

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Operation Liberation!

Beautiful Fruit

(Galatians 5:22-21)

Study #12

Introduction: The most beautiful garden in the world...

(Now that we have come to the verses in Galatians that talk about the *“fruit of the Spirit”* did you really think I would miss an opportunity to talk about gardening?)

I’ve tended a vegetable garden for most of my adult life. My father was a tremendous backyard gardener and possessed about the greenest thumb of anybody I’ve ever known. We used to joke that he could have planted and grown a broomstick.

Unfortunately, while I inherited a love for home gardening from my father, I didn’t inherit his green thumb.

BUT, I did have a pretty good spring garden this year. I tried a few new fertilizing and watering tricks and even through most of a very hot, droughty summer harvested plenty of vegetables for the dinner table.

Some of what I grew did so well that Kathy would roll her eyes when I came in from the garden, accompanied by a, *“What? More squash! MORE tomatoes!”* (I do like that eye roll...).

Home-grown produce tastes better than the other kind - at least to the gardener. And I believe that plopping a vine-ripened tomato in your mouth while standing in a hot garden is one of life’s truly sweet pleasures.

Today, we get a picture of the life that God wants to see His people live, couched in terms of a beautiful garden.

There is delight in bearing the fruit that Paul describes in Galatians 5. Delight for God, the Gardener. Delight for those we know, since they will benefit from this fruit. And delight for us, because there is nothing like BEING a bountiful garden for Jesus.

This beautiful passage follows one of the uglier sections in the New Testament. Paul has just listed fifteen members of the flesh family. And he immediately contrasts that image with the mouth-watering picture of a life that displays the fruit of the Holy Spirit.¹

Listen as Paul paints a picture of the Christian who *“walk[s] by/with the Spirit.”*

The Fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23a)

[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23a] gentleness, self-control...

The Truth about Fruit

Those words describe the life Jesus saved us to live. God’s norm is that you and I should exhibit the full measure of the Spirit’s fruit in our lives.

It may not be the **average** Christian life. It may not be what you see around you. It may not even be what you observe when you look in the mirror. But a life marked by the Spirit’s fruit is God’s “norm.”

This is to be the life of the Christian. Your life. My life.

Now, there are different ways to view the fruit listed in Galatians. But here’s the way I see it. The first fruit is the main fruit. More than anything else, the fruit of the Spirit is LOVE.

¹ In the New Testament, there are several kinds of “fruit.” The fruit of people won to Christ may be the one that most obviously comes to our mind. The fruit of Galatians 5, though, has to do with character

Love is the defining characteristic of the Spirit-led life, the unmistakable mark of the Jesus-centered life, and the summary of all the fruit the Holy Spirit wants to produce in our lives.

Love represents the high point of spiritual maturity and it is the end-all of Christlike character. Jesus Himself said so.²

The Fruit of the Spirit is LOVE

[22] But the fruit³ of the Spirit is love...

The priority of love

On the last night of His life, Jesus looked across the low table at which He and His disciples were seated while they were eating the Passover meal and told them, *[John 13:34] A new commandment I give to you, that you love you another. Even as I have loved you, that you love one another. [35] By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

Of all the things Jesus could have done to tell what He expected from His disciples, He chose this. *“Guys, love. That’s what you are to be all about. More than anything else, following Me means that you’ve got to love.”*

Well, the apostles certainly got it. Over and over again in the letters they wrote that make up the New Testament, they told churches and individuals to love.

Nowhere does that message come across more powerfully and more eloquently than in Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth. He writes,

[1 Corinthians 13:1] If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

[3] And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

[4] Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, [5] does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, [6] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [7] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[8] Love never fails...

What a picture.

Here in Galatians 5 he simply says that the fruit of the Spirit is love. And love is so all-encompassing that it informs how we are to act in every situation.

The faces of love

Of course, that love will take different forms in different contexts.

Sometimes love will be **tender** and **compassionate**. It will always be **self-sacrificing**. At times it will even be **tough**.

But a desire to bless, to enrich, to serve, to meet needs will be the motivating force behind the words and the actions of the fruit- of-the-Spirit-filled Christian.

She will take risks and put others’ needs ahead of her own. He’ll give and give and give. You and I who have received love from God, we hear the promise of God, *“I love you”* - and so we love.

The Christian who is walking with the Spirit loves. Period. A Christian who is not growing in a capacity to love is not growing. Period.

His involvement with church may be increasing, but if he’s not becoming more loving, he’s a bubble off plumb.

² John 13:34-35

³ Much has been written about the reason for Paul using the singular rather than the plural when referring to nine separate fruits. Most simply, “fruit” is a collective noun whose singular can imply the plural. But, perhaps Paul means to say that the fruit of the Spirit is love - and that the remaining 8 are explanatory to love.

Her teaching ability may be improving, but if she is not increasingly marked by love, she's gotten derailed.

Love is the first fruit listed. And I think it is listed first because it summarizes the other fruits. The remaining eight fruits simply describe the description of what a love-filled, Spirit-led life looks like.

Let's look at them, even if only briefly.

Love's Derivatives

*[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23a] gentleness, self-control...*⁴

JOY and PEACE

Joy and peace are the Spirit's inner graces for **tumultuous times**.

The presence of joy and peace allows us to NOT panic and complain about what is going on all around us when the world seems to be turning upside down.

Are you going through tumultuous times right now? I know some of you are. The foundations are crumbling. Key relationships are breaking. Financial stability is eroding. Big events make it seem that the world is coming unglued.

The Bible says that joy and peace are fruits that can be hanging off the limbs of your life even in these tumultuous times. They are available to you now.

PATIENCE and FAITHFULNESS

Then, patience⁵ and faithfulness⁶ are graces the Spirit gives that enable us to lead an others-focus life in **trying times**.

When, on a more personal level, things aren't going well, or are not going as we might have planned or are turning out far differently than we have dreamed, it is so easy to become impatient. It's tempting to stop performing little faithfulnesses.

But imagine this: You, attacked by the worst, the most disappointing, the most frustrating things that life can throw at you, responding patiently, never forsaking faithfulness, never using the hard times as an excuse for faithlessness or impatience.

Paul says it is possible. The Spirit can and will grace you with the capacity to be faithful and patient, no matter what.

The list continues, as Paul mentions kindness, goodness and gentleness.⁷

KINDNESS, GOODNESS, and GENTLENESS

These are the Spirit's graces for dealing with **tough people**.

Got any tough people in your world? Most of us do.

They may live next door to your home - or they may live in your home. You may see them daily or you may see them once in a blue moon. They may be tough to deal with because of a past insult or an on-going offense.

But the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness, kindness and goodness. GENTLE people take others' weaknesses into account. KIND people show compassion and sympathy. GOOD people strive to be fair with those with others.

These fruits picture us dealing with others the way God has graciously dealt with us.

⁴ Every one of the fruits here listed is commanded for Christians elsewhere in the New Testament, as well as being attributes of God.

⁵ Patience - endurance in what is good, persistence, a clinging, bulldog-like tenacity to not give in to evil or to temptation, forbearance with others, slow to anger (literally, "long in nose")

⁶ Faithfulness - not "one who believes" but "one who is believable" and dependable

⁷ Animals who are tame are said to be "gentle." And, just as an animal is only really useful if he is tamed, Christians are only useful in service if they are tamed. If we have learned to do another's (specifically, God's) bidding.

When treated with contempt, it is so easy to respond in kind, rather than kindly! “Love” sounds nice. But LOVE where the rubber meets the road, where it gets real, is what is pictured by these three fruits.

They are all hallmarks of the spiritual person’s relationships, especially with difficult people.

SELF-CONTROL

And the final grace (or fruit) of the Holy Spirit that Paul mentions here is self-control. Normally, when we hear the word “control” we get our guard up. But this fruit has nothing to do with being a controlling person, being in control of a situation, or being in control of others.

This manifestation of the Spirit is all about the Christian being in control of himself, of herself.

Self-control. Doesn’t that sound wonderful. No need to demand, panic, or become frantic, arm twist, manipulate, coerce, or cajole. We are not control freaks because we embrace the idea that Jesus has supplied or will supply all that we need.

- On the one hand, the person who is self-controlled doesn’t fly off the handle when provoked.
- On the other hand, the self-controlled person is not controlled by anyone else or anything else. Compulsive behaviors and addictions are not present where there is self-control.

There. That’s a quick run-through of the fruit of the Spirit. It describes a very robust spiritual maturity.

In terms of lifestyle, Galatians 5:22-23 shows us the end goal of life in Christ. This is what we are aiming for. Love and its derivatives are what God wants to produce in your life and mine.

That’s the list. And I find Paul’s final remark in v. 23 almost comical.

The Fruit of the Spirit is Legal!

[23b]...against such things⁸ there is no law.

Isn’t that great? We are free to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as much as we wish - no restrictions.

What a relief. You never have to worry that you are being too kind, too good, too patient, too loving!

The sky’s the limit when it comes to manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. We have the freedom to become what we were redeemed to become - **POWERFULLY LOVING PEOPLE!**

What a vision! THIS is what we long for. It’s the life of Christ.

What if your life was marked by the fruit of the Spirit? Can you imagine how delightful that would be for you? Can you just imagine what impact for the Kingdom of God you would make? Wouldn’t you bring untold honor to the God who has saved you! Yes!!

But, even the most mature Christian alive will admit that manifesting the full measure of the fruit of the Spirit is more future vision than present reality. All of us here today have quite a ways to go before the person we see in the mirror has the fruit of the Spirit in full.

So the question may arise, “*How do I get there from here?*”

And if that is the question that is forming in your mind right about now, you can rejoice because the Apostle Paul follows up his listing of the Spirit’s fruit by giving us one of the most practical “how-to’s” we find anywhere in the Bible, and one of the most pointed comments he makes anywhere in this letter.

Growth is called for! Change must occur! Progress is the need of the hour if we are to daily exhibit more and more of the fruit of the Spirit.

⁸ I take it, too, that “such things” implies that the list is not exhaustive, just as the list of the deeds of the flesh in vv. 19-21 was not exhaustive either.

So what do we DO? HOW do we progress in spiritual fruit production? Listen.

There is one thing you and I can do that is totally consistent with a grace-based and faith-filled approach to the Christian life. We can crucify the flesh.

The Pursuit of the Fruit (v. 24)

[24] Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Let's think carefully about this...

Crucified (passive)

Earlier in this letter,⁹ Paul said that at the moment of salvation he had **been crucified** with Christ.

That was true for Paul and it is true for every Christian. The moment you placed your trust in Jesus you were “crucified” with Jesus.

This is a graphic picture of what happened, spiritually speaking. The old *you* - the *you* that was condemned and under the judgment of God, was, in effect, nailed to the cross with Jesus. That old you was put to death!

And in the place of the old you, a new you was raised up. A *you* who has a righteous standing before God; a status as God's child; a new *you* who has been redeemed.

This crucifixion is described by Paul by the use of the passive voice. You'll observe that this is a grammatical observation.

See, even though I graduated from college many years ago, my English major self still notices things grammatical. And I notice that in Galatians 2:20, Paul uses the passive form of the verb “to crucify.”

⁹ [2:20] *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

This means that he was passive in the process. He had nothing to do with this spiritual crucifixion of his old, sinful, Hell-bound self. The old Paul was put to death by somebody else. (Namely, God, in preparation for a glorious spiritual resurrection to a new self!)¹⁰

This truth of our old self having been crucified is a tremendous truth, something to celebrate. But that is something far different from the words we find in our passage for today.

In Galatians 5:24 he uses the active voice. He is emphasizing action that every Christian has taken (to some degree and to some extent) which is also an action that every Christian is to continually take.

Before we look specifically at verse 24, let me take a moment to paint a picture contrasting two ways of looking at the Christian life.

Two Approaches to the Christian life

Over the weeks of our studies together in Galatians, I've repeatedly said that Paul has not emphasized rules-keeping as the way to make progress toward spiritual maturity.

Rather than adopt a rules-based orientation to the Christian life, we are to travel on a three lane bridge leading to spiritual growth: (1). We remember the promises of God and (2). We embrace grace; (3). We trust God.

A rules-based orientation to the Christian life vs. ...

Now, I'm not sure that I've been as clear about what I mean about a “rules-based orientation to the Christian life” as I want to be. So I'm going to try to be crystal clear today.

It is possible that we might view the Bible as a book that contains a list of principles and rules that ought to be followed. Period.

¹⁰ We find the same thought in Romans 6:6 - *knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin*

Drawing this straw man with a bit more detail, it is possible to take the Bible's commands and seek to obey them with a drudgery-laden sense of "ought-to". It is possible that this - obeying a rule-book - might be the sum total of our understanding of the Christian life.

In my estimation, this is a big piece of what Paul is warning against. This would be to adopt a rules-based orientation to the Christian life.

But it is possible to approach the Bible's commands from a completely different vantage point.

...a grace-based orientation to the Christian life]

Picture this - overwhelmed with gratitude for grace received and actively trusting God and remembering the awesome promises God has given us in Jesus, we THEN hear the commands of the Bible.

We hear things like, "***speaking the truth in love***" and "***serve one another***" and "***flee sexual immorality***" and dozens of other commands.

And because we are hearing them with gratitude to God for grace received, we hear them as invitations to lead a God-honoring life - EXACTLY the life we WANT to live because of all God has done for us.

Now, here's the funny thing.

Viewed strictly from a behavioral standpoint (and especially from a distance), the life of a Christian who is obeying Scripture out of gratitude and from the heart may be little different from that of a Christian who is obeying out of a sense of obligation and "have to."

But on closer examination and over time, there will be something winsome about the grace-motivated believer that is not present in the other and there is a magnetism that travels with the grace-motivated Christian that draws people to Jesus that is absent from the other.

The difference isn't in the actual behavior, but in the motivation for the behavior. And, my experience and my understanding of Galatians tell me that motivation makes a huge difference!

So now, with hearts that are overflowing with gratitude to God for grace received, let's listen to the words of Galatians 5:24.

Crucify (active)

[24] Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The active voice

This is "crucify" in the active, not the passive, voice. This is you and me doing the crucifying work.¹¹

We are crucifying the flesh, that active force that is trying to trip us up and get us to sin and that manifests itself in the "***deeds of the flesh***" (5:19-21).

And Paul doesn't just tell us that we have killed the flesh. No, he provides the ugly picture of death by way of crucifixion for a reason.

When we think "crucify, we think pitiless. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst of Rome's offenders (that is why it was so shameful that Jesus was *crucified*.) Our crucifixion of the flesh and its deeds shows us what God thinks of the flesh!

And when we think crucifixion, we think painful. Clearly, to be crucified was an exceptionally painful experience. And we shouldn't be surprised if our crucifying the flesh is accompanied by some acute pain, too.

And when we think crucifixion, we think decisive. Crucifixion was a lingering death, but it was a certain death. No one survived being crucified.

When Paul says that we Christians have crucified the flesh, he means that at some level and to some extent, we have renounced the flesh - after all, it is the flesh and its sinful deeds that drove Jesus to the cross and that had sentenced us to Hell!

¹¹ John R. W. Stott takes this same interpretation in his commentary, [Only One Way: The Message of Galatians](#).

The challenge of the verse is that while Paul speaks of it having happened in the past, we are to have an on-going commitment to keeping the flesh fixed to the cross and to never draw out those nails

The Christian life is never likened to a balloon ascension where we lazily drift into Christlikeness.

Actions we are to take!

Instead, we read things like, “*put on the new man*” and “*put off the old man*” and “*walk by the Spirit*” and “*discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness*” and “*struggle against....spiritual forces of wickedness*” and “*be a hard-working farmer*” and “*run the race*” and “*fight the good fight*” and “*present your body as a living sacrifice*” throughout the New Testament.

Does it cost something to grow as a Christian? YES!

It requires the cost of a continual, merciless crucifying of “the flesh” force that is out to drive you to sin.

When your desires for self-fulfillment get in the way of whatever grace/fruit the Spirit wants to exhibit through you, you will have to **enthusiastically** pound a nail through that desire and yield to the Spirit.

And Paul says that Christians - all Christians - HAVE CRUCIFIED the flesh.

Does he mean that we have thoroughly crucified the flesh? I don’t think so. Crucifying the flesh is a lifetime assignment. Have we perfectly crucified the flesh? Nope.

There is part statement of fact in this verse (to some extent, Christians have crucified the flesh) and part exhortation (keep crucifying the flesh!)¹²

Different Christians are at different stages in the flesh-crucifying process, to be sure. There are more nails in some of us than in others of us. And in some of us the nails have gone deeper or less deep than in others.

But you play an integral role in the change that God wants to accomplish in your life as you “*crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.*”

Conclusion:

At the beginning this morning I used the example of my garden to whet our appetites for lives that manifest the fruit of the Spirit.

And if we are going to think of our life in Christ as compared to a vegetable garden, we’ll all agree that we won’t reap a rich harvest unless we weep, fertilize and water (at least not in South Texas!).

I can’t make a squash, but unless I water the squash plant, my garden won’t produce a squash.

It is God who causes spiritual growth, but unless I crucify the flesh I won’t manifest the fruit of the Spirit and won’t enjoy the most beautiful garden in the world.

¹² As one of my commentaries puts it (F.F. Bruce), “What has been effected once and for all by the cross of Christ must be worked out in practice.