

January 12, 2025
Being Fruitful
Galatians 5:22-23

Intro:

The church in Galatia has a problem ... not a problem that is isolated to just that church, but it is the church that Paul is writing to in the book of Galatians, and so we say that they have a problem. The problem is that there is a division of thought on how Christians are to behave, or maybe a better way of looking at it is figuring out what the rules are.

When Paul established the church in Galatia, he did so by preaching about Jesus Christ, and the people came to faith in Christ. It was mostly that simple. Christ was central, and everything else in a person's life was to be reframed by the new reality of their new faith.

Now, if that was the way things had stayed, then Paul wouldn't have needed to write the letter. Since we have this letter before us, we can assume that something went off track somewhere along the way.

Let's leave this train of thought for just a moment.

This morning, I am beginning a new sermon series focusing on Galatians 5:22-23, which most people know as the "Fruit of the Spirit" passage. We can probably all recite the 9 traits listed by Paul: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. I don't think anyone here would dispute that these are all admirable qualities for a person, for a Christian, to possess. Often, we see them as a list of virtues that act as a counter to the list of vices found just a few verses earlier in Gal 5:19-21. As we work through this sermon series, exploring and expanding on each one, we will find that they are not simply just a list for balance. There much more to them and to Paul's inclusion of them in his letter to the Galatians.

I would like to also point out that much of my thinking on these verses is being influenced by Christopher Wright's book: [Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness.](#)

As familiar as we are with this passage, we often stop paying attention after we have gotten through the list, and don't give much time to what Paul says immediately after. And so, this morning we are going to start this series not with the first fruit, as it were – although I will hope to re-frame our understanding of these being separate fruits, but with the end, the part of the verse that says, "There is no law against these things!"

There is no law:

I can appreciate how most of us would dismiss that sentence of Paul's. After all, how can a person reasonably expect a law to be in opposition to the good things that Paul has listed? Imagine the short-lived law enforcement career of the police officer who walks up to and arrests you for showing undue kindness. It is a bit ridiculous. So why does Paul set these things up against the law?

Now we come back to the problem in the church in Galatia, and honestly still in churches today. Somewhere along the way, the "simple" message of faith in Christ that the early Christians in Galatia had received was being complicated by the imposition of rules to be followed. Someone, possibly Jewish and maybe a Pharisee, converted to Christianity, then went around and taught that the only way to truly be a child of God, a follower of Jesus, was to obey the law of Moses. This would include, among other things, the requirement of circumcision for all the Gentile believers, and strict adherence to following and observing the festivals. Paul had spoken out against such teaching at the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, and he speaks out against it again in Gal 3.

In spite of what had happened in Jerusalem, it is clear that there were strong voices in the early church advocating for the importance of being legalistic. They claimed that following the letter of the law was how a person should prove that he was a follower of Jesus. This is the legalism side of the division in the church.

There is another side, however. On the other end of the spectrum are the people who were teaching the exact opposite, that the law is entirely no longer needed and should be completely thrown out. This is the side of moral license, meaning that in Christ people are free to do whatever they want to because there is freedom in Christ. To this side Paul also says no. Doing whatever we want to is not what freedom in Christ means. When Christians adopt that posture, it doesn't lead to an enlightened faith, but rather to a slide back into a pre-Christ life of sin. The only difference is the presumption that the grace of Christ will make it all right in the end. This is what Paul is speaking out against when he speaks against those who would allow themselves to fall back into their old, pre-Christ lives. We find this in Galatians 5:16-21.

We still have the same polar extremes in the church today. There are many churches and Christians out there who believe that following the rules of being a Christian is all that matters. Growing in faith is replaced by following a hierarchy of rules of "goodness" that is based on being religious and not on a deepening relationship to Jesus. On this side are the Christians and churches who have set themselves in opposition to the legalistic churches. Rather than having rules to guide behaviour and what is acceptable, they leave it all up their own consciences and decisions. "No one can tell me how I am supposed to behave." The concept of freedom on this side goes beyond the freedom from being a slave to sin to almost being the freedom to define what Christianity is for one's own convenience.

For Paul, it is not a choice of one or the other ideas about the law. It is neither. For Paul the issue of faith is not about following or not following the rules. It is about the working presence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. We need to ask, "Are we in Christ, and is He in us?"

Conclusion:

At the beginning of his book, Christopher Wright recalls that the well-known pastor and theologian, John Stott, would pray this prayer every day:

“Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more.

Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.

Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”¹

The Christian life is one that is infused and led by the Holy Spirit. The evidence of this infusion in our lives is the presence of the traits Paul listed, which have become known as the Fruit of the Spirit. It is not a rule, nor is it a rejection of a rule. It is the new life that is growing in us. It is the external evidence of the transformation that is happening daily as we allow Jesus to more fully indwell us as believers.

And all the fruits go together; we don’t pick and choose. The word “fruit” in this context is not plural. The fruit is a singular fruit. The Fruit of the Spirit – those nine things, are all part of the same fruit of evidence of our faith in Christ. Wright suggests we think of it not as a bunch of grapes, but as an orange where the segments are all part of the same fruit. We don’t get to say, “I’m not really good at being kind, but my self-control is off the charts.” Self-control need kindness, which needs patience, which needs goodness, which needs joy, which needs... well you get the picture. And so, Stott prayed for all pieces to come together as a ripe piece of fruit in his life. I hope that as we spend the next 9 weeks immersed in this passage that you will seek the same.

Let’s Pray.

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of The Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 13.