

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
February 26, 2012

Fruits of Redemption

Read Galatians 5:22-26 & 6:1-10

Key verse: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things” (Galatians 5:22-23).

When Jesus Christ is given His rightful place as Lord of our lives, His Spirit works in us to make us more like Jesus. Christ changes us from the inside out. This life change does not happen overnight—it is a growth process. But change and growth are an inevitable result of a life surrendered to Christ. Galatians 5:22-23 famously describes the character traits that develop as one walks with Jesus as “the fruit of the Spirit.” The fruit of the Spirit is the outward manifestation of Christ living within.

“Love” leads the list, and some interpreters believe that the other eight traits are but various expressions of this Christ-like love. Kenneth Moyner, for example, wrote about the fruit of the Spirit as “the different faces of love”:

Joy is love exalting, and peace is love at rest.

Patience, love enduring in every trial and test.

Gentleness, love yielding to all that is not sin.

Goodness, love in actions that flow from Christ within.

Faith is love’s eyes opened, the loving Christ to see.

Meekness, love not fighting but bowed at Calvary.

Temperance, love in harness and under Christ’s control.

The Christ is love in person, and love, Christ in the soul.

The fruit of the Spirit grows in the lives of “those who belong to Christ Jesus” and who “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (5:24). This dynamic of dying to the old life of “the flesh” is also an ongoing process, not a one-time event. We must choose daily to die to the old life so that we can “live by the Spirit” and be “guided by the Spirit” (5:25).

Galatians 6:1-10 describes how a Christ-centered, Spirit-led life is demonstrated in our *relationships*. Verse 1 tells us how to “restore” someone whose life has become entangled in sin—“in a spirit of gentleness,” remembering that we all are tempted and we all can fall.

Verse 2 is a call to servant-hood: “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” This new life in Christ, Paul reminds us, is a *shared* life. We are

bound in love to others, especially to other members of the Christian community. The Spirit-filled life expresses itself by a willingness to serve and help bear the burdens of others.

In verses 3 and 4, Paul strikes a wonderful balance in cautioning against undue pride, while also encouraging a healthy appreciation of our own self-worth: “For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor’s work, will become a cause for pride.”

After an exhortation for believers to give practical support to their spiritual leaders (v. 6), Paul then moves to what some have called the “agriculture of the Spirit,” verses 7-8: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.”

This law of sowing and reaping offers both the promise of blessing and a caution of negative consequences, depending on whether one sows to the flesh or to the Spirit. C.S. Lewis shared this insight about the agriculture of the Spirit:

“Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God and with its fellow-creatures and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to one state or the other.” (from *Mere Christianity*)

Paul ends with a word of encouragement. Since the agriculture of the Spirit (vv. 7-8) is a changeless principle that God has established, let’s don’t be discouraged, but keep on living for Jesus: “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (vv. 9-10).

(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)

