

BE CRUCIFIED
Live Fully
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Through these summer months we have shared together from Galatians 5:22-23 and taken time each Sunday to look at a separate fruit of the Spirit. We conclude this summer series this Sunday and look at the entire passage. The passage in its entirety in which the fruit of the Spirit teaching occurs. That's Galatians 5:13-26.

This passage of scripture shares with us the fact that the Christian life is one of struggle between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. These two ways of life compete with one another, to dominate us. The modern translations use the term "sinful human nature" to translate the word which in the King James is simply "flesh." It's actually one word in the Greek *sarx*. When the King James talks to us about flesh as it does in the Galatians 5 passage most of the time that word occurs it does not refer to simply meat, or skin. Flesh is a term which refers to human life lived outside of, apart from God. It describes that whole world of our emotions, attitudes and actions that are unlike God.

When you look at the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, a careful observation will immediately bring you to the conclusion that one is plural and the other is singular. Works is in the plural. Fruit is in the singular. The difference between the two is important because if you are in the flesh, if you are apart from God, not all of these traits will necessarily apply to your life. Perhaps only one of them. Perhaps only several of them. Maybe all of them. But if you are growing in the Lord all the fruit of the Spirit – singular – will be making itself felt and present in your life. It will not be possible for you "I'll pick the fruit of joy but I'll leave behind the fruit of goodness. I'll pick the fruit of peace but I don't care for patience." All the fruit of the Spirit will become present, not necessarily will everyone manifest all the works of the flesh. There are some very sexually moral people who do not show that side of immorality to their nature but who in other areas manifest the life of the human being apart from God.

Paul in this passage of Galatians 5 gives us 15 works of the flesh and nine fruit of the Spirit. Since we have taken a Sunday for each of the nine fruit I thought it would be well in just a few moments to look at the other side – the 15 works of the flesh which compete against the fruit for dominance in our life.

These 15 works of the flesh subdivide into four major areas. The first area is that of sexual sin. Three words describe the human life apart from God in the area of sexual sin. The first word is the word from which we derive the word "pornography." The root is a term, which simply means fornication or sexual immorality. It refers to all sexual intercourse outside of marriage, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual. All is covered under this one word – fornication, immorality.

The second word is the word "uncleanness" or "impurity." It describes a person who lives in or with sexual filth.

The third word relating to sexual sin is the word "debauchery." Or the older translations use the word "lasciviousness." A very difficult word to get the meaning of because it's pretty much fallen out of usage. It simply tells us that a person who is this way, who lives in lasciviousness

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or debauchery practices sexual conduct that is without restraint and cares less what people see or think about their own behavior.

We see this kind of behavior in people that openly flaunt their immoral lifestyle whether it is homosexual or heterosexual. This inability or unwillingness to be ashamed and to forcefully contend that the most despicable human behavior is to be thought of as acceptable.

The second major area of the works of the flesh concern wrongful spiritual experiences. There are two words that describe these. One is the word “idolatry.” Idolatry simply refers to worship that is given any idea, object, principle or person other than God. Idolatry is not simply bowing down before a carved image. Idolatry is putting anything on the throne of your life other than God. It’s that which you give you first allegiance and your basic trust to.

The second area of wrongful spiritual worship is witchcraft. The word in the Greek is the word, which has passed directly into the English language as “pharmacy” or “pharmacist.” Not hard to understand why. Because in the ancient world as well as in our world, often transcendental spiritual experiences, especially those on the cultic side, are done in association with the taking of drugs. So the word associated with our pharmacy is the word associated with witchcraft.

Any attempt to have a transcendental experience outside of genuine communion with the one true God is that which is associated with witchcraft and since drugs bring that hallucinatory state to us that is a form of wrongful spiritual experience. Works of the flesh.

The third major area of the works of the flesh are violations of brotherly love. There are eight of these. They get the most treatment as Paul develops them.

It’s important to recognize this because sometimes Christians have very severely denounced the works of the flesh in the sexual side – sexual sin – but have excused works of the flesh in their own life that manifested a lack of brotherly love. Both are wrong.

There are violations of brotherly love which are guaranteed if you practice them to pull apart any family, group or society.

The first is hatred, which is simply a breach of love in feeling or in act.

The second is discord, which is quarrelsomeness. An argumentative kind of spirit.

The third is jealousy, which is really an insistence in being number one. An overly self-assertive nature.

A lot is being said about asserting yourself. And there’s a degree of wholesomeness to having a healthy self-image, which doesn’t reduce you to a doormat. But there is a wrong kind of self-assertiveness that simply pushes your way out upon other people no matter what harm or consequence it causes to them.

Fourth, fits of rage. Explosive temper, explosive anger.

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Fifth, selfish ambition. This carries with it the idea of no concept of serving someone else but simply a spirit of what's in it for me. If I get something out of it, I'll do it. If not I won't. Selfish ambition.

Dissension. A splitting rather than a reconciling spirit.

Factions is a sectarian spirit which turns against those not in your group. They're not in our group then they can't be right.

The last, envy, is the meaning word of all. Almost a weak word in English but in the Greek it describes the attitude which doesn't so much simply want what another person has but resents that they have it at all. A spirit which wants to take something from another person not because you need it but because you simply want to deprive them of the pleasure of having it.

The last fourth area of the works of the flesh speak about intemperate excesses. There are two of these –

The first, drunkenness was a scourge of their society as well as ours.

Finally, the last word speaking of intemperate excess and the word that brings up the end of the list is the word "orgies." It was a word originally used by the Greeks to describe a band of friends who accompanied a victor of games after his triumph at the games. It then came to describe devotees of the God of wine, Bacchus, in celebration. And ultimately it was a word by the Greeks employed those who participated in unrestrained and uncontrolled revelry. Here is a person who has lost all moral sense.

As you review these four major categories which contain the 15 specific works of the flesh. Could I ask you to personally do some inventory for a moment? Where are you the most vulnerable? What is the area if the flesh, the human nature in you apart from God, is going to raise its head where is it most likely to occur?

All of us in looking at these works of the Spirit can perhaps identify within our own spiritual makeup an aneurysm. Some of us as we look at the four major categories of the works of the flesh will have strong consistency and certain things don't even bother us. Other things seem to. We know the areas we are weak because the Spirit and our own honesty with ourselves makes that plain.

Throughout the history of the Christian church people have tried to wrestle theologically with this matter of how do we deal with the pull between the man of us that's from heaven and the man that is from earth? At least four different false attitudes have emerged regarding resolving this tension. I want to share them with you. How do you deal with a spiritual aneurysm in your life?

One solution that has been proposed by some is you can get to a state where sin does not exist in you. Perfection is attainable. A true Christian will never sin in thought, word or deed. There are two basic problems with this view. One is 1 John 1:8 "*If we say that we do not sin we deceive ourselves.*" And the other problem is the people that teach it aren't there. They are not perfect. That's why there aren't many around teaching it. If they are wise they don't teach it.

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Second way that this tension has attempted to be reconciled and resolved is that some have sought to eradicate the sinful human nature through great effort. Sometimes this has occurred in the context of rigid legalism. The problem with legalism is it can never cover everything that needs to be covered. You no sooner slam the door on this wrong than you forget to make a law against *this* wrong or attitude. So some have sought to go beyond legalism in eradicating the sinful human nature to practice asceticism, a rigorous denial of the body.

Symeon was a fifth century saint who tried this. He was called the Pillar Saint. In a Herculean effort to deny the flesh he spent the last 36 years of his life camped on a platform that was three feet in diameter, set on a pillar fifty feet high. No roof over his head and a simple banister that ran around the rim of the platform so that he could have something to lean upon. He went up there 36 years before his death and he never came down until he died from a loathsome cancer on his leg. If ever a man could have conquered the flesh by rigorous asceticism and self-effort there is no better candidate I could select than Symeon, the Pillar Saint.

Phillip Shaff says of him there Saint Symeon stood for many long and weary days and weeks and months and years. It blows your imagination to think of a person doing this. There he stood exposed to the scorching sun, the drenching rain, the crackling frost, the howling storm, living a life of daily death and martyrdom, groaning under the load of sin, never attaining to the true comfort and peace of soul which is derived from a childlike trust in Christ. Infinite merit, earnestly seeking after a super human holiness.

If the old Saint Symeon could not successfully eradicate the evil human nature, it's doubtful that you're going to be able to either on your own efforts.

The third attitude toward our fallen human nature goes to the exact opposite of the pendulum. It is the idea that our evil conduct of our sinful human nature can be excused on the basis that God forgives. So many Christians are falling into this trap today. I know that what I'm going to do, what I'm about to do, is wrong. But I'm going to go ahead and do it anyway because God forgives. And you've got to forgive me too if God forgives.

That has as much logic as an expensive china vase is perched on the edge of the ledge and it says I'm going to go ahead and fall off this ledge and shatter into a million pieces because I know that the potter who made me is able to put me back together again. Yes, the potter may be able to put the vase together again. But the cracks, the seams, the chips will show. It will be together but it will not be as before.

David found that while God forgave his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah he did not remove the consequences of that deliberate act. David was always different after that moment even though he was forgiven. Don't trade lightly on this matter of God's forgiveness. Forgiveness for deliberate sin is somewhat akin to what the father was telling his boy – Son, when you nail nails into this beautifully crafted wood table I can remove the nails. That's forgiveness. But the scars will remain.

A fourth wrong approach to the sinful human nature manifesting itself in the life of the Christian is despair. I am powerless to change my behavior. I can never live the Christian life. I have tried to get victory in this area of my life. But I am powerless. Why try?

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So a person goes into defeat.

If none of these approaches are right how can we deal with the flesh? How can we deal with our sinful human nature? How can we see the fruit of the Spirit grow in us? That's what this passage in Galatians 5 is all about. Paul really presents to us three clear understandings and concepts and truths, which are the means by which we live the life of the Spirit rather than live the works of the flesh. The three things which Paul teaches us are these.

First, know this, that "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires," Galatians 5:24. Have you done this? Have you crucified the works of the flesh? The sinful human nature with its passions and desires? Your immediate instinct is to probably say no, I haven't done that. The reason why your instinct is to say no is because after one moment of self-inventory you discover that there is some area of your human nature that isn't yet dead. Maybe it might not be acting up all that much at this present moment but if its asleep, it's still not dead. So your tendency is to say, I've not yet completed my crucifixion. If those who live according to the Spirit have crucified the sinful nature. Then I must not yet be fully dead.

I want for you to govern your life by the clear reading, the plain reading of the scripture. Which may tell you something about yourself that you do not know or that you do not feel. How many know that there are some things that are true whether you know them or feel them. Here is a truth that is true.

Paul says, "They that belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature." Have crucified. It's a past tense statement. He does not say those who belong to Christ *are* crucifying the flesh. He does not say those who belong to Christ *shall* crucify the flesh. But he says those who belong to Christ *have*. Past tense. An act that has already been done. Have crucified the flesh.

This communion Sunday reminds us what does it mean that we have crucified the flesh? It means that on the cross Christ was crucified for you. I know of other place where you are crucified except in the cross of Christ. I've never yet found anybody who can crucify themselves because you have to keep one hand free. To be crucified, to see the flesh crucified is to identify with the death of Jesus completely.

Peter says "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness." Paul is not calling upon us to deal with our sinful human nature by going and getting ourselves crucified. It has been done for us. Done for 2000 years. It was done on the cross. There's the spiritual that says, Were you there when they crucified my Lord? I want to answer scripturally, Yes I was there when they crucified my Lord. I was there when they laid him in the tomb. I was there when he rose up from the dead. Because my life and your life, if you belong to Christ, has been hidden with God in Christ. You were with him on the cross. He was not put to death for his own sinful nature but he was put to death for yours. Forever from that time on the battle, the issue was settled as to who is victor in your life. Christ is victor if you have trusted in his death and in his resurrection. It's a very hard concept to understand because it involves you positionally being present before God. It involves you perceiving that through faith rather than through sight.

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I think I can illustrate it. On many a Sunday I hold a baby and dedicate that infant the Lord. At that particular moment that baby is not aware of the act that is going on on its behalf. Only later as that child grows will it begin to understand that at a particular moment in its life it was presented to God in dedication. I think it's that way when we begin to understand the cross. That we were really present at Calvary. We were like a baby in that we did not sense. Our sensory experience was not working at that moment to perceive the action that was happening. But we were present there. Christ died for us. We were in him. Because we were in him in the cross we were with him when he rose from the grave. You were present to him even when he was not present to you. You were given a new nature on the cross. Theologically the old you is already gone. You have been crucified. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away and the new has come." Theologically the old you is already gone. Biologically you're coming to an end.

The cross was where our own nature was crucified. In the cross of Christ in glory. The nature of a dynamited building was over the minute the plunger was plunged. It took a little bit of time for the manifestation of the fact that the old nature of the building was gone. From the vantage point of eternity it is only a matter of seconds between the time the plunger on the cross is given which destroys your old nature and the manifestation of that – the time when you'll eternally appear before God. It has already happened. Christ has administered a fatal dose to your old human nature. It is dead and it is dying. The outward man is passing away. There will come that day when we're in God's present when that man won't even be with us anymore. It is dying. It is terminally ill.

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