the peace of Christ, we have a responsibility for living in peace and making peace. The Hebrew and Greek words for “peace” are “shalom” and “eirene” (eye-RAY-nay). These words are active, positive words, communicating much of what we desire in life: health, security, long life, harmonious relationships with other people, and blessing. Paul told the bickering Christians in Corinth (2 Corinthians 13:11), *“Live in peace; and the God of **love and peace** will be with you.”*

A Peanuts cartoon has Lucy saying to Charlie Brown,

"I hate everything. I hate everybody. I hate the whole wide world!"

Charlie Brown says, *"But I thought you had inner peace."*

Lucy replies, *"I do have inner peace. But I still have outer obnoxiousness."*¹

Needless to say, if we have outer obnoxiousness, agitation, anxiety, anger, fears, even violence, we may be living more out of our flesh, our sinful nature, than living by the Spirit. There may be a need for us to have more of Jesus' peace in our lives. Thomas a Kempis wrote, *"First keep the peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others. A peaceful and patient man is of more profit to himself and to others, too, than a learned man who has no peace."*

If we are not at peace with God and with ourselves, it shouldn't surprise us if we are more like Lucy than Thomas a Kempis. We cannot share with others what we do not possess ourselves. This is especially true of peace.

Jesus gives us Love, Joy, and Peace. These gifts of God's Spirit enable us to grow in **Patience, Kindness, and Goodness.**

The King James Version uses *"Long Suffering"* for patience. In the Bible, the words "patience," "patient," and "patiently" are used to describe God's behavior as well as our own. All of the fruit of the spirit are reflections of the character of God and are demonstrated in the life of Jesus.

As we seek to develop patience in our life, perhaps it helps to remember how patient and gracious God has been with us. In 1 Timothy 1:16 Paul writes, *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, **Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience**, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life."*

It took Paul a long time to understand that the way he was living his life was not pleasing to God and yet God was incredibly patient toward him, and didn't give up on him. Finally, Paul understood how he was disappointing and hurting the heart of God and Paul experienced and responded to God's love in Jesus.

Jesus himself was very patient with his sometimes slow-to-understand disciples, often repeating his teaching two or three times or more in trying to help them grow. Paul taught his churches the importance of being patient with the weaker members of the faith community. *"And we urge you, brothers and sisters, to admonish the idlers,*

¹ Barbara Brokhoff, *New & Improved Jesus?* C.S.S., 1991, 53.

*encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, **be patient with all of them** (1 Thessalonians 5:14)."*

God has been patient with us individually and with the human race as a whole. In the late first-century some Christians wondered if the Lord was not keeping his promise about returning because the years were marching on. But in 2 Peter, which was perhaps the last book written in the New Testament, we hear (2 Peter 3:9,14,15), "*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, **but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.** Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, **strive to be found by him at peace**, without spot or blemish; **and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.**"*

When referring to human behavior, patience in the Bible is used almost exclusively in reference **to dealing with other people or being patient in enduring suffering.** Patience is a fruit of the spirit we need when we find ourselves in situations over which we have no control, such as a medical diagnosis, being stuck in traffic, or at an airport as flights are delayed or postponed.

I don't think it is a coincidence that patience and kindness are next to each other in the fruit of the spirit and that they often go together in many other passages (2 Cor. 6:6, Col. 3:12). 1 Corinthians 13:4 "*Love is **patient**, love is **kind**.*" Even pastors and teachers are admonished in 2 Timothy 2:24 to remember that, "*the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but **kindly to everyone**, an apt teacher, **patient.**"*

The final three fruit of the Spirit are **Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control.** All three are aspects of self-mastery or self-leadership. Faithfulness is keeping our promises and responsibilities. Elton Trueblood, wrote, "*Faith is not belief without proof, But trust without reservations.*" Faith originates in the impact of God's word upon us and then faith exercises a transforming influence upon all aspects of our life. One of the major ways faith is displayed in the New Testament is through a developing transformation of our character and personality as we grow in Christian virtue. Faithfulness is a quality that is always in demand, especially in challenging times.

In David McCullough's book *John Adams*, writing of the difficult summer of 1776, it says, "Little that had happened through the summer had distressed Adams quite so much as the behavior of American troops, and especially reports that Massachusetts men had 'behaved ill.' '**Unfaithfulness**' was something he could not abide, and in his spells of gloom he pondered whether the fault was in the times. John wrote to Abigail,

“Unfaithfulness in public stations is deeply criminal. But there is no encouragement to be faithful. Neither profit, nor honor, nor applause is acquired by faithfulness...There is too much corruption, even in this infant age of our Republic. Virtue is not in fashion. Vice is not infamous.

One day, as he and Benjamin Rush sat together in Congress, Rush asked Adams in a whisper if he thought America would succeed in the struggle.

“Yes,” Adams replied, “*if we fear God and repent our sins.*”²

One can ponder how our own lives and how our culture and times might be different if millions of Christians began this Pentecost Sunday being fully led by the Spirit and producing with God’s power a bumper crop of spiritual fruit.

These then are the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

May God grant that as a body of believers we will experience such fruit in abundance.

Blessing for Pentecost (Joyce Rupp)

May **the enthusiasm of the Spirit** leap incessantly within you and help you to live a vibrant life.

May **the warmth of Spirit’s fire** be extended through your concern and care for all those who need your love.

May **the blaze of Spirit’s courage** enable you to speak the truth and to stand up for respect, dignity, and justice.

May **the undying embers of Spirit’s faithfulness** support you when you feel spiritually dry and empty.

May **the strength of Spirit’s love** sustain your hope as you enter into the pain of our world.

May **the clear light of Spirit’s guidance** be a source of effective discernment and decision-making for you.

May **Spirit’s patient endurance** be yours while you wait for what is unknown to be revealed.

May **the steady flame of Spirit’s goodness** within you convince you every day of the power of your presence with others.

May **the joyful fire of Spirit** dance within you and set happiness ablaze in your life.

² David McCullough, *John Adams*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2001, 160.

May the spark of **your relationship with Spirit** catch afire in the hearts of those with whom you live and work.

May you be mindful of the Eternal Flame within you.

May you rely on this Source of Love to be your constant ally and steady guide.