

“The Fruit of the Spirit” (part 2)

Galatians 5:22-23

I am told that giant sequoia trees are the largest trees by volume in the world, and they are also some of the oldest. Many sequoias are estimated to be somewhere around 2,500 years old and anywhere from 250 to 300 feet tall, the tallest being about 325 feet high. And while their height is impressive, the real wonder of a giant sequoia lies in its bulk. Many of these giants have diameters in excess of 35 feet near the ground, with a corresponding circumference of over 95 feet! To put that in perspective, that is so large that you can carve out a tunnel through which you can drive a vehicle. In fact, one of the more iconic tunnel trees was the ‘Pioneer Cabin Tree’ in California’s Calaveras State Park (you have seen its image somewhere, as it has been featured in a number of places). In January 2017, a powerful winter storm brought it down to the ground. For more than a thousand years, the tree had pointed upward and was quite a sight to behold. But once it fell, it became obvious that its limbs were brittle, its roots were shallow, and its core had rotted out.

And it was only a matter of time before it collapsed.

Sometimes, people look really impressive on the outside. They look like they’ve got it all together. But upon closer examination, there are no roots that go down deep. There is a hollowed out center that can’t bear the weight of life. Friend, that’s why character is so very important. Far too many men and women in our day are tottering back and forth on the brink of moral collapse, just one storm away from a fall. Character matters, yet we still fail to make the connection between character and conduct. In our day, the headlines shout that society has problems, but the pundits want to blame the system. If you stop and think about it, with the exception of natural disasters beyond our control, most problems are

caused by people...people who elevate money, power, or personal gain above the value of integrity and character. And so they act with very little regard for the impact their decisions have on others. The reason is due to the fact that the root of their character is corrupted by sin which is at the core of their fallen humanity.

The answer to that is found in being rooted in Jesus Christ. And where there is a root of spiritual life, there will also be fruit in terms of character. Turn with me in your Bibles this morning to Galatians 5. We're considering what the Bible refers to as the fruit of the Spirit, nine character traits which are mentioned here in these verses. Last time, we looked at the fruit from a big picture perspective and explained how it is really the life of God on the inside of a person that is working its way out practically. Fruit is evidence of life and health. Fruit grows with time and cultivation. Fruit is observable. Fruit is beneficial. Fruit contains within it the seeds for more fruit.

Spiritually, these same principles also apply. The fruit of the Spirit is evidence of spiritual life. It grows with time and cultivation. It will be visible and beneficial to others, and it will contain within it the seed of more fruit. God's will for every believer is that the branches of our life be 'weighed down' with the fruit of the Spirit. It is what Paul wanted for the Galatians in 4:19 when he says, "My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of child birth until Christ is formed in you!" What will it look like when Christ is formed in a person by the power of the Holy Spirit? Well, in a word, it will look like fruit! The character of Christ will show up in the conduct of the Christian. These character traits are not the exception, but the norm of Christian experience. It is the character of the Lord Jesus being produced in the believer by the power of God's indwelling Spirit. And it is intended for every Christian, regardless of their age or their station in life. (Read)

These nine virtues found in verses 22-23 can be grouped into three categories that involve life's major relationships with God, others, and self. So that the fruit of the Spirit is such that it grows upward, outward, and inward. I don't want to rush through these, and so this morning we will look at how the fruit of the Spirit grows upward in terms of our relationship with God. Love, joy, and peace are the first triad of virtues that come as a result of being in a right relationship with God. And so the first fruit of the Spirit is:

1—The love of God that FILLS my heart (5:22a)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love..."

Jesus said that His disciples would be known by their love, so it should not be surprising that love is mentioned first on this list of spiritual virtues. If you ask someone to define what love is, you will find that they have a hard time coming up with a sufficient answer. The Oxford English Dictionary defines love as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, 'love' is defined as an intense feeling of deep affection, a great interest and pleasure in something. As a verb, to 'love' is to feel deep affection for someone, to enjoy something very much. Or, to come up with another, Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines love as a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person, and to love something is to have a warm attachment to it. Yet the dictionary definitions come up short. Why?

Love is more than feelings of affection. Love is an action that manifests itself. If love is nothing more than a feeling, then perhaps it can be lost. It comes and goes like the flu. And unfortunately, this is exactly how a lot of people in our generation think about love. It is something to fall into, and as such, it can be fell out of. Love is something beyond our control, kind of like being struck by a bolt of lightning. The world understands love strictly at the emotional level. While all of

that is most certainly involved, the Word of God tells us that love is far more than that. The word that Paul uses here for 'love' is the word 'agape,' the word used to describe the unconditional nature of God's love. For the writers of the New Testament, this truth of God so loving imperfect people in a perfect way was so wonderful and new that a new word had to be invented to describe it. J.I. Packer said that the Greek word 'agape' (love) seems to have been a Christian invention—a new word for a new thing. It was almost a non-existent word before the New Testament, where it shows up more than 200 times. No one uses this word any more than the apostle John, and in 1 John it is found 46 times in five chapters. Love is an attribute of God and is the very nature and character of the One in whose image we have been made. He is the One who gives love its definition, who gives it true shape, and who displays it with perfection. The world says love is love, but Scripture tells us that God is love. (See 1 John 4:7-12)

In a monumental passage, the apostle John emphasizes:

- The majesty of God's love (4:7-8)
- The measure of God's love (4:9-10)
- The motive of God's love (4:11-12)

The love of God that is experienced through Jesus Christ is life changing, and it results in love for others. The emphasis in these verses is that the love of God ought to be true of our relationships with others. In fact, that word is used in verse 11 as John says, "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." We ought to love other people the way that God has loved us. The word 'ought' is a word that has fallen upon hard times in our generation. It carries a sense of obligation to something, and these days nobody really wants to be obligated to anything.

And so the word ‘agape’ draws its meaning directly from the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Which means that it is not a form of natural affection, but is the supernatural fruit of the Spirit. And it is more a matter of the will rather than feeling, for Jesus said His disciples are commanded to love even their enemies. Friend, that isn’t something that comes natural to us. How could we ever love those who mistreat us, use us, or persecute us?

Romans 5:5—“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

A Christian is someone in whom the love of God has been poured into their heart. This same divine love that we see on display in Christ has been given to us. Just like grapes on a vine, it grows within us as the fruit of the Spirit. Love is not so much about what we feel for others as much as it is about what we do for others. Love is a verb. Love is an action based upon the way Jesus Christ has demonstrated His love for us. I think about the vows that a husband and wife make on their wedding day:

“I _____, take you _____, to be my wife/husband, 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.”

Agape love in marriage involves a husband vowing to love his wife, or a wife vowing to love her husband. And it is for better or for worse, richer or poorer, in times of sickness or in health—and it is until death! I’ve counseled with far too many couples who spend so much time planning for the wedding, but they don’t spend enough time thinking through the marriage. When the going gets tough, they cut and run.

Ephesians 5:25—“Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

The pattern for a husband's love for his wife is the way in which Jesus has loved the church. That's 'agape' love, friend. It is love that goes the distance. And it is the same kind described in 1 Corinthians 13 which says, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends...So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Paul is describing the kind of love that is sacrificial, kind, and true. It is the 'agape' love of God which is most clearly seen in the sacrificial way that Christ gave Himself up for the church through His death on the cross. It is the love of sacrifice and devotion, the kind which is concerned for the welfare of another.

David Jeremiah — *“This love isn’t just a spiritual sensation. This love wears work gloves and handles the everyday nuts and bolts of life. It’s highly practical. It hugs the lonely, feeds the hungry, tends the sick, comforts the sorrowful, and puts up with the insufferable. It is kind and long-suffering, pure and perceptive, positive in outlook.”*

Before Jesus came, the world didn't know or understand this kind of love. It wasn't until love wrapped Himself up in human flesh and dwelt among us that we truly understood how God is love. Now, divine love is on display for all to see. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son!

Romans 5:5—“The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

2 Timothy 1:7—“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

God’s Spirit produces the fruit of this love, but at the same time, you and I are responsible for cultivating it. Love is a gift as well as a task. After that wonderful description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, the very next verse of chapter 14 says, “Pursue love.” Two simple words, but a monumental assignment. And you and I will spend the rest of our lives learning to love others the way that God in Christ has loved us. But the fruit of the Spirit is a reminder that God’s love in our hearts is a reservoir of love we can draw from when we need to love someone. The gospel frees us to love others with the same love with which we ourselves have been loved.

Not only does the Spirit produce the love of God that fills my heart, but notice also that He produces:

2—The joy of God that floods my soul (5:22b)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy...”

The Holy Spirit pours out the love of God within our hearts as believers, but He also produces the joy of the Lord that floods the soul. Christians of all people ought to be the most joyful. After all, the gospel is ‘good news’ that brings joy to the life of the person who embraces its message.

Luke 2:10-11—“And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

All of us need the kind of joy that doesn’t depend upon the weather, the contagious kind of joy that other people are attracted to in life. A joyful believer is

a beautiful believer. There's something attractive when a person has authentic Spirit-produced joy, not the fake plastered on stuff offered by the world. The real thing is attractive and people want to know where you get it. People who don't know Jesus ought to be able to look at the life of a Christian and say, "I want what he or she has!" A joyful Christian is a billboard for the good news, a witness to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And where joy is found in a Christian, it will also be accompanied by other good things, such as perseverance that doesn't quit out of discouragement, an enthusiasm for life, and a spirit that encourages others. Nehemiah, when the people of Jerusalem were rebuilding the walls that had been broken down, there was a period of discouragement and sadness, he said to them:

Nehemiah 8:10—“Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Isn't that great? The joy of the Lord is your strength. Now it needs to be understood—and not too long ago we spent a lot of time looking at this from Philippians—but there is a vast difference between the happiness of the world and the joy of the Lord. Happiness is fluid, while joy is fixed. You can be going through crummy circumstances and still have joy. Happiness fluctuates depending on the 'happenings' of your life. It is related to happenstance. Happiness is all about the hap. The word 'hap' is an old word for chance, and so when the chance falls favorably toward you, you're happy. When it doesn't, you're unhappy. Negativity then sours us to the point that we grumble about everything and see nothing in a positive light. What we need is authentic joy that comes by being filled with the Spirit.

J.P. Moreland—*“We Americans are obsessed with being happy. But we are also terribly confused about what [it] is. As a result, we seldom find happiness that lasts. Because the ‘pursuit’ of happiness is promised to us as a right in the*

Declaration of Independence, we carry a sense of entitlement. We think we deserve happiness. And if we don't find what we consider to be happiness, we are likely to develop what Alexis de Tocqueville called 'a strange melancholy in the midst of abundance.'

The happiest people in life are rarely the richest, the most successful by worldly standards, or the most accomplished. Truly joyful people aren't dependent upon excitement or entertainment to bring them a sense of happiness, for joy isn't external. They don't waste time longing for greener pastures. Instead, they make the most of every day with its endless opportunities, always keeping eternity in mind.

Joy is an inside job! Christian joy is letting Christ live out His life through you so that what He is you become. And this can only be done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Colossians 1:10-11 — “Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.”

Pay attention there to the fact that we must be strengthened for all endurance and patience with joy. Rejoicing is a choice that isn't always easy. Many of you are familiar with Joni Eareckson Tada, who is a Christian author and radio host. When she was 17 years old, she dove into the Chesapeake Bay after misjudging the shallowness of the water. She severely fractured her vertebrae and became a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down. Some years ago she was speaking at a women's conference and was asked about her joy. She tells the

story in an article entitled “Joy Hard Won.” The women wanted to know how she could look so happy even though she was in a wheelchair. She said:

“I don’t do it,” I said. “In fact, may I tell you honestly how I woke up this morning? This is an average day,” I breathed deeply. “After my husband, Ken, leaves for work at 6am, I’m alone until I hear the front door open at 7am. That’s when a friend arrives to get me up. While I listen to her make coffee, I pray, ‘O, Lord, my friend will soon give me a bath, get me dressed, sit me up in my chair, brush my hair and teeth, and send me out the door. I don’t have the strength to face this routine one more time. I have no resources. I don’t have a smile to take into the day. But You do. May I have Yours? God, I need You desperately.”

“So, what happens when your friend comes through the bedroom door?” one of the them asked.

“I turn my head toward her and give her a smile sent straight from heaven. It’s not mine. It’s God’s. And so,” I said, gesturing to my paralyzed legs, “whatever joy you see today was hard won this morning.”

The joy of the Lord is our strength, but sometimes that joy is hard won in our lives. Sometimes it comes only through a hard fought, heart felt, been through hell Hallelujah. But the faithfulness of God, proven over and over again, is all the reminder we need. So that when I recall the promises of His Word, remember the price that He has paid for my redemption, and rely upon the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit, joy is cultivated in my life no matter the season. Joy is not a matter of what you possess, but of who possesses you. The joy of the Lord is my strength.

Here are four steps you can begin to take right now if you want to cultivate joy in your life:

- Surrender daily to the Spirit of God
- Study diligently the Word of God
- Seek desperately the face of God
- Share deeply with the people of God

John Ortberg — *“We all live with the illusion that joy will come someday when conditions change. We go to school and think we will be happy when we graduate. We are single and are convinced we will be happy when we get married. We get married and decide we will be happy someday when we have children. We have children and decide we will be happy when they grow up and leave the nest—then they do, and we think we were happier when they were still at home. The psalmist says this is the day that the Lord has made, a day that Christ’s death has redeemed. If we are going to know joy, it must be this day—today...If we don’t rejoice today, we will not rejoice at all. If we wait until conditions are perfect, we will still be waiting when we die. If we are going to rejoice, it must be in this day.”*

True joy comes only to those who have devoted their lives to something greater than their own personal happiness. The fruit of the Spirit is joy!

3—The peace of God that fortifies my mind (5:22c)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...”

Love that fills my heart, joy that floods my soul, and peace that fortifies my mind. A third virtue described as the fruit of the Spirit is peace. When we look around at our world, it would seem that peace is nowhere to be found. Conflict is raging on nearly every continent. Wars and rumors of war dominate the headlines whether it be in places like Ukraine or the Middle East. Politicians call for a

cease fire, only to see conflict flare right back up. Then there is the conflict on a smaller scale, such as within our homes and families. Conflict among relatives and former friends who are now bitter foes. Or, there is the conflict within our own hearts and minds. Fear of what might be lurking just around the corner. We wonder if there is any peace to be found? The apostle Paul reminds us that there is, for the Spirit of God works within us as believers to produce the peace of God.

“Peace” —*to bind together; tranquil serenity of heart which comes from knowing that our times are in the hands of God*

We think of peace as being the absence of war or conflict. But peace isn't so much the absence of problems as much as it is the presence of Jesus. We can be at peace even when the storm is raging around us. This peace is both a gift, a grace, as well as a goal.

Peace is a gift from God in Christ

On the night before He went to the cross, Jesus talked about peace. And it was not something external. Peace was a subject of conversation with His disciples there in the Upper Room. He gathered with them to keep the Passover and He mentioned peace multiple times. He said to them:

John 14:27—“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

John 16:33—“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Jesus said that it is only through Him that we can have true peace. It is peace that surpasses all human understanding which means it has no earthly explanation. This peace is a gift. It is the peace that comes from being right with God!

Romans 5:1 — “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That’s why the letters of the New Testament always begin with the greeting, “Grace and peace.” The order there is so very important. It doesn’t say peace and grace. No, before there can be an experience of peace, there must first of all be an experience of grace. Through His own death in the sinner’s place, Jesus took the hand of both man and God and made peace through the blood of His cross. It means that He reconciles us to God, so that those of us who were under wrath have now experienced His mercy. Ephesians 2:14 says that Jesus is our peace. Sin resulted in hostility between God and man. And because man is not right with God, the world is under a curse. Sin is the disruptive factor that makes you and me God’s enemies. The only way for the hostility to cease is for the wrath of God to be satisfied. That’s why the gospel is the greatest news the world could ever hear! The angels announced the news to the shepherds:

Luke 2:10-14 — “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

This news announced by heaven's angels means that the peace Jesus has come to bring was not peace in some ethereal sense. It is peace between a holy God and sinful man, peace toward those who accept the sacrifice of his perfect Passover Lamb. It means that through the grace of God and the gift of His Son, peace with God is available for sinners. And when you are truly at peace with God, you can then make peace with everybody else.

Colossians 1:19-20—“For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.”

I don't know, but you may or may not be familiar with the name Don Richardson. In 1955, he became a missionary to the primitive tribes of New Guinea. One of the tribes that he desperately wanted to reach with the gospel practiced cannibalism and head-hunting. He agonized over the question of how they could ever understand that a loving Savior had died to save them from their sins. As he became familiar with their practices, he discovered a key that he believed would lead to their understanding of the message. When the tribes would war among themselves, a strange ceremony would have to be followed if there was to be peace. The ceremony involved exchanging a young child from one village with a child from the other. The decision as to whose child would be exchanged was heart wrenching. Mothers clutched their children and hoped that theirs would not be selected. It was only when someone had the initiative to take his own child and rush toward the enemy camp to give his own son to his enemy that peace would come. In return, he would receive a child from the camp of the enemy. It was peace based on trust between two murderous tribes that believed it was only when a man gave his son he could be trusted. Richardson told the

story in a book entitled, “Peace Child.” Friend, peace is a gift from God which came at the steep price of His only Son.

Isaiah 9:6-7—“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end.”

The Prince of Peace is coming to reign and will one day blanket the earth with His peace. He will forever remove the curse of sin and death from creation, and those things which terrify and trouble our hearts will be no more. And He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and as God’s children you and I will live in the light of His peace for all eternity. It is in this hope that we now live, and the sweet peace of God is now ours to experience even in the midst of life’s most difficult struggles.

Peace is a grace produced by the Spirit

Peace is a gift, and it is also a grace. To experience God’s peace, the Bible says that our minds as Christians must be set on the Spirit.

Romans 8:5-6—“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. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Isaiah 26:3—“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”

The Holy Spirit works to produce the fruit of peace in our lives. If peace means to bring together, the opposite would be worry which speaks of a divided mind.

Worry pulls us apart. It is a recipe for internal conflict. That's why we are told to be anxious for nothing, but pray about everything.

Philippians 4:7—“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The Spirit of God produces the peace of God that 'guards' our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The word used there means 'garrison' so that the idea is God's peace acts as a guard at the door of your mind to provide security. When we pray and think and do as God has instructed us to, His peace then becomes the guard that is standing watch at the door and keeps anxiety from wreaking its havoc. This gives us an advantage as we deal with the pressures of the day. The storm may be raging around me, but my mind is fortified. For when we keep our eyes fixed on the promise of Jesus, our minds will be fortified by His peace. So that even in the midst of life's storms, there is a calm assurance that is ours. The hymn writer said it best:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, It is well, with my soul!*

The fruit of the Spirit is peace, and when we're looking in faith to the presence of Jesus rather in fear at the problems of life, we are mentally and spiritually fortified. Peace is a gift and grace. But then notice:

Peace is a goal in our relationships

As someone who is at peace with God through faith in the Lord Jesus, and as someone in whom the Holy Spirit is at work producing the fruit of peace, I ought

to be at peace in my relationships with other people. Peace should be the goal in a Christian's relationships.

Romans 12:17-18—“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Romans 14:19—“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”

Hebrews 12:14—“Strive for peace with everyone.”

We can have peace with God because Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins. We can have peace with ourselves because He removes the stain of guilt settles our troubled heart. And we can have peace with others because the fruit of the Spirit changes the way we relate to them. When a Christian is walking with God and keeping in step with the Spirit, their life will be set apart by the fruit of love, joy, and peace. And to be filled with God's Spirit is to be growing and increasing and abounding in this spiritual fruit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. Three virtues which are rooted in Christ. Do you want to know why I think love is at the head of the list? Because without love, these other virtues would not be possible. When the love of God is lacking in a person's life, they will be without joy and peace. They'll be impatient with people, unkind, harsh, and without self-control in their expression. But when the Holy Spirit is producing the love of Christ within our hearts, His joy will fill our soul, and His peace will be in control my mind. So this is the upward fruit of the Spirit. Next time, we will look at the outward fruit in our relationship to people—patience, kindness, goodness. Then, the inward fruit in relationship to self—faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Perhaps there are some of you who do not know the love, joy, and peace that is being described in Galatians 5:22. That is because you've never put your trust in Jesus Christ. Friend, let me encourage you to do so now while you have the opportunity. Today is the day of salvation! Don't put it off until tomorrow. Come right now to Jesus. And when you do, your sins will be forgiven and, through His Spirit, He will pour His love, joy, and peace into your heart and will transform your life. Your roots will go down deep, and your fruit will be abundant!