

I. Introduction

A. Father's Day.

1. My family thinks I increasingly look and act like my Dad. Which I do not see and I don't think they mean it as a compliment. A video like that tends to point out that in some ways all dads are alike. On behalf of Dad's everywhere I want to say, "we'd be glad to stop saying the same things over and over as soon as someone listens."

2. Dads, not every male who helps make a baby is a Dad. To all of you who are committed to be a dad and who are trying to be the best Dad you can be, thanks. Good work. It's not easy. There are lots of setbacks, failures and regrets – but hang in there. And as our way of saying thanks for all of your hard work, we have a pair of bright socks we are going to give you!

B. So, how are you doing? Not just Dads, but everyone. How are you doing?

1. Are you growing? Are you getting better? This is an important question. Do you have a growing sense of joy? Are you pleased with the path you are on? Do you like the trajectory of your life? Are you becoming kinder? Less angry? More loving? More Christ-like? Are you getting better? Have you surprised yourself lately by your growth? Have others noticed your progress? Have they said, "Wow, you've changed."

2. Or does it seem as though your pursuit of God isn't really leading anywhere? And if you feel stalled, do you have any idea what are you doing wrong?

II. Our Galatians passage today is focused on a specific group of people. There are lots of groups out there.

A. There are people who do not believe in God or see any value in religion.

B. There are people who do not believe in God but do see value in religion.

C. There are people who believe in God and affirm all types of religion. This is not what we call Christianity. In the first message in this series I defined religion as the belief that following rules and rituals makes us good people – better than others – and qualifies us for God's love.

1. I then noted that Christianity is not a religion. For starters, a Christ-follower who understands what Jesus said would not assume that they are morally superior to their non-Christian friends and neighbors – for instance, they would not assume that because they are a Christian they are a better dad.

2. But the bigger point is, Christianity is very clear on the idea that we cannot be good enough to earn God's favor – to reach up to God. He has to reach down, not because of who we are but in spite of who we are. Jesus is not primarily our teacher or guide, He is our savior because we need to be rescued. You spell religion "do," and you spell Christianity "done." Jesus did for us what needed to be done for our rescue.

D. The fourth group takes a step closer to Christian faith but still misses. Those in this camp do not simply believe in a generic God, they celebrate Jesus but claim that faith in Christ is not enough. We also need to do good works. If you have been paying attention during our study of Galatians, you know that this is a description of the Judaizers, who taught that F (in Jesus) + W = S . Paul said "No, no, no." $F = S + W$. This is what he has been yelling about for the last four chapters.

E. Well, there are two other groups left – both believe that $F = S + W$. Both understand that God's grace does not come to people who morally outperform others but to those who embrace Christ. But they differ on what comes next.

1. To frame this in theological terms, they agree on justification – how we become a child of God. But they disagree on sanctification – which is how we grow; how we get better; how we become more like Christ.² The specific issue is, how do we grow.³

2. The discussion is not how do we come to faith – how do we become a child of God – but how do we grow? And this is what Paul addresses in what's left in his letter to the Galatians.

F. Now, let me pause here to say a few things. First,

1. It's hard to grow and it takes longer than we expect – especially since we – 21st century Westerners – are not very good at it. We start with undeveloped inner worlds. I've talked about this before:

2. I've occasionally pointed to the difference between *Robinson Crusoe* (the early 18th century novel by Daniel Defoe) in which a sailor is stranded on an island and uses the time to learn about himself and pursue God and *Castaway* – the 21st century movie starring Tom Hanks, who is stranded on an island and spends all of his time trying to get off or talking to a volley ball.

3. Or I have pointed out that most of the self-help books we see in print today focus on short cuts. The starting assumption is that we want an easy life – we want to know the short cuts to success – *at making lots of money or experiencing deep, abiding peace*. But we are not particularly interested in thinking deeply or making any sacrifices. No one is interested in dying to self or doing something hard. What we want to know is if there is a pill we can take or a counseling program we can sign up for, some tech gadget that will organize us, some school or counseling or something that will help us.

4. The insight we get from Paul goes in a different direction, and it's a bit confusing, so, you'll have to pay attention as we work through the second half of Galatians 5. By way of heads up. What you are going to see is that:

a) Though our justification is an act of God alone, our sanctification is a joint project. It is also a work of God's grace through his Spirit. The change we are after is not something we can do. But, as Augustine famously said: We cannot do it on our own and God will not do it on his own.

b) Our sanctification is a partnership. But perhaps not in the way you think. Which may be why you are not seeing the progress you would like.

III. OK Galatians.

A. In the previous four chapters we've looked at the Gospel, faith, the law and freedom.

B. In chapter five he has: 1) commended the Galatians Christians for running a good race for a while – which reminds us that the Christian life is not a sprint it's a marathon; 2) complained that the crazy advice of the false teachers has been spreading like yeast in bread dough, confusing and discouraging everyone; and talked about the fact that we are free from the law, which doesn't mean we can do anything, but it does mean we are free to love and serve others.

IV. Galatians 5:16: **So I say, walk by the Spirit**

A. The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives within you. You may not be following the Holy Spirit – allowing him to lead. We can grieve the Spirit – harden our heart in ways that make it hard for us to hear His voice. But, if you are a Christ follower, God’s Spirit lives in your heart. Paul writes about this in Romans, noting that the moment we become a Christ follower, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit⁴ and expected to walk in step with the Spirit – this is not only in the imperative, it’s military language.

B. And Jesus told his disciples that it was better for them to have the Holy Spirit inside of them than Jesus next to them.

V. So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

A. Paul starts by contrasting good and evil. This is NOT a contrast between the physical and the spiritual. Many Christians think the physical is bad and the spiritual is good. That is Plato not Paul. The word *flesh* is a bit confusing. Do not think of it as your physical body, think of it as your *sinful nature* – as the unhelpful, misdirected passions and desires that lead to sin.

B. And realize that one of the reason the Galatian Christians are listening to the Judaizers is because they are looking for help controlling their passions and desires. They are surprised at how hard the Christian life is. They are surprised at how long it takes to get better. That made them susceptible to the idea put out by the Judaizers that they were doing it wrong and that they needed to follow the law. What Paul is saying here is, “It’s not about keeping the Law, it’s about walking in the Spirit. The law cannot help here. Remember, this is not one of the things the law does.

C. Indeed, what he says is, “if you walk by the Spirit you will not gratify the flesh.” Note, he doesn’t say, “Walk by the Spirit and do not gratify the flesh.” We are given that advice in other places. We do get told not to do certain things. But that is not what Paul says here. What he says here is, if we follow the Holy Spirit, our heart is changed and we will increasingly desire the right things. This is not about simply controlling our behavior, he is talking about how our inner world is changed.⁵

VI. V:17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

A. This is not good news. What we are being told is that following Christ is hard, even if we are doing it right. Some think the normal Christian life is easy. It is not. It is not. It is characterized by an ongoing struggle between the new life in the Spirit and the old way in the flesh.

B. I hear from some who struggle to get better and end up worrying that maybe they are not Christ followers. This is an important question that is not always easy to answer.

C. On the one hand, ongoing struggles can be a good sign. Being bothered by your sin is one of the things you should expect as a believer.

1. I remember when this came into very clear focus for me. I was in college. It was late Friday night and

D. But being unsettled may be the Holy Spirit conviction bringing you to faith. Lots of people think they are Christians who are not. So, I would never say to someone, “you are a Christian.” Instead we go to the Bible to look at the promises we find there. And repeat them.

E. Let me keep reading – there is more to come in a minute.

VII. V18: **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.** If you are walking with the Holy Spirit and he convicts you of your anger, you do not need to read the sixth commandment to know that you were out of line.⁶

VIII. Then, starting in verse 19 we get two lists – the Fruit of the Flesh and the Fruit of the Spirit. These lists are not all that unique. Aristotle had a list of virtues. And in the Divine Comedy Dante has a list of vices – they unfold as we descend down into different levels of hell. It's also worth noting that Paul does not claim that these lists are comprehensive.

IX. V19: **The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions⁷ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.**

- A. There are 15 words here – some of irreligious people and some of religious
- B. We have three on sex: most on uncontrolled and out of control sex
- C. Then we have those that are tied to false religion, a third group that ties to self-centeredness and then some linked specifically to alcohol.

X. V21B: **I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

- A. What. Time out. Is Paul now saying that we are going to be judged by our works? Yes.⁷
- B. But you spent the last six weeks saying our works do not matter – that we are not saved by our works. Right. We are not saved by our works but works are expected. It is not $F + W = S$, it is $F = S + W$. But the Works are there. It is not $F = S$. Faith without works is dead. If you do not see growth, works - progress, improvement - the implication is, the faith you are claiming is not a living, vital, saving, eternity changing faith. If you have come to faith, you should change. Works confirm faith.
- C. Does this mean we become perfect? No. We do not become perfect this side of the grave.⁸
- D. So, how do we know if we are really saved? This is why I started this sermon with the question – how are you doing? Are you getting better? You should not think you are great, but you – or those around you – should see progress.
- E. What does progress look like? The Fruit of the Spirit.

XI. V22: **But the fruit of the Spirit** – we had the bad list, here comes the good list. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ⁹Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.**

- A. This is a lot to see here. The specifics are worth thinking about. I have long thought that I would eventually preach through the Fruit of the Spirit.
 - 1. Love come first – no surprise. This list grows out of God's character and God is love. And we are to be known for our love for each other. What does that look like? For our purposes here let's say: The opposite of love is not hate. It is self-protection. You cannot love and protect yourself. Love means making yourself vulnerable. Putting yourself out.
 - 2. Joy means abiding in God for who he is.⁹
 - 3. Peace is drawn from the Hebrew Shalom – it means wholeness and wellbeing, not just absence of war.
 - 4. Self-control is the ability to choose the important over urgent.

- B. But there are other things much more interesting to note.
1. We need to see all of them. Paul does something odd here – he mentions singular subject but plural predicate. Why? Because he is trying to show something important. All of these are one.
 - a) Jonathan Edwards wrote a book with a chapter on this. He claims there is a “concatenation” between the graces of Christianity. If you want to know that it is real love, joy, peace, etc. and not something patched up, man-made, or just your temperament, you have to see that they are always concatenated.
 - b) All the graces go together. If you have one without the other it’s just your personality.
 2. The use of the term “fruit” – as opposed to traits or characteristics – implies they will take time to develop. But once they do, the work is done internally and without effort.
 - a) *Apple trees do not immediately produce apples. In fact, it is so slow that you really do not see it happen.¹⁰ But if they are healthy they produce the fruit effortlessly.*

XII. So what should I be doing? So far you have said:

- A. One: We are after is a changed heart. What we want is the Holy Spirit to take over greater control and grow the character of God in us.
- B. Two: This is expected – indeed commanded. If we have come to faith we must grow. If we are not growing, something is wrong.
 1. I’m not saying we will feel like we are growing. It can be hard to see – and sometimes it’s others who see it or something has to happen.
 2. My recent visit to my Mom.
- C. Three: It takes time. Spiritual growth is hard and it takes longer than we expect.¹¹ So we should not be surprised or give up. We need a balanced approach
- D. Four: We cannot make it happen on our own – but we can walk in the Spirit. What does that mean?

XIII. So what does it mean to walk in the Spirit. What does that look like? Let’s imagine that your challenge is anger.

- A. I’m not talking about righteous anger. I am talking about getting mad when you shouldn’t. Over-reacting.
- B. If this is you what should you do?
 1. You know that, deciding to not get angry isn’t a real viable plan.
 2. And you may have figured out that praying that God will help you not get angry is not enough.
- C. I am going to suggest three things that walking in the Spirit imply:
 1. Word and Sacrament
 2. Quick repentance and the ask to be filled.
 3. Listening. Ask God – the HS – what is going on in my heart? What is it that is making me so angry?

¹⁰ Tim Keller, writing in *The Reason For God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (2008)

¹¹ To frame this in business terms – which some of you may understand better – the disagreement revolves around the difference between chapter 7 and chapter 13 bankruptcy. If this is your world, you know that: 1) In chapter 7 the old entity dissolves. This is not a perfect illustration, because in chapter 7 you hold on to some of your debt. You cannot escape student loans and back taxes and things like that. But chapter seven is code for – I’m done. I can’t go

forward; 2) Whereas chapter 13 (chapter 11 if you are a company, but chapter 13 for an individual) is where you get some debt forgiven and can restructure what's left, but you have to keep working to dig out.

· C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Nice People or New Men. For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it cannot do so: and at that stage the lumps on the shoulders—no one could tell by looking at them that they are going to be wings—may even give it an awkward appearance.

· Romans 11:20

· Keller notes that Gospel transformation is different than moral reformation. If you take a rod of iron that is bent, there are two ways to fix it. You can use external power and bend it back, but it is now weaker than it was before. And if you bend it one more time it will break. It looks straight but it is weaker than before. But if you put it in the fire and let it glow and then bend it. Now it is stronger and tempered – stronger than before. We are after putting our heart in the fire of the one who made us. We want a fire within, a softness and then be organically changed.

· If you know how to drive you do not have to rely on the guard rails to keep you in the road.

· I Cor. 13 – it is a very frightening passage – read in Bible. You can know all mysteries, doing good, and yet have nothing if you do not have fruit of the Spirit. Paul doesn't say you are not a Christian, but he implies that it is possible that you are not. Matthew 7 (Lord, Lord), Gal. 5, - if people's lives are being changed through you but yours is not, fly to him immediately

· There are some who claim otherwise. There is a joke about a preacher who asked anyone who was perfect to stand. And one man did. And when the pastor questioned him he said, "It's not me. I'm standing for my wife's first husband."

· Opposite of joy is delighting in the blessing not the One who gives them. If you delight in God, then circumstances do not matter. That is power!

· What we say to someone is, "I think you've grown." Why, do I think? Because I didn't see it. All you type "A"s out there need to get some patience. It may also be worth noting that: 1) There are seasons in fruit trees where it comes quickly; 2) But they go through winter time as well.

· Nowhere are we told it happens quickly and many places we are told that it's hard