

“Godly Character” // Gospel: The Revolutionary Power of the Christian Life // John 15:8; Galatians 5:16–24

Read before sermon:

[2] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

[4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

[8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

[9] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

[10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

****Recap of Vision Night (see attached)****

Message: JOHN 15: The title of our series is “Gospel,” and we’re spending several weeks in John 15 getting a picture of what it looks like really to be changed by Jesus. John 15 gives you the essential components of the Christian life.

One of the things Jesus says in there is that if you are alive in Him, you will produce fruit. See there in **vs. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that... you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples**”? Bearing fruit proves you are alive.

- If it’s not, that means something is wrong.
- **Lots of analogies in this series, here is another: In college, one of my good friends was a really disgusting person...** He lived off campus and he and his roommate never cleaned their house
 - Go in their house there would be cereal bowls half full of milk from days before
 - All their dishes were dirty in the sink. And I mean all of them. When you needed one, you just took one out, scraped the mold off, and cleaned it
 - The pile system
 - To top it all off, they had a cat that couldn’t seem to get the litter box concept down... Mary came
 - If Jesus is present, certain things are present. There are certain markers.
- Get that?
- So, we’ve introduced a tool to help you understand spiritual growth. **Wheel:**
 - *Matthew 22:37*
 - We express that in 5 ways
 - Now, don’t make the mistake of thinking the way you “fix” yourself spiritually is to get busy doing those things. (That would be artificial change, like stapling roses to a dead rose bush. That wouldn’t make you alive:)
 - **Doing these things won’t make you alive, but if you are really alive, you will do these things.** These things flow naturally out of a heart that loves God. Like grapes on a grapevine.
 - **Well, you say, what produces a love for God in your heart?** (You say, “J.D., I’d love to love God. But I don’t.”) **Abiding in the gospel.** What produces a love

for God in you is dwelling on the love of God for you. *(Gospel replaces Matt 22:37 as wheel hub)* **As you abide in the love of God for you, love for God grows in you, and then you begin to do these things naturally.** Spiritual fruit happens when you are alive with the gospel.

- You see, the key to growing spiritually is not mastering a list of things you are to do for God, but standing in awe of what He's done for you.
- When your soul has been captivated by what God has done for you, these things, the fruits of righteousness, will grow out of you as naturally as grapes on a grapevine.

Today we're going to talk about one of those wheel spokes, and that is how the gospel produces **godly character**.¹ We're going to go to where Paul taught about this, because Paul takes Jesus' concept a little bit deeper with it: **Galatians 5:16**

[Galatians 5:16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

[18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. [19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, competitiveness, (selfish ambition), dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. (Sounds like the plot line of an episode of Jersey Shore, right? Bad news, J-Woww. Actually, avoid the temptation to look for these out there; they are all right here in your heart.) I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Here's what we'll see: **1. a description of two different plants** with two different fruits; then we have **2. a command**; and **3. a warning** about a lifelong struggle.

1. A description of 2 different plants w/ 2 different fruits

- The first one he calls "the flesh." When Paul says, "the flesh," he does not simply mean, 'the body.' Flesh means "the sinful nature." It's our hearts when we are separated from the life of God.
- We were created for God, and when we are not connected to God, our lives are filled with all kinds of dysfunctions and deviant cravings like the ones on that list: *impurity, sensuality, sorcery, strife, fits of anger, envy, drunkenness, orgies...* those are fruits that grow out of our separation from God.
- **You see, to not live for God is like dragging a wagon without wheels.** Without wheels, you can move the wagon around, but you end up doing a lot of damage to it. It's all ripped up and scraped up. Without God, you can get married, have a career, get married, have a family... but you end up doing a lot of damage to yourself because something that was absolutely foundational, essential to your life is missing and you end up doing the things on that list to try to compensate for God's absence in your lives.
- For example, many girls are not in right relationship with God, so they crave a guy's attention, that's like God to them; they need a guy's attention to feel worthy and be happy; so they give away their bodies in impurity because they only feel worth anything when a guy is paying attention to them. That impurity comes from a craving which comes from not being in right relationship to God.
- Some people worship money: the fruit of that is anxiety; when your stocks crash or something doesn't go your way; **full of strife; fits of anger.** Those fruits come out of worshipping money rather than God.

¹ Leave wheel up until here.

- Some people worship their spouse’s attention
 - and that **produces bitterness or strife in the home**
- So people crave the attention of others
 - A girl gets jealous of another girl because people are noticing her rather than you, so you fantasize about them getting a thyroid problem and gaining 100 lbs. You see, hatred and strife are produced by craving the attention of others.
 - I have confessed to you that so much of my life has been ruined by craving the attention and approval of others.
 - It has caused the most sinful emotions in my heart. I get jealous of people more successful than me; and it makes me desire their downfall, delight in it.
 - It’s distorted some of my decisions.
 - It driven me to hurt people that I love. Overwork, because I want so badly to succeed so people will admire me.
 - It makes me lie.
 - These are all fruits of the flesh.
- And all these things are driven by the absence of God from our lives. When Paul wants to summarize all these sins (vs, 16), he uses the word “*epithumia*.” Which means “craving.”
 - The word is usually translated into English as “lust.” Which is fine, but when we hear the word “lust” we almost always think “sex.” But “*epithumia*” is about a lot more than sex. It means deep, soul craving in our soul.² It leads to that list: hatred, strife, drunkenness, orgies, the boredom that leads to pornography addiction, sensuality, and other sinful captivities.
- So, the law, Paul says, (or, being commanded to change) doesn’t help this problem—because our core problem is that we don’t love

God. So being commanded to do loving things for God doesn’t help for a couple of reasons.

- **For one**, Paul says, while it may change our behavior; it doesn’t change our desires. **Like bending metal.**
- The other thing is we end up commandeering religion in service of our sinful hearts. **Guy who sleeps with a girl for power.** You see, religion doesn’t change the fact that our hearts worship power, it just gives our lust for power a new means to than end. Marx was correct: religious sentiment and the quest for power often go hand-in-hand.
- (Christians a lot of times are blind to these kinds of sins. We hear “sin” and think about things like “drunkenness;” “sexually immoral,” or “orgies.” But do you see that Paul puts jealousy, strife, gossiping, self-centeredness and competitiveness in that same list? These are every bit the fruits of the flesh that drunkenness and orgies are.
 - Imagine you were talking about a guy in the church and you were like, “This guy could really be a great leader; only problem he is part of drunken orgies every weekend.” That would never fly. But you have church leadership teams all over the country led by selfishly ambitious, competitive, divisive people who are dominated by the flesh in these things, and that seems to be ok.)
 - So the law doesn’t change our hearts... and while it may curb some of our sinful behavior, it actually feeds other parts.
 - **Give you one more example:** Religion feed a xenophobia and racism that exist in some people (xenophobia is thinking your culture is better): We think, “One of the many things that makes us superior to other cultures and races is we have the right religion, not like those backwards barbarians.” That produces a feeling of superiority, which can lead to oppression, injustice, even violence.

² If ‘idolatry’ is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then ‘lust’ [inordinate desires], **epithumia** is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for that same drift. Keller, Galatians study.

- That's why when people talk about how religion creates all these problems in the world, I tend to agree with them. But they're talking about religion, not gospel.
- You see, there is a different type of plant Paul talks about, which produces a completely different kind of fruit: this plant has its roots in the gospel. It walks "by the Spirit," Paul says.
- The gospel is the story of how you and I deserved the wrath of God. But instead of giving it to us, God, in His love, emptied Himself of His divine glory and came to earth to rescue us by dying on a cross in our place.
- Looking at the cross crushes our pride because it shows us what we deserve; it ignites in our hearts passion for God because we see how good He is and what He did to save us. It's impossible to look at the cross and remain proud and self-centered; and so when you abide in it, plant yourself in it... it produces a totally different set of things in you. Look at Paul's list³
 - **Love⁴** (**Gr. agape**): you start to love other people, not because of what they can do for you, but just because they are people, like you: **Agape** means love for love's sake.
 - **Joy (chara)**: delight in God; a delight in God that goes above and beyond your circumstances.
 - **Peace (Irene)**: (BTW, why you would name a hurricane "Irene" is beyond me.) Peace is this restful confidence you have in that your Heavenly Father is present in your life and fully in charge, working out His loving plan in your life
 - **Patience (macrothumia)**: you deal with disappointment without lashing out in anger. Even when people hurt you and let you down you maintain this posture of goodness toward them. Why? That's how Jesus was toward you.
 - **Kindness (chrestotes)**: it means that there is a goodness that just flows out of you to others.
 - **Goodness (agathosune)**: which really means integrity. Means you're just good all the way down. When we peel back the layers of you and there's not all these nuances and

³ This list came, in large part, from a list given by Tim Keller in his small group study on Galatians. For each fruit he gives the definition; opposite and counterfeit version of it.

⁴ All on screen at one time.

- hidden agendas and secret hatreds in there. Just goodness all the way down.
- **Faithfulness (pistis)**: loyalty. Your commitment to God and others is not based on whether or not there's something in it for you. You're not an opportunist; you're loyal and principle-driven.
- **Gentleness (prautes)**: means, humility. You just don't walk around with a sense of entitlement, that it's all about you.
- **Self-control (egkrateia)**: you have bodily desires; but they don't rule you, so you can turn them off when there is a greater purpose. Whether it's saying no to food, sex, anger, revenge, the need to be recognized—all that stuff you can turn off because God's purposes is your greatest concern at any given moment.
- **Vs. [23]** Paul says **... against such things there is no law.** In other words, for a person dominated by **love, joy peace patience kindness goodness**, you don't have to make laws, because those things are the fulfillment of the law! Those 8 things are the essence of a good person, and if this is what is in your heart, you don't need laws to constrain your behavior. You'll act righteous because you are righteous.
- **This is what the gospel produces.** These 8 things are what it means to love God and love others. Growth in that list is growth in *character*.⁵

2. A command

- **Galatians 5:16**, "But I say, walk by the Spirit..." What does He mean by that? I never knew what that meant (throughout the day I'd think, "Spirit power!" and I'd fill up like a balloon...)
- **What does it mean to walk by the Spirit?** *Remember last week? What does the Spirit do?* **John 16:14**: He glorifies Jesus. He makes Jesus large in your heart; He makes the gospel real. He gives you a felt sense of it.

⁵ We have a tendency to look at our spiritual gifts and measure our Christ likeness in that vein. We should instead look at our growth in Spiritual fruit. Keller, Galatians study.

- As you abide in the gospel, you walk by the spirit. Those are the same thing. Like Paul said in **Galatians 3:1**, if you want to be filled with the Spirit, abide in the gospel.
 - **And as you are filled by the Spirit, those 8 things: love, joy, peace, patience... Again, as easily as grapes on a grapevine!**
 - Let me teach you 2 theological terms:
 - **Justification = to declare holy** the act by which God declares us righteous in Christ. The Great Exchange. Christ lived the life we should have lived; died the death we were condemned to die. Because of that, God declares us righteous in Christ, not because our behavior was actually righteous, but because God credits us with Christ's righteousness.
 - **Sanctification = to make holy** means literally "to make holy." It means that we become holy and righteous in how we act.
 - Often we think those are two separate things, and in one sense, they most certainly are:
 - **Justification:** is God's legal declaration over us. He declares us righteous because Christ took our place and He now sees us according to Christ's record, not ours (gift righteousness) **Sanctification:** is how much our hearts and desires have actually begun to desire righteousness.
 - So they are separate. *Justification has to do with your official standing before God; sanctification has to do with how godly your heart has become. BUT.* They are closely related. **Sanctification feeds** on justification.
 - **It is as we dwell on the awesome fact of God has made us holy in Christ that we begin to desire to become holy. You get that?** Only as we dwell more deeply in what God has done for us (justification) will we begin to desire what we should do for Him (which is sanctification). **Growth in sanctification comes from dwelling constantly on justification; going deeper into justification.**
 - That's why Martin Luther said this, **"To progress is always to begin again."** **Martin Luther, Lectures on Romans.** To make progress in Christ is always to go back to the beginning.
 - **"One reason we don't grow in ordinary, grateful obedience as we should is that we've got amnesia; we've forgotten that we are cleansed from our sins. In other words, ongoing failure in our growth is the direct result of failing to remember God's love for us in the gospel. If we fail to remember our justification... we'll struggle in our sanctification."** ~ **Elyse Fitzpatrick in Because He Loves Me**
 - Growth in sanctification comes from going deeper into our justification; constantly dwelling on it.
 - It is only as we grow in our understanding of the fact that God's acceptance of us was not based on how good we are that we begin to desire what is good. In other words, **the only ones who will "get better" (sanctification) are those that understand God's approval of them is not dependent on their "getting better." (justification).**
 - **Is that blowing your mind? Write this down and think on it later: Dwelling on your justification is the most essential component for your sanctification.**
 - Now, you hear this and say, "Wait, wait. If this is true, people will have no motivation to grow in their devotion to God."
 - The leaders of the church of England had placed **John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress***, in prison for preaching the gospel. They told him, "You can't go on telling people that God's acceptance of them is not based on how they behave, but is a gift given to them in Christ, because if they believe that, they'll go around doing whatever they want to do!" Bunyan said, "No. If they grasp Christ's righteousness has been given to them entirely as a gift, they'll do whatever *He* wants."
 - Your motivation becomes love for God, which is the heart of all the commandments.
- So as you walk by the Spirit, growing in your love for the gospel, spiritual fruit is the natural result
- *I've used this with you before: spiritual fruit is the same as physical fruit. Waffle House: now add salt; vanilla... not how you make a kid! Some of you are writing things down now?*

Give you one other insight on this from this passage: **Fruit is singular.** Not “fruits,” as if these were things you add, but the whole lot of them. When you abide in Jesus, they all grow.

- That means when one of these is growing but not the others, you have to wonder if it’s really fruit. For example, I know people who are kind, but have no self-control. That’s probably not spiritual growth; it’s probably just personality. They have a naturally kind disposition. Because if it were real spiritual fruit, it would be making all those things grow.
 - Boldness could be considered spiritual fruit. I’ve always been bold for Christ... back from the beginning. But that was more due to my personality than spiritual fruit. I’d probably be bold about things even if I weren’t saved; it’s just my personality make-up, not necessarily spiritual fruit. Here’s how I know that: During that same time I had such a condescending, judgmental view of others that demonstrated how little the gospel had taken root in my heart.
- Which is why I might say this: **“You’re only as mature as weakest fruit.”** (maybe an overstatement, but you get the idea?) “Fruit” is singular: because when the gospel has taken root, all these things grow. (**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**)
- Believe it or not, there is actually some good encouragement in this for you: if you’re in Christ, the DNA for all those things is already present in you.
 - **When I was 12 years old my head and feet were the same size they are now...** but the rest of me was 12 year old sized. *How did people encourage me?* **“You’ll grow into it.”** The DNA for my size was already in me, you could see it in things like my feet and head; I was just catching up with it.
 - **The same for you.** The DNA of spiritual growth is already present in you. So don’t get overwhelmed or discouraged in your defeats. The question is not, “Can I

ever overcome this?” The question is, “When am I going to grow up?” It’s already there. Just let it out.

- **The rest of your life is simply becoming in your behavior (sanctification) what God has already made you in Christ (justification).**

3. A warning (about a life-long struggle)

- Paul is telling you that at every point for the rest of your life, you are going to be in a war! A lifelong, to the death struggle between your old sinful nature and your new righteous one. Both of them to get you to put the roots of your heart into them.
- And so you have to constantly be pulling the roots of your soul up out of your flesh and driving them into the gospel!
- And that’s war!
 - When the Apostle Paul talks about spiritual warfare he tells us to put on spiritual armor (Eph 6) Remember when we studied this I showed you that essentially every piece or the armor is the gospel?
 - Gird up loins with truth!
 - Helmet of salvation.
 - Breastplate of righteousness.
 - Shield of faith—in the gospel
 - Sword of the Spirit: guess what that is?
- So I have given you the gospel prayer:
 - You know what you’re doing when you do that? **You’re applying the gospel to unevangelized territories in your heart.** You’re saved, but you’ve still got unevangelized territories in your soul. You’ve got to take the gospel to them and preach it there!
 - We talk about UPG’s: you’ve got UPG’s in parts of your heart that need to hear the gospel and be converted.
- You’ll never get over this on this earth. Until you leave this body/flesh behind, it will be a constant, bitter, battle.

- J.C. Ryle, *“The real Christian is known by his inner warfare.”*⁶
- God’s role in this is often through affliction
 - [Galatians 5:24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
 - **John 15:2:** pruning, cleaning. It’s painful, but God is pulling up the roots of what we trusted in besides Him.
 - **Martin Luther** said that 3 things teach a person really to know God: prayer; Bible study; pain
- Our part of this is putting to death your sinful passions. At every moment you’ve got two parts of you, the flesh and the Spirit, competing for you to put the roots of your soul into them. **Like two hard drives, your RAM is always deciding which one to pull from.** When your flesh craves that which is wrong, you have to shut it down and switch hard-drives. Drive your roots down somewhere else.
 - **E.g. Guy walking through the mall...** sees pretty girl. Want to turn around, check her out. What do you do in that moment? The goal is that you be so full of Jesus that you are not tempted by impurity; you love purity so much. Impurity seems disgusting. You know what it’s like for sin to be disgusting to you? Like abusing a child? The goal is that all sin be that disgusting to you. And that’s what the gospel aims to produce. But, until then, you have to say no to your sinful desires and put faith and repent, saying, “God, why is my heart so bad?” And meditating on the gospel of grace that God accepts you even when your heart is bad so that the grace of His acceptance changes your heart to love what He loves.

Conclusion: Here is my whole point: At every point you are choosing to put the roots of your soul somewhere. In Christ, or in something of the flesh. If your roots are in the sinful flesh, it just breeds more destruction; and more of these fruits that Paul mentioned: jealousy, hatred, superstition, drunkenness, etc. If you put them in Christ, “Love,

joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self-control.

Listen to this. A letter I got recently.

I was raped my freshman year of college, within the first couple of months of my college experience by the boy I was dating. I denied its happening for the rest of the year and spent my time in never land with the assistance of drugs, alcohol, and bad men. *(SHE THEN WENT THROUGH A TIME OF QUESTIONING ‘WHY’ AND months of counseling...)*

I still woke up every single day with this heavy thing on my heart and it just became obvious (EVEN AFTER THE COUNSELING) that I needed outside help if I was going to get through this before it destroyed me. My friend invited me to Summit one Sunday and I remember walking out the doors and thinking about the sermon for days after (it was the Search for a King series and much to my shock, you actually said the word rape during the sermon).

(A process of discovery, lots of questions about God, until one night she cried out to God) That was the last night I have ever spent laying in my bed crying in despair over what happened. Something special happened that night, I prayed to God for forgiveness of what I had done, for strength to carry on, and for His help to get through this. It was the most raw and desperate prayer I have ever made. I can’t explain what happened, but immediately I felt this presence inside me. It physically came in and took the burden off my shoulder that I had been carrying around all that time and I have never suffered through remembering again. I stopped viewing myself as a broken and ruined girl that nobody would ever want because God wanted me, He proved it that night. I trusted Him that night and have since left my old lifestyle behind. I dropped the drugs, alcohol, and group

⁶ J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*, chapter “The Fight.”

of people I had been hanging out with; I don't have any desire to live that way ever again. This new high is so much better than any drug has ever given me.

Seeing all the choices I made and the things that happened those couple years, I realize God's plan is amazing, and it was at work in all of what happened to me. I was raped, which contributed to a terrible immune system freshman year, leading to tonsil surgery, leading to living off campus sophomore year (something otherwise not allowed at my college), and it led me to my roommates, to counseling, to a friend at the Summit, to the Summit Church, and to God. (ALMOST THOU PERSUADEST ME TO BE A CALVINIST!)

Where are the roots of your life? In Christ? It can be. He is the One you were created for and the one you've been searching for your whole life, even if you didn't know it!

Bullpen:

- Bending metal

One of the things Jesus says in there is that if you are alive in Him, you will produce fruit. See there in **vs. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that... you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples**”?

Adding fruit to a tree doesn't make it alive; but if it is alive, it will produce fruit!

- You don't add fruit to a tree and make it alive... **Think of a Christmas tree.** (How many of you like real? Not me; I'm all fake. If I could get away with just putting a poster a Christmas tree up, I'd do it). **A Christmas tree is designed to look full of life but it is not.**
- On the other hand, if the tree is alive, it will produce fruit. If it's not, that means something is wrong.
- *Jesus is saying the same thing about us:*
 - adding fruit to our lives like ornaments on a Christmas tree doesn't make us alive (so doing all these things doesn't make any difference if your heart has not been made alive to Him);
 - but, on the other hand, if we are alive, we will produce those things; *and*, the fact that fruit is growing in our hearts is proof we are alive.
- One other analogy: In college, one of my good friends was a really disgusting person... He lived off campus and he and his roommate never cleaned their house
 - Go in their house there would be cereal bowls half full of milk from days before
 - All their dishes were dirty in the sink. And I mean all of them. When you needed one, you just took one out, scraped the mold off, and cleaned it
 - The pile system
 - To top it all off, they had a cat that couldn't seem to get the litter box concept down... Mary came
 - If Jesus is present, certain things are present. There are certain markers.

Get that?

You have to guard your abiding in Christ.

Two different plants; two different kinds of fruit

Plants with roots in some idol besides Jesus

What gives you a sense of worth? Only feel worthy in sex.

What must you have to be happy? Success. Money.

Self-centered. Always thinking about you and what you want; your reputation. Your exaltation.

It produces those bad fruits.

College student who converts from sex to reputation

Religious versions:

Religious adherence produces pride; selfishness; violence; desires for lusts (guy who lives off of fame and then falls into an affair)

Plants with roots in Jesus love

Jesus is the only God that if you find Him, will satisfy you, and if you fail Him, will forgive you.

Fruit is singular. They always grow together. Not things we add, but the result. Which means that when one of these is growing but not the others, you have to wonder if it's really fruit. I know people who are kind, but have no self-control. That's not growth; it might be personality.

You're only as mature as weakest trait.

Fruit is the natural result.
Off like a lightswitch
Balloon (metal)

What is my flesh trying to get me to focus on beside Jesus that I look to it as my righteousness, hope and refuge?

Justification/sanctification

The role of affliction: God has a deeper purpose in our pain

The only ones who get better are those who know that God's approval of them does not depend upon their getting better. **Illus.** You get an "A"

[11] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

[12] "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.