

DATE: June 8, 2008

TEXT: Galatians 5: 19-25

TITLE: "Fruits of the Spirit I: Love"



I am beginning a sermon series today that will last throughout the summer. I am looking at what are called the "fruits of the Spirit." Throughout this series we will look at what it means to live a full Christian life. We will see what it means to have the fullness of the Holy Spirit live within us. As an introduction to this sermon series I want to begin with some basic truths that are essential to understand how to live a full life in Christ.

Truth # 1 We are saved only by grace. We are not saved by being good. We are not saved by doing a series of actions... by works.

A person can be a very, very good person and still not be a Christian and be out of the presence of God. A person can fulfill the 10 Commandments and not be a child of God. A person can come to church every week, come to Sunday School every week, be an officer of the church and not be a Christian. Scripture is very, very clear. *Romans 3: 38* is clear..

"A man who has faith is now freely acquitted in the eyes of God...the whole matter (of salvation) is now on a different plane--believing instead of achieving."

We are saved by faith and surrender to Jesus Christ.

Truth # 2 Faith is more than knowledge. Faith involves surrendering self to Christ.

When we say that we are saved by faith alone and not by works that does not mean we merely have to believe in Jesus and we are Christians. *James 2 is very clear.* It states... **“so you believe in one God? So do all the devils in hell , and they shudder in terror”**. Faith is not just belief.... biblical faith is surrender to Jesus Christ.... allowing Christ to be Lord of your life.

Truth # 3 Upon surrender to Christ we receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ gave this promise in John 16..

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

God himself comes and abides in all who truly surrender to Christ. The Holy Spirit, according to scripture, does a number of things in our lives. First, He gives us the presence and power of Christ. We are never alone; we are never without the power of God in our lives.

Second, He teaches us about the Lord. The role of the Holy Spirit is to point us to Jesus Christ.

Third, He changes us to the likeness of Jesus Christ. This leads us to our final truth.

Truth # 4 A surrendered life is a life changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. In our text from Galatians we read a contrast between those who are walking with the Lord and those who are not filled with the Holy Spirit. The point is this: When we are surrendered to Jesus Christ and we receive the Holy Spirit in our lives, He changes our lives. We gain, over a period of time, the very character of Christ. The fruits of the Spirit are the qualities of character that we receive. We receive these not by trying harder to be good. We receive these not by being determined to live a moral life. We receive these fruits of the Spirit by continuing to surrender to Jesus Christ and continue to receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Allow me to share this illustration. We are a lot like a funnel. The hole at the bottom represents how much we have opened ourselves up to Christ. God pours his Spirit into us until we are full. If the hole at the bottom is small, we fill up very quickly and we prevent the Spirit from being poured. If we open up the hole bigger and bigger, if we surrender more and more of

our lives to Christ, we receive more and more of the Holy Spirit. Our characters are transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Let me say again... the fruits of the Spirit are the character traits of a surrendered life to Christ. The Holy Spirit gives us these character traits as we mature in our faith. Does that mean the fruits can be used to judge the level of spiritual maturity? Yes. It does mean that. They serve as a barometer of surrendered lives.

Over the next 9 weeks we will look at the 9 fruits of the Spirit listed in our text in Galatians. We will see how mature we are in faith and we will see the character God wants to build in each and every one of us.

The first fruit of the Spirit is love. We, as Christians, need to be constantly growing in our love. Love is one of those terms that is used constantly but rarely defined. We say we love liver and we love our spouses, but we do not mean the same thing (I hope). I want to share 3 lessons on love taught to us in scripture.

Lesson # 1. Biblical love is primarily a commitment. This is contrary to what our society

often teaches. Our society often teaches that love is a feeling. In premarital counseling I always ask, **“When you tell your future spouse you love him or her what are you saying to him or her?”** I get many answers; but often they are: **“You make me feel good when I’m around you”** or **“ I have deep feelings of care for you.”** My next question is.... **“What will happen to your relationship when you do not feel good around your spouse and when your feelings of care disappear?** I assure them this will happen sometimes in their marriage. When love is just a feeling, love is a very undependable thing.

One of the most famous verses in scripture is *John 3:16*. It states..

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

This text is giving us the absolute assurance of God’s love. What does that mean? Does it mean that God has strong feelings for us? No, it doesn’t. Scripture tells us that God is often very angry at us. What does it mean? It means that God is absolutely committed to us. Committed to the point of great, great sacrifice. He sent Jesus to die for us... that’s commitment.

There are times when I do not feel “in love” with Kim and my kids. At times, when they were young, I was very angry... at times I wanted to kill my kids. But that did not in any way affect my love for them. I am absolutely committed to them. Love is a commitment. As we mature in Christ, our characters change. Our commitment to Christ, to our spouses, to our church, to our neighbors grows. In other words... our love grows. That is maturing in Christ.

Lesson # 2 Love is a matter of choice. Again this is opposite of what our society teaches us. We use the term “fall in love”. As if it is an accident that we have no control over. That is not true. Love is choice. It is a matter of the will not a matter of feelings. People come to me for premarital counseling and they say, “**At one time I was deeply in love with her, but it seems that I have fallen out of love**”. What they mean by that is it is not their fault. It just kind of happened and they had no control or choice in the matter. That is untrue. *Col. 3:14 teaches. “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”* Love is something we “Put on;” it is a choice.

What is the choice? The choice is to put away selfishness. The opposite of love is not

hate. Often in marriages when couples split up, they do not hate their ex-spouse. The opposite of love is selfishness. Putting self first. The vows that most couples state to each other on their wedding day are these:

I so and so take thee so and so to be my wedded husband or wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance, I pledge thee my faith.

What are these vows? These are vows to overcome selfishness. Often these vows last until the reception. I've seen couples have major fights at the reception. What causes fights and quarrels? Scripture directly answers that question in *James 4*...

... What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it.

In the next couple weeks we will once again have VBS. A good number of years I worked with the kids in recreation. The young children in grades 1 to 3 came and played kickball and had a great time. The older kids had a good time, but they constantly argued. They argued with each other. They argued with the umpires. Why? Because of selfishness. They wanted to win. Let me say there is nothing wrong with competitiveness. I am very competitive, but we must be

careful in our desire to win that we do not become very selfish. Have you ever seen some parents at little league games? They can be a case study on this text from James. They do not get what they want and they argue and fight. This is true with kids playing, at little league games, in marriages, in churches.

Notice in our text from Galatians the characteristics of a person not walking with Christ. **“Fits of rage, dissensions, factions and envy.”** These are characteristic of a person who has not surrendered these areas to the Lord. They are in control and not the Lord. As we mature in Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit gains control and changes our anger and selfishness into love. Love is an overcoming of selfishness.

Finally, Lesson # 3 Love is controlled by actions. Allow me to once again quote *James*.

*He states.....***In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.**

Faith and love are demonstrated by actions. Allow me to give one final illustration from marriage. A woman comes to me for marital counseling and states, **“Pastor, I do not know**

what to do; I don't feel in love with my husband any more." I will give two

recommendations. First, do not lessen your commitment to him. And Second, act in love. Do the actions of love. Feelings follow actions. Let me say that again... Feelings follow actions... not the other way around. Act in love. We read 1 Corinthians 13 as our responsive reading. Notice that the words of love are action words. Love is patient.... kind....not envious.... not boastful....not self seeking...not easily angered... it protects... it perseveres. Love is action of obedience to the Word of God. Love is being filled with the Holy Spirit and acting as Christ would in any given situation. That is love.

The first fruit of the Spirit is love. A commitment to be more Christ like in every area of our life with all of our words, thoughts and actions. Christ is molding our character to his will.

AMEN