

## Galatians 5:1, 13-25

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

<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.

“The Fruit of the Spirit” – Andy Wing, 2.7.10

As you may know Galatians, where our reading comes from today is a letter. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to a church in Galatia, Asia because he had heard that the people were not getting along, but were arguing and fighting over what rituals they should keep in their religious services. Specifically, there were those who were chastising and alienating other Christians because they weren't circumcised. It was becoming an ugly situation.

So, Paul writes a letter to the Galatians and says don't let these people force you to adhere to ritual requirements. Christ died for you so that you could be free from those kind of requirements.

Do you remember the last time you got in an argument? You know nobody really wins an argument. Human beings are fussy. This letter is not the only letter in Bible written to churches. We have Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. All of these were written because people could not get along in one way or another and Paul as a ambassador of Jesus Christ has something to say about that. Years after Paul died, the next church leaders continued to write letters to these fussy churches. The Corinthians got a letter from the church leader Clement, because even after a letter from Paul, they still couldn't get along. But we have the same problem. How many times have you heard the words, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is at least the third time it's in the bible. We all know that we should love our neighbor. The love our neighbor sermon has been preached many times. Jesus calls us to love our neighbor, our neighbors need love, therefore we should love our neighbor. But, you can see how people are rarely moved to actually do anything just because they are told to love their neighbor. Even after hearing all those sermons, don't we still have an impossible time loving those who are difficult to love? We know we ought to. God is pretty clear about that. How do you make yourself love someone? Can you make yourself love your neighbor as yourself? It seems like an impossible command for us.

But, Paul talks about the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Live by the Spirit....what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit....we are to be led by the Spirit. If you examine your own life, you know how impossible it is to love those who are hard to love. We are just as guilty the Galatians of stepping on the toes of our neighbor. We also know how bad the consequences can be when we don't love our neighbor. We live in a very competitive world where people bite and devour one another as Verse 15 says. Paul warns us "if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." If you don't love your neighbor and handle disagreements with love, if you let it eat at you, the bitterness and anger will take a negative hold on your life. Have you seen the effects that can have on someone who just can't let it go?

But Paul sees a much better way for us to live. Live by the Spirit. What the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh. The flesh is the natural way that human beings compete with each other in selfish ways. Paul names the works of flesh. He names some that are sins against the seventh commandment, such as *adultery*,

*fornication, impurity, licentiousness.* All having to do with committing an adultery of some kind or another. He names others *idolatry and witchcraft*, which are sins against the first and second commandments, to love the Lord God with our hearts. Idolatry is an adultery against God. Others are sins against our neighbour, and contrary to the royal law of brotherly love, such as *strife, jealousy, quarrels dissensions, factions, enmities, anger.* People get hurt so badly through these. Others are sins against ourselves, such as *drunkenness and carousing.* The list of works of the flesh is not exhaustive. Paul could go on as he says and “and things like these.” Paul sees a better way. When we live by the Spirit, we will exhibit this fruit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit is the harvest that comes from a daily life spent with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God sent in and among us that causes a change in peoples’ lives.

When the spirit changes someone, it shows in a growth in their character, they show the fruit. Christians are a certain kind of tree and we ought to expect to see this fruit. Think about the fruit that grows in the wild or in an orchard. The fruit grows, and the people come around, and the animals come around and they pick the fruit. And they enjoy the fruit because it is delicious to the taste. They see it and they know that fruit. They recognize that fruit and they know it’s going to be delicious. And the animals look and they see an apple tree and they want the delicious apple. Are people coming around to pick your fruit because they like what they see?

Are you joyful? When the bible talks about joyfulness, it’s talking about a state of being. You may say to God, I’m not happy because of the situation I am in right now. But let me tell about the tree. A tree is preparing daily to produce fruit. The water comes and the roots drink it up. The roots take in the nutrients of the soil they are planted in. Where you are planted is in the presence of God. God is working in you to nurture you. That is your soil. If you are trying to derive your happiness from your circumstances, it’s no wonder you are not getting nourishment. You’re looking in the wrong place. You are starving for the Holy Spirit. You need to put your roots out and take in the Holy Spirit. Do you remember from the book of Acts how Paul and Silas were in prison where they had

been whipped? Do you remember what they did? They started singing so loud the jailer heard them singing. Their joy came from outside of their circumstances. We cannot do life without the ability to grieve. And if we don't grieve when bad things happen to us, there is something with us. But, what I am saying is God must take the ultimate place in our lives. And if we put God in the place of our ultimate concern, God will fill us up with the Holy Spirit and we will bear the fruit of spirit.

Do you ever get angry because you aren't getting your way? Do you find that you just can't wait for what you want? Do you find yourself wishing you had more patience? The only way you will ever learn patience is by learning how to deal with not getting what you want.

Think again about how the fruit grown by a tree can feed people and wildlife. "From ancient times to today, abundant fruit from an orchard is seen as cause for hope and celebration." The growth of fruit on a tree is good for all, not just one person. The animals come by and get fruit. Humans come and take some and share it. Selfishness and impatience is the opposite of good for all. You cannot be hell-bent on getting what you want and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And if you are not filled with Holy Spirit, good luck trying to love your neighbor as yourself.

The Christian life, desiring to be filled with Holy Spirit, is not an easy life for us. It is hard, but it is a better life for us. It is a better life for us to live loving our neighbor. One the most noticeable characteristics is thankfulness. Maybe you can think of mother Teresa as you know her. Have you all met Christians whose lives were characterized by thankfulness? There was that time I met the Philippino monks who were working in a home for cast out mentally handicapped children. Many people go into this home and throw up from the mess of the poverty. But these monks were genuinely joyful. I met them and blessed by the experience. They were real live thankful Christians.

Craig Barnes had something good say about this when he described what being thankful really is and is not.

He wrote, "Being thankful is not telling God you appreciate the fact that your life is not in shambles. If that is the basis of your gratitude, you are on slippery ground. Every day of your life you face the possibility that a blessing in

your life may be taken away. But blessings are only signs of God's love. The real blessing, of course, is the love itself. Whenever we get too attached to the sign, we lose our grasp on the God who gave it to us. Churches are filled with widows who can explain this to you. We are not ultimately grateful that we are still holding our blessings. We are grateful that we are held by God even when the blessings are slipping through our fingers."

- Craig Barnes

As a matter of our nature, we are hell-bent on getting what we desire. We're not really easily thankful. Even the best side of us gets twisted by this inner drive. God has a very different way, and wants us to follow it. Since you are not Jesus and cannot love your neighbor as yourself, the Spirit grows you up. The Spirit cleans you up. And the Spirit makes good fruit come from you, in the way of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, who your son Jesus into the world, and who sent the gift of your spirit to us, I pray we would see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in abundance in our lives as we relate to our families, friends, and neighbors those who are very difficult to love and those who are easier. Amen.