

*Christ in Us*  
*Part 1 – The Fruit of His Spirit*  
**Galatians 5:13-26**

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ April 12, 2026 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘

<sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. <sup>14</sup>For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup>If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

<sup>16</sup>Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

<sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup>envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup>By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. <sup>26</sup>Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:13-26, NRSV)

✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘

Love. Deep affection for others.

Joy. Sustained exuberance for life.

Peace. Unshakable serenity.

Patience. A willingness to always stick with things and people.

Kindness. Compassion that overflows to everybody you meet, regardless of how they treat you.

Generosity or goodness. You are always more than willing to give in sacrificial ways.

Faithfulness. You always keep your commitments; you say what you mean and do what you say.

Gentleness. You never force your way into things.

And self-control. You are always able to marshal and direct your energies wisely.<sup>1</sup>

Does that describe your life? Are these your most dominate characteristics? Do they describe not only what others see in your actions, but what others can't see in the motivations and affections of your heart? What would the people who know you best say about you? Is this how they would describe you? Would the Lord, who knows you better than you know yourself, describe you with this list?

I'd be surprised if any of us here would disagree that these are the qualities we most desire in our lives. Anybody here not want to be a person who loves, knows deep joy and peace, lives with faithfulness and generosity, and so on? Of course you do. We all do. I also think we understand that these are the qualities which most please the Lord. If you want to find favor with God, if you want to live in the way God created you to live, this is as good a description as any. Agreed?

Do you see the problem? How many of us actually live this way? Not just in fits and spurts, but live this way constantly, consistently? And so if this is the way we are *supposed* to live, the way we *desire* to live, the way the Lord *created us* to live, and yet not the way we are currently living, what's your plan to change? Do you have a plan to become a loving, joyful, peace-filled,

---

<sup>1</sup> I'm borrowing some of these descriptions from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this passage in *The Message*.

patient, kind, generous, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled person? And if you do, how's it going? Is your plan working?

Here's how I see it. I like to imagine my life is like a lump of playdough, and that any changes I make are permanent. You mold the dough in a certain way and it stays like that. I put in some effort on being more patient and then I become patient and I stay patient. I wish! No, my life is more like a rubber ball. I work on being patient and, for a time, I sustain some greater level of patience. But then something happens, and it all unravels. Like a rubber ball when I let go of it, my life just snaps back to the way it was before.<sup>2</sup>

Can anybody else here relate? Because so many of us *can* relate, we can so easily become discouraged and disillusioned. Maybe this sort of life described in these verses is simply out of reach, at least this side of heaven. Or maybe other people can change, but I'm somebody who just can't change. Maybe I'm not trying hard enough. Or maybe there are some secret Jedi life hacks I need to learn to help me effect real change in my life.

Let me give you some good news. I do believe that the Lord sets these characteristics before you because he desires to see them grow in increasing measure in *your* life. These qualities are not unattainable, or only attainable by the super-spiritual among us, whoever they are. This is a list of qualities that the Lord wants to see in ordinary Christians like you and me. The problem is, we have tragically misunderstood *his plan* for making that happen. And the letter of Galatians was written by Paul 2000 years ago to correct that misunderstanding, meaning that followers of Jesus have gotten this wrong ever since the beginning.

You see, in Paul's day people in the church had come to imagine that it was up to them to *make themselves* into people who could please God. In this particular context, Jewish Christians had become convinced that if they could follow the laws of the Torah then they could earn God's favor, justify their lives before God. But again, it wasn't just them. This idea of prideful self-reliance is deeply ingrained in all us. The English poet, William Henley, once declared what we all tend to believe, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."<sup>3</sup> Be honest, there is something in you that believes that the harder you try to live the right way, the more you will find favor with God, that his view of you somehow depends on your performance.

Paul could not be more emphatic when he declares, "Never! That is never how it works!" In Galatians 2:16 he flatly asserts, "**No one will be justified [before God] by the works of the law.**"<sup>4</sup> In other words, nobody can ever generate these qualities in themselves to the point of God's satisfaction. To think otherwise is to distort the Christian gospel beyond recognition. Earlier in the letter he calls this idea a *false* gospel, and declare that anybody who teaches it as the truth is under God's curse.<sup>5</sup>

So what's the true gospel? I hope you know it. Paul expresses it most succinctly in Galatians 2:16, "**Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.**"<sup>6</sup> Jesus, the eternal Son of God, took on our humanity and lived the sort of life you and I will never even come close to living, a life that pleased his Father in every single aspect. And yet, instead of inheriting the reward he deserved, he took the punishment we deserve when he went to the cross and then to the grave. In doing so, he achieved not only the forgiveness of our sin (i.e. our utter failure to live as God made us to live), but also achieved for us the life of God, eternal and abundant. This is all grace, in no way deserved or achieved by us. And all you and I need to do to receive this priceless gift is to place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. This is, and has always been, the true gospel. We cannot justify ourselves before God. We are justified, however, by grace through faith in Christ alone! Amen?

The thing is, when Paul presented this true gospel to the people of his day, here's how twisted their thinking had become. They reasoned that if God has indeed forgiven us for *all* our sin, that means that we can just go out and live life however we want, and in the end God will forgive us. It was a license to sin! It's this distorted thinking that Paul is addressing in the beginning of our passage today when he writes, "**Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence!**" To do so is a horrendous cheapening of the gospel, and indicates that the person who thinks this way has no idea of the priceless gift he or she has received from Christ.

Think about it, how could you imagine that the Lord has saved you from eternal death and condemnation to eternal life and unshakable favor, receive this gift, and then choose to turn around and continue to live a life that dishonors the Lord? You can't. That's why the

<sup>2</sup> I'm borrowing and adapting an analogy here from Tim Keller, "Love and the Fruit of the Spirit," *Gospel in Life*, April 11, 2010. Listen online at <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/love-and-the-fruit-of-the-spirit/>

<sup>3</sup> Cited by M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey* (InterVarsity Press, 2016), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, this and all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>5</sup> See Galatians 1:6-9

<sup>6</sup> NIV

New Testament is consistently clear that if you claim to have trusted Jesus, but then continue to willfully and blatantly disregard the teachings of Jesus, you never really trusted Jesus in the first place. You cannot receive God's grace and remain unchanged by it.

1<sup>st</sup> John 3:6 puts it succinctly: **“No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.”**<sup>7</sup> Now, of course, John isn't saying here that Christians never sin. Of course we do. So he's not referring here to the person who continues to struggle against sin, but rather the person who thoughtlessly embraces habitual and unchecked sinful attitudes and habits. That person has never come to know or trust Christ in the first place. It was supposedly Martin Luther who first said, “We are saved by faith alone, but not by faith that remains alone.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus loves us *so much* that he saves us just as we are, but also loves us *too much* to want to leave us that way. And so as we trust him, we will agree with him that massive renovations in our lives are long overdue.

I hope you agree that once you are saved, forgiven and justified before God by grace, he now wants you to begin to live the sort of life described by these characteristics of love, joy, peace, and so on. So how does that happen? That's the million dollar question, right? Now that we are Christians, can we just start being these kinds of people? No. At least not on our own. In fact, we have no more ability in ourselves to live rightly before God than we do to earn his forgiveness for failing to do so. In other words, we need God's grace not only to be forgiven for our sin, but also to start living lives that are not stuck in sin. Thankfully, the Christian gospel boldly declares that God's grace is sufficient for both, and not only for the super-spiritual among us but for ordinary followers of Jesus like you and me. By God's grace, *you* can increasingly become this sort of person. In fact, it is God's plan that you do.

But let me point out something that many people miss in this famous passage about the fruit of the Spirit. What spirit is Paul referring to here? Your spirit? No. The Holy Spirit? Or, said another way, the Spirit of Christ. These are not characteristics that describe you and me. I think we already agreed on that. Who do they describe? They describe Jesus. This is not a to-do list given to us by God.<sup>9</sup> This is instead a declaration of what Jesus is like. Agreed? And it's not given here as an example to follow, as if Paul is writing to tell us,

“Okay, this is how Jesus lived, now you go out and follow his example.” Absolutely not! That's just falling back into that same false gospel. We can't live like this on our own effort or goodness. I've tried. I can't do it. It's not sustainable. The rubber ball always eventually snaps back to form. And the same is true for you.

Here's what we need to see. When you come to place your faith in Jesus, the one who died but rose again from the dead, then the risen Christ, through the Holy Spirit, literally comes to live in you supernaturally. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in your life. But the Spirit is there not only to be *with* you, but also to *transform you* from the inside out. This is why Paul can famously declare in Galatians 2:20 about himself, **“It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”** He's not speaking metaphorically, but literally. Like a hand which animates and empowers a glove, Christ is in us to animate and empower us. And just like a glove does whatever the hand within it does, our lives similarly begin to reflect the one who is at work within us. The fruit of Christ's Spirit becomes the fruit of our spirit!

Notice something. Fruit here is not plural, but singular. It's not the *fruits* of the Spirit, but the *fruit* of the Spirit. This is a subtle affirmation of what I just said. You see, these aren't nine different fruits that you go out and collect from nine different orchards. This is the collective fruit coming from one source, specifically one person, Christ. I've heard it described this way. These aren't nine different jewels that are mined from different places, but one radiant jewel with nine brilliant facets.<sup>10</sup> That means that as Christ forms one of these characteristics in us, he forms *all* of these characteristics in us symmetrically.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it's not so much that these *characteristics* are formed in us, but *Christ* who is formed in us, who has these characteristics. All that belongs to Christ now belongs to us, not only his favor before his Father, but also the life he lives which pleases God. And this doesn't matter who you are, where you have been, or what you have done. Because none of this depends on you. It's not your character, but Christ's character. You're not forming it in yourself; he is forming himself in you! It's all grace.

Now granted, this transformation is not quick and easy. In fact, the Bible describes this process as a war, and war, as we have recently been reminded, is never quick and easy. In this passage Paul characterizes this as a war between what he calls the desires of the flesh and

<sup>7</sup> See also Jesus' teaching in places like Matthew 7:21-23 and Matthew 7:15-20.

<sup>8</sup> Claims on the origin of this statement are disputed. Either way, it certainly captures the heart of Luther's teaching on salvation.

<sup>9</sup> I'm borrowing this idea from Jonathan Landry Cruse, *The Character of Christ* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2023), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Cruse, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards once wrote, “There is a concatenation [i.e. interconnectedness] of the graces of Christianity.” Cited by Timothy Keller, *Galatians for You* (The Good Book Company, 2013), 152.

the desires of the Spirit. On the one hand, the desires of the flesh are the ways we live naturally because our nature has been corrupted by sin, so corrupted it's in our bones. In verse 17 Paul says, **“For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.”** Don't you feel this war within you? You know the way God wants you to live. Since you've come to know Jesus it's actually become the way *you want to live!* And yet there are powerful forces within you, instincts and habits and tendencies, which keep pulling you in the other direction. Paul gives a long list here of these sinful actions and attitudes in verses 19-21, and says that they are obvious. And they all are absolutely opposed to what the Spirit of Christ wants to see in your life, enmity opposed to love, rage opposed to peace, envy and jealousy opposed to kindness and generosity, and so on. It's a war.<sup>12</sup>

Now, Paul uses agricultural imagery rather than militaristic imagery here to make his point. But as any farmer or gardener knows, it's still a war he's talking about. My lawn looks fantastic right now, as good as it has ever looked. I just reseeded a few weeks ago. It's been raining some, and when it hasn't been I've been watering. It's green and full and I'm hoping the envy of my neighbors. And none of it will last. I know from experience that the enemy is planning a sneak attack, already covertly at work beneath the surface. Clover, and crabgrass, and chickweed. Pure evil. And if I let down my guard, it won't be long before these enemies come back with a vengeance. In fact, if I just let things just take their natural course, in a season or two my entire lawn will be all weeds. It's a war, and there can be no let up.

It really is no different with my life. Left on my own, the “weeds” Paul describes here, which he calls the “works of the flesh,” are what will always naturally grow up in my life and eventually take over. But the Spirit of Christ in me wants to see something entirely different produced, and this is not just behavior modification or restraint, but a complete destruction of the sinful nature within me. That's why Paul says in verse 24 that, **“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”** You don't just want to snip off the top of the weeds; you want to rip them out at the roots. The sinful nature in us is not something the Spirit wants only to see restrained, but something the Spirit wants to see crucified. In this battle there is no truce, no peace

negotiations, no surrender. When the Spirit captures the flesh, it does not hold the flesh prisoner, but puts it to death, and not just any death, but the brutal death that is death on a cross.<sup>13</sup>

Think about it this way. Going back to the orchard, why do peaches grow on a peach tree? It's not a trick question. It's because the tree, at it's very essence, is a peach tree. Even Jesus once stated the obvious, **“You will know [people] by their fruits...In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.”**<sup>14</sup> In other words, you can't tie peaches onto an orange tree and pretend it's now become a peach tree. The fruit doesn't give life to the tree; it's the tree that gives life to the fruit! So Paul is not just describing an external transformation here, but a deep transformation at the roots of who we are. Because if the roots are transformed, the fruit will eventually give evidence that this is the case. Again, the weeds can't just be covered up or beaten back, but totally exterminated.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus' aim in your life is not only to get you to act loving on the outside while love is nowhere to be found in your heart. His goal is to make your heart full of his love so that love is what is naturally produced in your actions. You see the difference? Paul gets at this in that famous passage in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 where he says that the person who speaks like an angel, and prophesies with great power, and gives away all his possession to the poor, and demonstrates remarkable faith and knowledge in the Christian life, but does not have love at the core of who he is, that person is nothing and gains nothing.<sup>16</sup> In this war, the Spirit will not rest until Christ is formed in us all the way to the roots. And again, this is not something we can do for ourselves. This is Christ forming himself in us, his character, by grace, shaping our character.

But notice something, when Paul talks about the sinful flesh being crucified, he says that it's those who belong to Christ *who are the ones doing the crucifying*. And in the next verse he says, **“If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”** In other words, though it is Christ alone who provides the grace to bring about this transformation in us, our role is not purely passive. Dependent, yes, absolutely! But not passive. In the same way a farmer *cannot make* peaches come out of his peach tree, there are nonetheless things he *can do* to help promote that growth. Writer Richard Lovelace captures this well when he says, “It is true that any contest against sin in our lives must be a dependent

<sup>12</sup> Read how Paul described this war within himself in Romans 7:14-25.

<sup>13</sup> I'm indebted here to Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians* (P&R Publishing, 2005), 236.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 7:16-17

<sup>15</sup> Keller, *Galatians for You*, 152.

<sup>16</sup> See specifically 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:1-3.

striving [i.e. grace is essential!], but it must be a full and continuous engagement of the will nevertheless.”<sup>17</sup>

At other places in his letters Paul uses phrases like “press on” and “strain towards” and “train yourself” when he talks about the Christian life and seeing this fruit of the Spirit emerge in our lives.<sup>18</sup> In that famous passage from Philippians 2 he calls us to, “**continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.**”<sup>19</sup> Do you see tension here? Yes, it is absolutely God who is at work within us to form us in Christ, but we are to cooperate in seeing his salvation worked out in our whole lives, and that cooperation at times may lead to fear and trembling. In other words, it’s not easy!<sup>20</sup>

Verse 25 instructs us to be “guided by the Spirit.” Some translations say, “**Let us keep in step with the Spirit.**”<sup>21</sup> I think that’s a better translation, because the Greek word translated “guided” was actually a military term, used in those days to describe how soldiers would march in formation.<sup>22</sup> Some of you have done this in the military, so you know that when you are marching in formation the only thing you have to focus on is keeping in step. You don’t have to worry about where you are going, how you will get there, or how fast or slow you need to go as you do. All you need to do is keep focused on your commanding officer, follow whatever orders are given, and then pay attention to the fellow soldiers marching alongside you so that you stay in sync with them.<sup>23</sup>

What a beautiful picture of the Christian life. We never walk it alone. The Holy Spirit of Christ is always our guide, not only with us but *within* us. And our brothers and sisters in the church are always right beside us. This isn’t a competition – Paul stresses that in the final verse – but a commitment as a church to keep our eyes on Christ, and to do so together. Part of this simply means staying committed together to the ordinary practices he gives us in life where we find that he meets us and helps us grow in grace together: the reading and preaching of the scriptures, a commitment to prayer, never neglecting to gather regularly for worship, the celebration of the sacraments, giving sacrificially, honoring the sabbath, and so on.<sup>24</sup>

As we do so, cooperating with the work of the Spirit within us, we will begin to see the fruit of the Spirit

emerge in our lives, Christ formed in us by grace. But just like literal fruit, you can never watch the fruit of the Spirit grow. I can stand and stare at our peach tree all day long and I will never see the fruit grow. But it is growing. And over time it can be measured. It’s no different in the spiritual life. As François Fénelon, the French theologian once put it, “God hides his work, in the spiritual order as in the natural order, under an unnoticeable sequence of events.”<sup>25</sup> You were never a patient person before, but at some point you notice that without realizing it was happening to you, you have come to enjoy a level of patience that you never thought possible, a patience that seems to come from somewhere else because it does come from somewhere else, specifically from *someone* else. You eventually discover a generosity in yourself that at one time would have seemed forced or pretend, but now somehow seems natural. Yes, the progress is often far slower than we would like, but it is progress nonetheless, and we should help one another not grow discouraged along the way.

I may have told you before the story about how Ruth Bell Graham, the wife of evangelist Billy Graham, was driving down the highway one day and saw this very common road sign: “Under Construction. Thank you for your patience.” For some reason, that day the message caught her attention, so much so that she decided right then and there that those words so accurately described the journey of her Christian life that she wanted them etched on her tombstone one day. After she died, her family honored her request.

Over the course of the next nine weeks we will look more closely at each aspect of this fruit of Christ’s Spirit, beginning with love and ending with self-control. Not only will we see how these characteristics are beautifully embodied in Christ, but we will also explore how he is, even now, forming them in us as we keep in step with the Spirit and with one another, cooperating with his desire to form himself in us over time. As we do, keep in mind this truth that remains etched in stone, that though this work of Christ being formed in each of us along the way so often seems so slow, and requires patience both from ourselves and others, there will come a day when we will see that work completed. And on that day, because all the work in us will have been done by Christ, all the glory, all the praise, all the honor will go to him and to him alone. Amen.

<sup>17</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of the Spiritual Life* (InterVarsity Press, 1979), page unknown.

<sup>18</sup> See Philippians 2:12-14 & 1st Timothy 4:7.

<sup>19</sup> Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV).

<sup>20</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Fruitful Life* (NavPress, 2006), 8.

<sup>21</sup> NIV

<sup>22</sup> <https://biblehub.com/greek/4748.htm>

<sup>23</sup> I’m indebted here to Ryken, 239-240

<sup>24</sup> We describe these things as our Congregational Rule of Life. Read about these practices on our website at <https://faithpresby.org/grow/practices>, where you can also find tools to help you engage.

<sup>25</sup> Cited by Mulholland, 26.



### The Next Step

#### *A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application*

1. Read Galatians 5:13-26 again. There's a lot here. What stands out to you?
2. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Is this an accurate description of your life today, of your character? Why or why not?
3. To this point, what has been your plan (if you've had one) when it comes to becoming the sort of person who embodies these characteristics, a person more like Jesus?
4. What do you think Paul means when he says in Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." And then later in Galatians 4:19 he says this to the church to which he is writing, "**My little children, for whom I am**

**again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...**" Christ in us? Christ formed in us? What is this all about?

5. Consider the claim that there is a war going on inside of you between the desires of your flesh and the desires of the Spirit. Do you agree? How do you experience this battle?
6. Examine your own life. How do you see the fruit of the Spirit growing in you over time?
7. What is one way that you recognize that you might better "keep in step" with the Spirit and with others around you in the church? Be as specific as you can.
8. If somebody asked you, "So how do I become the sort of person described by the fruit of the Spirit?" what would you tell them?

#### **Table to Table: Something for kids and adults to consider together.**



*Read Galatians 5:22-23. Talk together about each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. What does each one look like? How do we see these in Jesus?*