

*The Spirit's Harvest*

**Galatians 5:13-26**

John Breon

A son of Alexander the Great performed cowardly in battle. He was brought before his father, who didn't recognize him having been off conquering the world as the boy grew up. The cowardly deed was reviewed. The great general asked, "What is your name?"

"A ... Al ... Alexander, sir."

"What did you say?"

"Al ... Alexander, sir."

Grabbing him by the shoulders, Alexander the Great said, "Change your character or change your name!" (Lloyd Ogilvie, *The Radiance of the Inner Splendor* 125-26).

We're looking today at how we who bear Christ's name can receive Christ's character. This has to do with the process of growing in grace, sanctification. This is character formation. We sometimes call it spiritual formation.

It's not just about our individual lives. Paul is writing to a community of faith, actually probably several churches. So this is about how the church can manifest the character of Christ. Now, of course each of us needs to enter and live in this community of God's Spirit.

Paul says, "You are free in Christ. Don't use that freedom to indulge the flesh, but do the duty of a slave for one another in love" (v 13).

Then he says, walk by the Spirit and you won't gratify the desires of the flesh. There are two ways to live, two alignments we can choose. We can live according to the flesh or we can live according to the Holy Spirit.

As human beings we are in the flesh. By "flesh" Paul doesn't mean just our bodies or some isolated part of us. He uses the term "flesh" to refer to our total humanity in its weakness and frailty apart from God's grace. Flesh is a domain or realm of power and influence. Flesh isn't sin, but it's where sin operates.

As long as we are in the flesh—in this present world—the flesh will try to rule our lives. Weak human nature, invaded by sin, continues to try to be

the ruling force in our lives. But Paul says we don't have to give in to that. There's another way to live: according to the Holy Spirit. There will always be conflict here, but we can choose which power we yield to.

Then Paul contrasts these two ways of life. If we live according to the flesh, if we yield to that influence, a variety of works or acts results. Paul gives a random sample of fifteen here. These are behaviors and attitudes that characterized the Galatians' former life before Christ and still characterized the lives of their pagan neighbors. It's not an exhaustive list. It simply represents the flesh-works. Notice how he concludes with "and the like" (v 21). More than half of the works he lists here have to do with wrecking community (hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy). He really wants to protect their community from being split. He wants them not to bite and devour, provoke and envy each other (vv 15, 26).

God deals with the flesh through crucifixion. In verse 24 Paul says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." This involves our will. We choose to allow our sinful and self-centered desires to die. Baptism is a great example of this. In baptism, we identify with Jesus in his death and resurrection. Then we live out our baptism by regularly choosing to die and rise with Christ spiritually. All of this is made possible by the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us to walk by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and keep in step with the Spirit (vv. 16, 18, 25).

When we yield to God's Spirit as the dominant influence in our lives, when we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us, we act in ways consistent with the Holy Spirit's life in us. We're called to do this all together and individually.

Life in the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit. It's interesting that Paul uses the singular—*fruit* of the Spirit—in contrast to the plural—*works* of the flesh. Life according to the flesh is pulled apart in many directions, fragmented, and full of conflict. Life according to the Holy Spirit is integrated around Christ. It brings us together. We have a center and focus for our lives, for our church, in the love of Christ.

Let's take a closer look at the fruit of the Spirit. The New English Bible translates this, "The harvest of the Spirit."

As we're rooted in Christ, his life grows in us and is expressed through us. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus lives in us and through us. His character is produced in us. Paul says in 4:19 that he's in agony for the Galatians, "until Christ is formed in you." The fruit of the Spirit describes Jesus. And it describes us as we become more like him. As we open our lives more and more to Jesus, as we yield to his influence, we become more like him.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a story called *The Great Stone Face*. Above a valley was a mountain with a rock formation that looked like a gentle and wise face. That rock formation actually was in New Hampshire and was pictured on their state quarter. It collapsed some years ago. But when Hawthorne lived there, it was a major landmark. In his story there was a town in the valley where a little boy named Earnest lived. He heard the legend that someday a person born in the valley would look just like the Great Stone Face and would embody the noble character that the face seemed to represent.

As Earnest grew up he studied the face and meditated on it. He lived simply and humbly. He eventually became famous for his wisdom. One day as he was speaking to a group, they recognized that Earnest himself was the likeness of the Great Stone Face. But Earnest went on home, hoping that someone wiser and better than himself would appear who resembled the Great Stone Face.

As we look to Jesus, get to know him, consider him, open ourselves to his influence through the Holy Spirit, we begin to resemble him. People will see him in us.

This list of the Spirit's fruit helps us evaluate our walk in the Spirit and our life as a community of the Spirit. Like the list of the flesh's works, this one isn't exhaustive. Again, note how Paul mentions "such things" at the conclusion (v 23). This list represents the kind of character the Holy Spirit wants to produce in us. This sample of fruit gives us a good sense of the kind of life the Spirit produces. Are these qualities being produced in our lives? Do they characterize us? Does our church look like this?

The fruit of the Spirit reminds us who we are. In times of temptation, I find it helpful to recall the fruit of the Spirit and choose it instead of things

that are inconsistent with Christ's character. I ask God to fill me with this fruit. I pray for this fruit to abound in our church.

As we determine each day to die with Christ and to receive new life from him, the fruit of the Spirit will grow in our lives.

The fruit of the Spirit is *love*. Love *is* the fruit. All these other qualities grow out of love and are expressions of it. Love not only sums up the law, it also sums up all true spirituality. There's a lot of confusion in our world about what love is. The love mentioned here is that specifically Christian love, *agape*. This is God's love that desires the highest good for the loved one, that gives itself away and expects nothing in return, that says our being good has nothing to do with how God loves us.

Another New Testament writer, John, helps us recognize this love:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

I read about a teacher who was celebrating her eightieth birthday. Many of her former students came to the celebration. She had taught school in one of the worst sections of Baltimore. Before she came to that school to teach, there had been repeated instances of crime in the school. After she began her work, there came a change. In time the change became noticeable as so many of her students turned out to be good citizens, men and women of good character. Some became doctors, others lawyers, educators, ministers, craftsmen, and technicians.

A newspaper sent a reporter to interview her at the party. He asked what her secret was that made her teaching so rewarding. She said, "Oh, I

don't know. When I look at the young teachers in our schools today, so well-equipped with training and learning, I realize I was ill-prepared to teach. I had nothing to give but love" (*Illustrations Unlimited* 316).

*Joy* flows out of this love. The Holy Spirit gives us joy and it becomes the condition of our heart when we're confident in our relationship with Christ. Joy is the language of celebration and worship because we have confidence that God is with us. We rejoice in the Lord as a sign of our trust in him. This joy of the Lord is our strength. Joy produces energy.

After a dinner party, a woman said to her family, "I've got the Joy, let's get to work!" She was talking about dishwashing liquid and cleaning up after dinner. But that's a good motto for us. Joy flows from trust and obedience and gives strength for more trust and obedience. God gives us joy—let's get to work! (Ogilvie 51)

*Peace* is next on the list. Peace speaks of harmony and well-being. It's peace with God, a right relationship with God. And it's the serenity of mind that flows from that relationship. This peace expresses itself in harmony and unity with each other.

*Patience.* In the NT this word often refers to the attitude of God or Jesus toward people. Sometimes it's translated *forbearance* or *long-suffering*. It's a long temper instead of a short temper. This is a relationship word. We're called to be forbearing with each other, to suffer long with each other as God suffers long with us.

*Kindness.* This word elsewhere describes old wine as *mellow*. When Jesus says that his yoke is "easy," this is the word used. Christ's yoke doesn't chafe or irritate; it fits, it's easy. This suggests a style of relationship, a way of being with others as Christ is with us. We make the way easier for each other as we are yoked together.

Jesus showed this kindness and mercy to people who were rejected by society: touching lepers, eating with Zacchaeus, showing kindness to the sinful woman who anointed his feet, dealing graciously with the woman caught committing adultery. The word often describes God's kindness toward those who don't deserve it.

A third grade boy was sitting at his desk when something unexpected happened: he wet his pants. There was a big dark stain all

across the front of his jeans. The teacher was walking toward him. Some other students were walking around. He was about to be discovered and humiliated. Just then, a girl in the class came walking by carrying the fish bowl. She looked at the boy then stumbled and fell, dumping the fish bowl right in his lap. Immediately the boy jumped up and the other kids gathered around. Some rescued the fish. Some yelled at the girl: "What a klutz!" The boy became a hero. People helped him get cleaned up. The teacher sent for some gym clothes for him to wear while his jeans got dried in the boiler room. He was about to become a laughingstock, but he became a hero. The girl took on herself the shame and humiliation that should have been his.

After school, he was on his way to the bus and saw the girl standing by herself. He walked over to her and said, "You did that on purpose, didn't you?" She whispered, "I wet my pants once too" (I first heard this story from Bob Tuttle).

That's the kindness of God in Jesus Christ.

*Goodness.* Where kindness is a *comforting* quality, goodness is a *confronting* one. The meaning is "good for something." It's goodness with a purpose, "righteousness informed by love" (A. M. Hunter, *The Laymen's Bible Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* 39). This goodness challenges the evil or apathy it encounters—like Jesus pronouncing "woes" on scribes and Pharisees or clearing the temple of moneychangers and merchants.

*Faithfulness.* This includes faith—when we respond to God in Jesus Christ with trust. This part of the Spirit's fruit also speaks of fidelity and reliability and staying. Faithfulness means staying in covenant with God and each other. One who is faithful can be depended on. We can be faithful because we trust God's faithfulness. Remember, this is fruit. It's not something we pump up or produce on our own. It's a quality of Christ's life expressed in us. May God's faithfulness inspire us to be faithful.

*Gentleness* includes the idea of meekness and it describes an animal that's been tamed. We submit to God's will. Meek or gentle people know their strength and submit it to Christ in a ministry of love and caring for others. "Serve one another in love" (v 13). This word also means teachable.

We're humble enough to learn from God and others. And we treat each other gently, tenderly, with respect and consideration.

*Self-Control* seems to flow out of gentleness. This is God giving us power to overcome those flesh works listed earlier. Our desires don't have to rule us. We don't have to do everything we want to do. Our reason, commitment, and love can govern our desires. God enables us to be truly ourselves when we yield to him. We have power over ourselves only as we submit to the Holy Spirit's control and power in us. Christ-control is the basis of self-control (Ogilvie 135).

We need to give the Holy Spirit the climate and environment to grow this fruit in our lives and in our life together as the church. The fruit of the Spirit grows in the garden of commitment, trust, and obedience. We'll spend the next few weeks looking at ways we can be open to the Spirit, practices we can engage in that help us grow.

A priest in New York noticed a young man coming in and kneeling for about fifteen minutes each morning. One day he asked him what he was doing. The young man said, "I pray and say, 'Jesus, here's James.'" The priest said, "That doesn't take fifteen minutes." James said, "Then I wait until I hear him say, 'James, here's Jesus.'"

Will you put your name there and say, "Jesus, here's \_\_\_\_\_"? Will you wait on him and by faith hear him call your name: "\_\_\_\_\_, here's Jesus"? As we get to know him, his Spirit will help us resemble him more and more.