

Christian Growth

Galatians 5:16-26

READ Galatians 5:16-26

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever tried your hand at gardening? We just spent some time with my in-laws and they were showing us pictures of the beautiful garden that they have been working on at their home in central California. One of the things they mentioned was just how much continual, daily, ongoing work it took to keep the garden growing and healthy to produce a harvest.

Cadence my 5 year old just recently did a craft where she decorated a pot, filled it with soil and planted a seed. She watered it for a few days when the excitement was fresh, but quickly forgot about it. Last I checked there was a pot on its side in the backyard with half the soil knocked out of it and no sign of growth. ☹️ I think she follows in my footsteps as I can't even keep my front lawn green!

Christian growth takes work too, but God's Word reminds us there is a spiritual solution with divine enablement for growth.

We are not left to our own devices or strategies or even mere human will power.

At the core of our text this morning in **Galatians 5:16-26**, we are going to see the language of "fruit." This metaphoric language is not foreign to Scripture. Jesus himself taught in **John 15:4-5** – "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."

Mat 7:16-20 – Recognize them by their fruits

Mat 13:18-23 – parable of soils and the receptivity of the Word

Psalm 1:3-6 – The blessed man who delights in God's law is like a tree planted by streams of water bearing fruit

Phil 1:11 – Paul prays that the Philippians would be filled with fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ

Bearing fruit is directly related to abiding in the root which is Jesus.

We read a text of Scripture emphasizing Christian growth but that assumes you are **in Christ** – union with him.

In Galatians, we jump into a context where Paul is warning Christ-followers against the dangers of legalism. The Judaizers are demanding the Gentiles to follow the demands of the law in order to be in right standing with God. They are tearing down the gospel of grace and building a works-based salvation. Paul pushes back with the truth of the gospel of grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone. He then, as he does so often, brings the gospel to bear on practical daily living.

Learning for living.

Truth for life.

He centers on the union the believer has with Christ and how that looks with the indwelling Holy Spirit. He uses the language of walking and the result of fruit. Both communicate progress but not just external results but inevitable production from the inside out.

We do not have time to walk through as much of the context of this book of Galatians as I would like but let me direct your eyes to one key text that will help set the stage for Gal 5:16-26.

Gal 3:1-3 – “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2- Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works off the law or by hearing with faith? 3-Are you

so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

Here we have the first mention of the Holy Spirit in Galatians and Paul addresses the question we may ask after reading the text, "Why do we need the Spirit?"

He communicates clarity through a series of questions that the commencement of your faith was through the life-generating power of the Spirit, so why would you not think the continuation of your faith would also be through the empowerment of the Spirit?

The same Holy Spirit that applies salvation to the life of a believer is the same Holy Spirit that applies sanctification in the life of a believer.

You cannot add to Christ crucified for sinners.

"A Christ Supplemented is a Christ Supplanted" –
Hendrickson

The title for today's sermon is simple: **Christian Growth**.

If you are a follower of Jesus than your desire most definitely should be to grow in conformity to the likeness of Jesus.

I would like you to consider 5 principles for Spirit-led growth in our Christian walk. Another theological way to say this would be 5 keys to progressive sanctification.

Proposition: The spiritual growth of a Christian is **rooted** in the soil of faith in Christ crucified, **watered** by the Spirit-enabled means of grace in sanctification and **blooms** in the varied expressions of love.

We see this expressed through 5 principles vital for Christian growth.

- I. **The Command – “walk in the Spirit” – v16**
- II. **The Conflict – flesh v spirit – v17-18**
- III. **The Corruption – Works of the flesh – v19-21**
- IV. **The Character of Christ – Fruit of the Spirit -v22-23**
- V. **The Crucified Flesh – belong to Christ – v 24-26**

I. **The Command to the Christian - 5:16**

Point – You must understand the imperative charge to walk in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit plays an empowering role in the sanctification process of the believer.

Proof – “walk by the Spirit” – this is a continuous action, communicating progress. This is an imperative 2nd person plural verb. No one is left out. It is a command for all Christians.

WALK

- In the days of Aristotle, his students were known as peripatetics because of their habit of following their teacher around. For the Christian, to walk by the Spirit, or to be led by the Spirit, means to follow our Teacher around. We must listen to the Spirit’s Word, discern His will, and follow His guidance. This is not a deeper life or higher life; this is the normal Christian life. (Christ-centered Commentary)
- **Eph 2:10** – For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should WALK in them.
- **Col 2:6** – Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so WALK in him

BY THE SPIRIT

- *“Some see the Spirit as necessary for new birth (the beginning of the salvation experience) but treat him as functionally irrelevant thereafter. Others perceive the Spirit as their private genie, experience-generator,*

dream-filler and miracle worker.” – David Garner, essay on TheGospelCoalition.org

- **2 Peter 1:3-4** - His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.
- **Romans 8:2** For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- So how could we DEFINE “walking by the Spirit” – William Hendrickson give this definition: “It is that constant, effective, benevolent influence which the Holy Spirit exercises within the hearts of God’s children whereby they are being directing and enabled more and more to crush the power of indwelling sin and to walk in the way of God’s commandments freely and cheerfully.”

As the Holy Spirit inspired and illumines the Word of God, we can say walking in the spirit means living all of life in conformity to the Word of God through the power of the Spirit of God.

Picture – On Friday night some of us had the opportunity to attend a “man shower” for Mclain who will be marrying Julia this Saturday. A game was played where you chose a card that

had a problem on it, such as a leaky faucet. Then you chose 2 cards that had tools you would use to fix the problem. So maybe you got a tape measure and a hammer as your tools to fix a leaky faucet. Not a pretty picture, right? This is often the silly picture of many Christians as they seek to solve spiritual problems with fleshly solutions.

Personal – Do you understand the need for internal transformation by the spirit for the production of external fruit? Are you tired of simply seeking to modify behavior either in your own life or the lives of your children, spouse, co-workers?

It is the work of God’s grace, through the power of the Spirit, that fuels our obedience. Thus, the question before us as we ponder spiritual fruit is: How can I discern the difference between keeping in step with the Spirit’s work in my life and laboring in my own strengths and abilities?

Inside out living requires faith in the heart that produces fruit in the hands. Faith → Fruit all with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

II. The Conflict of this Life - 5:17-18

Point – You must understand the inevitable combat (conflict) that you face daily, moment by moment as a believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit yet still living in sinful flesh.

- This is the “why” point – I have two toddlers, so I hear the word “why” a lot! If I have a compelling, immediately gratifying answer to their “why question it seems much easier for them to accept it. For example – “Please hold my hand while we cross the street.” “WHY DAD?” “Because I don’t want you to get hit by a car and die!” “Oh...okay!”
- This is the explanation of the enemy. The orders have been given to “walk in the spirit” but here we see the

reason why it is so important and the opposition you will surely face.

- The opposition of DESIRES and DOINGS
- Vice versus virtue

Proof – vv. **16b-18** -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.”

- **Romans 8:5-8** “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
- **Romans 8:13** “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

The CONTRAST of solutions for the conflict....You must understand the strategic confusion the devil employs between the slavery of the law vs the freedom of the Spirit.

- **Col 2:20-23** – “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”

- **Romans 8:23** “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”
- *“True liberty produces love not license”*– Hendrickson
- Do not live in submission to the slavery of sinful flesh, but rather live in sonship to the freedom of spirit-empowered fruit! (**Gal 4:7**)
- **Gal 5:13-** Don’t let your freedom feed your flesh, but rather your faith grow your fruit.
- In these first two points there is a burden of responsibility on us to DO something. Paul says to Timothy - fight the good fight of faith.
- Paul tells the church of Phillipi in **Phil 2:12-13** – “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **13** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Picture – There is very much a tug-of war going on that we see in this contrast of ideas in the conflict of this war.

Consider the case study of Paul himself as he gives us first person insight into his personal battle of the flesh.

Romans 7:18-8:1

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Life in the Spirit

8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Personal— We should see that there is no neutral ground here. We are living in one sphere or the other. Either we are submitting to the Spirit's leadership, or we are gratifying our flesh.

Do you recognize the war waging within you, and do you understand the solution? It cannot be to simply try harder in your flesh. But you do need to give maximum effort. Part of the problem with fighting the flesh is a casual attitude toward sin that the enemy wants us to have.

III. The Corruption of the Flesh - 5:19-21

Point – You must understand the total depravity from within. The natural bent of the human flesh is not good but evil.

- list of 15 vices
- 1-3 – immorality (sexual sins)
- 4-5 – idolatry (false gods)
- 6-13 – Rivalry (contention with others)
- 14-15 – inebriety (drunkenness)
- And things like these, the list is not exhaustive
- And I warn you, that if these things are characteristic of your life you are not inheriting the kingdom of God. You are not an heir of Christ. You are not a son of God. You are not indwelt with the Spirit of God.
- Self-denial NOT self-indulgence

- Private sins are no better than public sins

Proof – vv.20-21- “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.”

IV. The Character of Christ - 5:22-23

Point – You must understand the union with Christ that comes out in the characteristics of his perfect life lived.

- **Jn 14:16-17** – “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Helper**, to be with you forever, **17** even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”
- Original Greek language: Paraclete- para- along – kaleo – to call out (helper, to call to one’s side; witness, advocate, testify Christ in us)
- *“From womb to tomb, to throne, the Spirit was the constant companion of the Son”* – Cappadocian Father, Basil of Caesarea (330-379)
- When the Spirit indwells believers, it is to possess Christ Himself – to lack the Spirit is to lack Christ.
- So...Christ’s earthly life gives us the greatest example of what it looks like to “walk in the Spirit” or be “led by the Spirit”
- Jesus = man of the Spirit par excellence (**Is 11:1; 42:1: 61:1 – Lk 4:16-21**)
- **2 Cor 3:17-18** – Major function of the Holy Spirit’s ministry is to shape us to be like Christ

- The Spirit gives us Christ himself (**Titus 2:14, Rom 8:9**)
- Salvation is a real union with the real Christ with the real personal bond of the Holy Spirit within us.
- These are NOT self-generating qualities
- Faith energized by love leads to holiness. We see that in this list of 9 virtues led by LOVE
- Qualities commended and commanded all throughout Scriptures – **Col 3:12-17; 2 Peter 1:5-11**

If we are to be holy as God is holy, we need the Holy Spirit in us to live out holiness through His enablement and power.

Proof – **vv. 22-23** – “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.”

Instead of going through each of the 9 virtues of the Holy Spirit, I want to share the words of Scotty Smith who has put many Scriptures to prayer. Here is his prayer based on this passage of Scripture:

God,

Love – Keep us alive to your outrageous—even scandalous love for us in Jesus, for this is the supply we need to love others well. Stun us with your love; liberate us by your love. Give us a self-sacrificing, self-giving, self-less love.

Joy – Grant us a joy that transcends our circumstances, sabotages our excuses, and turns our worries into worship.

Peace – Father, may your peace trump our anxieties and tame our fears. Grant us a core of peace.

Patience – Help us see your heart and hand at work in all things and people. Free us from our controlling, rigid, grumpy ways.

Kindness – Help us lead more with your kindness than our rightness. There’s no justification for us ever being curt, rude, and harsh.

Goodness – Father, we know we’re not saved **by** our works, but **for** a life of good works. Order our heart and hands accordingly.

Faithfulness – Forgive us when we make promises lightly, and/or fail to follow through on stuff. Great is *your* faithfulness. That’s not just a great hymn; it’s who you are. Make us more like yourself.

Gentleness – Gentle our rough edges, edgy words, and tart reactions, Father. Grow a non-anxious spirit within us—one that embraces conflicts as a part of life.

Self-control – Whether it’s with our eating or speaking, listening or spending, exercise or spiritual disciplines—Father, forgive us for confusing laziness with grace. Empower us for the freedom of self-control and taking responsibility for ourselves.

- **Picture** – We recently spent the night at Tessa’s grandmother’s house. It is quite fun chasing two toddlers around someone else’s home! They want to touch everything and in the nice formal sitting room there was a bowl of fruit on the coffee table. I saw Everett run toward that bowl with big eyes thinking he was going to get some tasty grapes. What a disappointment for the little guys when he found out that it was fake fruit.

Personal – Christian, you have been made a son/daughter of God through faith alone in Christ alone. You can never DO enough, but because you have put your faith in JESUS who DID it ALL, you can have life. You do have life. You have the indwelling of the 3rd person of the Trinity IN YOU. He produces beautiful healthy fruit in your life when you follow the leading of the Spirit.

“We are justified by grace through faith, a faith that is indeed active in love leading to holiness.”- Timothy George (New American Commentary

V. The Crucified Flesh - 5:24-26

Point – You must understand the union with Christ that comes out in the characteristics of his perfect life lived. (A summary of the whole passage but specifically the last point).

- **Gal 2:20-21** – I have been crucified with Christ (UNION - REGENERATION). It is no longer I who live but Christ who live in me (TRANSFORMATION). And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 – I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.
- We must acknowledge that every man-made religion that teaches any type of “works-based” salvation is not of God. Man-centered, works based religion destroys the purpose of the cross.
- Be what you are – you belong to HIM

Proof – And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

We way too often try to live as someone we really are not. We put on the mask (poor choice of words these days)... a façade and try to play the part on the outside without ever truly being transformed on the inside. It is a foolish way to live.

Picture – Tanner (my dog) trying to crawl up on your lap as a huge 100lb dog versus a small cute little dog jumping on your lap. Nothing is sadder than someone who thinks they are one thing and everyone around them knows it is not true.

But, if you are in Christ than you belong to him and you have crucified the flesh – the passions and the desires.

Proof –v25 “If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk”

- If the source of our life is the Spirit, the Spirit must also be the strength to advance us step by step to be set apart.

Proof – **v. 26** “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

Point – The conceited condescension is way too easy to fall prey too.

- V. 26- there is no room for conceit toward others
- The flesh is a wicked cycle – we see progress in the Spirit and we want to take credit for it and pride takes the throne of our heart as we revel in just how patient we have been this week.
- We want to allow the fruits of the Spirit to expel the works of the flesh and not add them back in again!

CONCLUSION

Paul says in **1 Cor 3:16** “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” Or a few chapters later in **6:19** “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own”

Eph 5:18 - And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit”

We are in an unseen battle (against the flesh), but we have an unseen person (the Holy Spirit) who gives us power to win the battles!

Our government leaders have used the language “an unseen battle” to refer to the current situation with the Coronavirus.

Regardless of where you stand in your opinion on the current events surrounding us ... one aspect that I believe relates well is the aspect of “response to a perceived threat”

The last several months of living in a global pandemic has shown us just how afraid of physical sickness and death people can be. We don't even need to mention the full gamut of precautions that have been suggested and taken to protect oneself and others against this physical virus.

What about us as Christians who understand we are in a much greater unseen battle with higher costs. Threats to our spiritual health are all around us. Do we GO OUT OF OUR WAY to protect the spiritual health of ourselves and others? We know we are in conflict with the flesh. We know there is at least 15 vices knocking at our door and that is just the beginning!

Gal 5:5-6 – “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.”

The object of our faith is not in self but in our Savior. Not in what but who.

Walk by the Spirit (**5:16,25**)

Be led by the Spirit (**5:18**)

Bear fruits of the Spirit (**5:22-23**)

Live by the Spirit (**5:25**)

For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. – **Gal 5:5**

Already in the day to day, not yet fully realized in the perfect sanctification of glorification in Heaven! May we be people of God that live with the hope of the Holy Spirit within us.