If over the past five months our study of Galatians has succeeded in getting you to identify aspects of legalism in your own life, convinced you that God hates it, and opened your heart to the freedom that is available in Christ, then we have accomplished something very important.

If last Lord’s Day Josh succeeded in helping you identify some of the desires of the sinful nature in your life, convinced you that these acts and attitudes are incompatible with your profession of faith, and helped you make the important decision to repent of those things, then we have accomplished something else very important.

But, friends, a person who has succeeded in eliminating legalistic attitudes, and avoiding the acts of the sinful nature, is not necessarily a godly, mature, and Christ-like person. The primary focus of a Christian’s life is never to be simply sin avoidance. You say, what could possibly be wrong with that? Well, pride for one thing. Suppose as Josh was working his way through the list of 15 sins in Galatians 5:19-21 you were doing a mental check-off:

- Sexual immorality? Nope! Always been faithful to my spouse.
- Witchcraft? Never even read a horoscope.
- Drunkenness? The devil’s nectar has never passed my lips.
- Orgies? I don’t even know what that is, though I know it’s not good.

Feeling pretty good about your status? But then there’s that troubling phrase at the end in verse 21, “and the like.” Paul probably got you with that one.

In Matthew 12 Jesus told about a man who had a demon cast out, but later the demon returns. “When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.” I think the point is that if you get rid of bad things in your life but don’t replace them with the right things, you may be vulnerable to even worse things. And I suspect the same principle may apply even to those who have avoided the bad things in the first place.

By the way, have you noticed how many of God’s greatest heroes did some very bad things but were passionate for God. I think of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Peter, Paul, and the list goes on and on. They did not become heroes because of their sin avoidance but because of their passionate faith in God. Now please don’t misunderstand me. Sin avoidance is good, and you will save yourself and your loved ones a lot of sorrow and pain by avoiding the things Paul’s lists in Galatians 5:19-21, but if that is your sole focus in life, you are missing something even more important.
So here is the central theme of our text today (the Sermon in a Sentence): “The believer who is serious about his relationship with Jesus Christ must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, turn from the destructive practice of legalism and from the desires of the sinful nature to the positive pursuit of the fruit of the Spirit.” Let’s read Galatians 5:22-25, but we will pick up the previous three verses for context:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Let’s begin by considering . . .

**The production of the fruit of the Spirit**

**Its source.** Fruit, you know, is not something made, manufactured or engineered. It is not the invention of a genius or the product of sophisticated technology. Fruit is the result of a long organic and living process established and overseen by the Creator. Spiritual fruit is likewise a long organic and living process that is the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life. The only people who can exhibit these characteristics in their true form are those indwelt by God’s Spirit, namely true believers.

Even with them it takes time for the fruit to ripen. No brand new believer is going to exhibit all the fruit overnight. The reason is that while the Holy Spirit indwells every believer from the moment of salvation, He clearly does not have control over every believer’s life. Unfortunately, too many think the test of how much control the Holy Spirit has is how much work they do for the church, or how many “Christian rules” they obey, or how many of these nasty works of the sinful nature they avoid, or even whether or not they speak in tongues. The true test of the Spirit’s control is how clearly these characteristics called “the fruit of the Spirit” are evidenced in our daily living.

**Its quality.** I love fruit, and I’m pretty good at picking it out. My first steady job was working in the fruit and vegetable department of an A & P store in Mission, KS. But even an experienced eye can sometimes pick what appears to be a beautiful juicy orange, only to find when peeled that it is sickeningly dry and full of fiber, or a beautiful apple that turns out to be mealy, or a watermelon that is tasteless. Things aren’t always what they seem on the surface. Likewise there are unbelievers out there, and even a few carnal Christians, who appear to be loving and patient and kind and self-controlled, but they remind me of the wax fruit you can buy in your better gift shops. Frankly some of it looks pretty good; in fact, from a distance you can’t tell it from the real thing. But when the heat is turned up, it begins to melt. You know, it’s
possible to go up to someone at church with a smile and greet her warmly, “Good morning. It’s so good to see you today,” while on the inside you’re saying, “She’s so prissy. I can’t stand to be around her.” That’s phony fruit. It has a beautiful skin of apparent love and concern, but its’s actually rotten to the core with bitterness and envy.

Fruit which truly comes from the Spirit is of excellent quality and integrity both inside and out.

Its necessity. We’ve considered its source, its quality, now its necessity. Jesus said in Matthew 7:16-20:

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

It is clear that the professing Christian who doesn’t produce good fruit is of the same value to the Lord as the non-producing fruit tree is to the farmer. He cuts it down and throws it in the fire, because it is useless to him. Friends, if we are serious about our relationship with Jesus, we must be producing this fruit (or better, allowing the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit in us). The alternative is tragic.

Now I want us to play the role of fruit inspectors this morning—not to inspect other people’s lives, but rather to inspect our own by the standard given to us in these verses. Nine aspects of this fruit are mentioned.

The character of the Fruit.

1. Love. Putting love first is not an arbitrary choice, for love is really the foundational quality needed for the rest of the fruit to exist. Again and again in the NT Paul stresses the unique function of love in the Christian’s life. As many of you know, there are a number of different words in the Greek language that are all translated “love.” There is a love that is sensual in nature, there is brotherly love, there is family love. But the word used here is the term *agape*. It is a love of the will, it is love in action. It is a love which causes a person to take the attitude, “I will do what is best for the other person, no matter what I get in return.” Imagine how that kind of attitude can revolutionize a marriage!

Six years ago I preached a series on the Christian home and shared a story that communicates better what love is all about than all the theologizing or philosophizing I might try to do this morning. Allow me to share it again. Tom Anderson wrote it of himself.

*I made a vow to myself on the drive down to the vacation beach cottage. For two weeks I would try to be a loving husband and father. Totally loving. No ifs, ands, or buts.*

*The idea had come to me as I listened to a commentator on my car’s tape player. He was quoting a biblical passage about husbands being thoughtful of their wives. Then he went on to say, “Love is an act of the will. A person can choose to love.” To myself, I*
had to admit that I had been a selfish husband—that our love had been dulled by my own insensitivity. In petty ways, really: chiding Evelyn for her tardiness; insisting on the TV channel I wanted to watch; throwing out day-old newspapers before Evelyn had a chance to read them. Well, for two weeks all that would change.

And it did. Right from the moment I kissed Evelyn at the door and said, “That new yellow sweater looks great on you.”

“Oh, Tom, you noticed,” she said, surprised and pleased. And maybe a little shocked.

After the long drive, I wanted to sit and read. Evelyn suggested a walk on the beach. I started to refuse, but then I thought, Evelyn’s been alone here with the kids all week and now she wants to be alone with me. We walked on the beach while the children flew their kites.

So it went. Two weeks of not calling the Wall Street investment firm where I am a director; a visit to the shell museum, though I usually hate museums; holding my tongue while Evelyn’s getting ready made us late for a dinner date. Relaxed and happy, that’s how the whole vacation passed. I made a new vow to keep on remembering to choose love.

There was one thing that went wrong with my experiment, however. On the last night at our cottage, preparing for bed, Evelyn stared at me with the saddest expression.

“What’s the matter?” I asked her.

“Tom,” she said, in a voice filled with distress, “do you know something I don’t?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well . . . that checkup I had several weeks ago . . . our doctor . . . did he tell you something about me? Tom, you’ve been so good to me . . . am I dying?”

It took a moment for it all to sink in. Then I burst out laughing.

“No, honey,” I said, wrapping her in my arms, “you’re not dying; I’m just starting to live!”

It’s pretty sad when exhibiting just one of the fruit of the Spirit for just two weeks would cause a spouse to think she’s dying. And what works in marriage also works with neighbors, with fellow-students, with friends at church. The fruit of the Spirit is love.

Joy. True joy can be defined as a delight in life that comes from the knowledge that we belong to God and that no matter what situation we are in, He is in total control. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church, “Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say, rejoice,” and he wrote that from a Roman prison cell.

Some of the key barriers to joy are, of course, legalism, selfishness, worry and just plain disobedience. In fact, there is no faster way to lose joy than to blatantly disobey the Lord. In Psalm 51 verse 12 David pleads with God, “Restore to me the joy of thy salvation.” His adultery had completely drained his life of joy. By the same token, the most important way to restore joy is confession of sin and subsequent obedience. In the same Psalm, after his confession, David
continues, “my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.” The fruit of the Spirit is joy.

**Peace.** This is the season of Advent and next Lord’s Day, Lord willing, I am going to preach on the subject, *The Prince of Peace*, so I don’t want to steal too much of my own thunder this morning. Let me just say that the most important peace attainable in this world is peace with God. That is available only through placing our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the Cross.

Peace with God enables us to enjoy the peace of God. That is the quiet confidence that God can be trusted with anything and everything we face. Paul calls this the “peace that passes understanding.” The peace of God, in turn, allows us to be at peace with one another. The Holy Spirit enables people with different backgrounds, different desires, different perspectives, and different goals to live in harmony with one another. If a battle is going on in your home, it’s not because men are from Mars and women from Venus. It’s because sin has violated the peace God has arranged.

But peace doesn’t just happen automatically because you’re a believer. We have to actively seek it. In Romans 14:19 Paul urges the believers to “pursue the things which make for peace.” In another key passage, Romans 12:18, we are told, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Sometimes it’s not possible, frankly, because we live in a sinful, hostile world, but when possible we need to pursue it. The fruit of the Spirit is peace.

**Patience.** There are two principal NT terms for patience, one speaking of patience under circumstances, and the other addressing the matter of patience with people. Patience with circumstances is not easy and the heavier the circumstances, the harder it is to exercise patience. But the second kind of patience is even harder. Guess which one is listed here in Gal. 5 as a fruit of the Spirit? Right, patience with people.

I believe if we first understand and appreciate God’s patience with us, we are better equipped to exercise patience with others. The OT tells us one of God’s great attributes is that He is patient or longsuffering. That is, He tolerates the failure of His people over a long period of time. So great was God’s patience that it moved Him to postpone His planned annihilation of the human race for over a century in the days of Noah, according to 1 Peter 3:20.

And the same patience of the Lord is being exercised today. Peter also informs us that in the last days mockers will come and ridicule the idea of the return of Jesus Christ. But then he adds, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is *patient* with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). After describing the return of the Lord in the next four verses, Peter urges us to “regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation.” Unfortunately, there are many who presume upon God’s patience and sit in church week after week, planning to repent later. Sometimes “later” never arrives.
Since the fruit of the Spirit is no less than the character of God worked into our lives, it should be no surprise that we are exhorted to extend patience to other people, just as God has to us. 1 Thess. 5:14 says, “And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” There’s no question that it’s easier to exercise patience with some people than with others. Some people try our patience sorely because of repeated demonstrations of irresponsibility or even obnoxious behavior, but God doesn’t let us pick and choose who will be the recipients of our patience. The fruit of the Spirit is patience.

**Kindness and Goodness.** I’m going to deal with these together, not because they are identical but because they are closely related. Friends, tell me, who would you rather have as a neighbor—a brilliant surgeon, a world-famous athlete, a great movie star, or someone who is ordinary in every way except he or she is kind and good? It’s not even a contest, is it? Simple kindness turns an ordinary person into a saint. It is also contagious. Someone has said, “One of the most difficult things to give away is kindness, for it is almost always returned.” In fact, there are very few people so hard of heart that they can resist a persistent barrage of kindness or goodness for any length of time.

Again I believe we will understand our responsibility here better if we first evaluate kindness and goodness as characteristics of God. God’s kindness is extended even to ungrateful and evil men. In the sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Luke 6:35, Jesus said, “But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”

But Paul also uses God’s kindness to unbelievers as a warning against them. In Rom 2:4-5 he asks, “Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.” In other words, God uses a carrot and stick approach. The carrot is His kindness, His goodness. The stick is His wrath that will inevitably come down on a person who takes God’s kindness for granted and refuses to repent.

Moving from God’s kindness and goodness to our responsibility, we discover that imitating God in His kindness and goodness should start at home. If we are out doing good deeds for others while neglecting the needs of our spouse, our parents, or our children, we are not developing the fruit of the Spirit. But these qualities should not end at home. In Gal. 6:9,10 we read, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

The two biggest obstacles to doing good in the church are both mentioned in this passage: fatigue (we become weary) and procrastination (we give up). We start out with good intentions but we grow weary. Worse yet, we may never get started. We learn on Sunday of a particular needy person and we have the good intention of writing a note of encouragement to that person or
taking a meal, but it's Wednesday before we remember it again and other things are crying for attention. Don't become weary, we are exhorted, and act while there is opportunity.

As I have heard the testimonies of scores of people who have come to know the Lord through the witness of individual believers, one common cord continues to appear—someone was kind to an unbeliever, and as a result he was attracted to the Savior. The fruit of the Spirit is kindness and goodness.

**Faithfulness.** Faithfulness is loyalty to long-term commitments based on invisible values rather than immediate and tangible self-interests. It involves unadulterated honesty, unfailing dependability, and undivided loyalty.

Faithfulness and marriage should be synonymous terms, but it’s important that we see faithfulness as more than abstaining from adultery. It is more than what we haven’t done. Faithfulness means we are committed to being there for our spouse—body, soul, and spirit. And faithfulness, of course, is critical in other relationships besides marriage. We all need faithful friends. We need faithful employees and employers. We need faithful servants of Christ—people who will do what they say and who are thoroughly reliable. In fact, in 1 Cor. 4:2 we learn that faithfulness in ministry is not optional. It says, “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”

As I talk to Judy Hollander, our Children’s Minister, and to Jeremy Krause, our Youth Pastor, I hear of individuals who are faithful as 2nd grade teachers or AWANA workers or Senior High staff year after year. We’ve had choir members who have served for over 40 years. We’ve had AWANA leaders who have also served that long. The key to any ministry is that faithful core that is always available. The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness.

**Gentleness.** In his *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, Longfellow puts words in the mouth of King Olaf:

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Force rules the world still,
Has ruled it, shall rule it.
Meekness is weakness,
Strength is triumphant.
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Unfortunately, that is the way the natural man thinks. In this world of ours the qualities that assure success are often thought of as strength, self-assurance, assertiveness, aggressiveness, even intimidation. But God puts a premium on gentleness.

Gentleness is not weakness. Moses was one of the strongest leaders ever, yet he was called the meekest (gentlest) man on earth. Gentleness implies considerateness, teachableness, respect for the personal dignity of others, avoidance of rude speech and abrupt manners, and tolerance for other people’s feelings. Jesus is the greatest example of this particular fruit of the Spirit (all of them really). He said, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls.” He was especially gentle with women and children.
Yet, of course, both Moses and Jesus could demonstrate righteous indignation when it was called for.

Men, this may be the sweetest piece of fruit in this entire cluster to most wives. The modern women’s movement would undoubtedly consider such a comment to be condescending, perhaps even chauvinistic. There’s nothing they hate more than the perception that a woman needs to be treated with any special deference by a man. But 99% of the women I know would give their right arm for a husband who saw gentleness as a top priority and practiced it.

Children, too, need to be treated with gentleness. Their spirits are delicate, easily bruised, and great damage can be done to their futures when father or mother do not practice gentleness. The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.

**Self-control.** Proverbs 25:28 says, “Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.” What is self-control? It is the healthy regulation of our desires and appetites, avoiding harmful excesses. It is needed because we are binge-ers by nature. Some people binge on food, others on sleep, others on work, and others still on TV or golf. One of my favorite Peanuts comic strips finds Charlie Brown climbing up to the can opener and filling two bowls with dog food. “Suppertime!” he yells. Snoopy runs up and Charlie tells him, “I’m going to be gone all day tomorrow, so I’m fixing you an extra supper. I’d advise you not to be greedy and eat it before tomorrow.”

Snoopy eats one bowl and then mounts his dog house. He begins to think of that other bowl, and this brings on a case of delirium tremens. He breaks out in a cold sweat as he struggles with himself. Finally, he lunges on the second bowl and devours it. Back on top of his house he says, “I’m glad I ate it. I would have hated myself if tomorrow never came.”

We need self-control of our bodies, self-control of our minds, and self-control of the emotions. Solomon warned, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” When one allows his emotions to control his life, rather than exercising control over his emotions, the springs of life are polluted and huge problems result. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

Now that we have discussed the production and the character of the fruit, the obvious question is, “How do we pursue the production of this fruit?”

**The pursuit of the fruit**

In verses 16 and 18 of Galatians 5 Paul has shown us that we need to make a major choice about how to live our lives.

**The believer’s choice.** The basic message is this: We have to choose to either walk by the Spirit or walk according to the sinful nature. It’s really up to us. And this is not just a once-in-
a-lifetime choice. It is a choice we have to make day-by-day and situation-by-situation. Clearly the choice we should make is found in verse 25: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” I think that really means, “since our very existence as believers is due to Him, we should keep in step with Him.” But in this area, as in many areas of the Christian life, there must be balance between doing and being.

**Being and doing.** Some theologians emphasize our responsibility to go out and do the things which reflect the fruit of the Spirit. Others remind us that we can’t do it; the Holy Spirit has to do it. Imagine the following debate between Mr. Do and Mr. Be:

Mr. Do says fruit is doing.
- Mr. Do notes the command to walk by the Holy Spirit.
- Mr. Do suggests going to a “How to” seminar.

Mr. Be says fruit is being.
- Mr. Be urges us to be filled with or led by the Holy Spirit.
- Mr. Be invites us to a deeper life conference.

Who is right? Well, if your car is out of gas and has a dead battery, you have to fix both for it to run, don’t you? The same is true here. For the fruit of the Spirit to be present in our lives, we have to exercise both complete dependence on God’s Spirit and complete obedience to His Word. An orange grower fertilizes the ground, waters the trees, prunes them regularly, fights insects by spraying, and puts out smudge-pots when frost threatens, but then, having done all he can, waits for God to produce a harvest. So also in the production of spiritual fruit.

Have you been born again by faith in Christ?
- If so, the Spirit of God is dwelling in you, and the seeds have been planted for a harvest of fruit.
- But do you need more of the water of the Word of God?
- Does your life need pruning through spiritual discipline?
- What about combating carnal blight with prayer?
- How about warding off chilling frost with the warmth of Christian fellowship?
- Perhaps most importantly, do you realize that the resurrected Christ is in you, that He dwells in your heart by faith, that “the life that you now live in the flesh, you live by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave Himself for you.”

If you take these issues seriously, and if you do all that in absolute dependence upon the Holy Spirit, you may be in for a bumper crop.

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i. There’s a rather puzzling statement in Romans 5:7: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.” It’s obvious there’s something better about a good man than a righteous man. When Paul speaks of a “righteous”
person here, I believe he is talking about “sin avoiders.” A synonym might be “pious,” perhaps even “self-righteous.” Such people often don’t have deep relationships with others, and it might be hard to find anyone who would want to make the ultimate sacrifice for them. But if, in addition to being pious, a person is also “good” (i.e. kind, gentle, loving, generous), someone might be willing to die for them. In other words, Paul is claiming a qualitative difference between the sin avoider and the truly godly person. (Then, of course, he goes on to set up a contrast with what Christ did: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” He made the ultimate sacrifice for those who were neither sin avoiders nor good, but actually wicked enemies of His!