

**LIVING BEYOND YOURSELF (THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT) - SJGC**

Galatians 5:13-26

Week #1 – Introduction and the Fruit of Love

**PATTI**

On a scale of 1 to 10, how difficult is it for you to be loving towards others right now? How about to be patient and self-controlled? Joyful? In a place of peace? Kind? My guess is that exhibiting these kinds of behaviors is a much greater challenge now than it was in a pre-pandemic, pre-recession, pre-homeschooling world.

And, my guess is, that living this way is going to become even more challenging for us over the coming days leading up to and following the presidential election.

But here's the good news... living the fruit of the Spirit is not dependent upon your ability to WILL these things into your life.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are what flows out of us when allow the Spirit of God to work deep within us.

These are the qualities that make us more like Jesus and the qualities that he uses to draw other people to Himself THROUGH YOU!

Do you know anyone who, no matter what their situation, always radiates godly peace? They're unshakeable no matter their circumstances.

Non-believers are drawn to that kind of peace, because with all the chaos surrounding them every day, they search for whatever shred of peace and joy they can get their hands on, but it's illusive, and it never lasts.

So they end up trying to fill the void with cheap substitutes that can't deliver what they promise. Things like food, alcohol,

entertainment, sex, or drugs that numb their pain for a time, but leave them longing for more once again.

When seekers like that look at you in a time of crisis, and see in you God's unshakable peace and joy, they want what you have.

And you will have an opportunity to introduce them to the God you know in Christ.

## **JEFF**

In the coming weeks, we'll explore how we can COOPERATE with the Holy Spirit's work to exhibit this fruit in our lives, so that tired, divided, and troubled people around us can benefit.

But first we have to define what it means to live by the Spirit.

And to do that, here's a little thought experiment.

What if tomorrow your heart was replaced with the heart of Jesus and he lived your life on Thursday, October 22?

With that heart transplant - would there be any change?

Would there be things that you would stop doing and other things you would start doing... or do more consistently?

While you ponder that, let me throw in a little twist.

According to **Ezekiel 36:25-27**,

YOU ALREADY HAVE THE HEART OF JESUS!

### **Ezekiel 36:25-27**

<sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you...

When you were baptized, God cleansed you from sin and plunged you into the death that Jesus died for you. And having been raised with Him, you now have both His heart and His Spirit.

This is what it means to be "born again" or "born from above".

Notice in these verses who is doing the work  
and whose takes the responsibility  
for changing a sinful person...

(and yes, even babies have a sin nature.  
Because their whole lives revolve around  
me and what I want and what I need...  
and this will only intensify when they  
become teenagers.

But I digress. As I was saying, who takes  
responsibility for change in these verses?

God says,

I will sprinkle you,

I will cleanse you,

I will give you..."

Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit,  
God takes up responsibility to make your  
life reflect His character.

### **PATTI**

Yes, ,but there's a problem, right?  
Because while our baptism gives us  
a new SPIRITUAL NATURE, we still have an  
OLD SINFUL NATURE that St. Paul calls "THE FLESH."  
When he says "flesh", Paul isn't talking about skin,  
but rather our innate tendency to rebel against  
God and to disobey his commands (think Adam and Eve).

So if the nature we are born with is of the FLESH,  
and the new nature that we are reborn into at our  
baptism is of the SPIRIT, then we have something of  
A WAR taking place within us almost every minute  
of every day.

This is the reason that Paul says in Romans 7 that  
he wants to do what is right, but he finds himself  
doing the opposite and actually ends up doing  
the wrong thing that he hates.

And our text tonight is really about  
how to solve this dilemma.

How then can we live the Christian life?

The Old Adam has been drowned in baptism, but to quote a line attributed to Martin Luther, *"the old Adam is a mighty good swimmer,"* and therefore keeps popping back up. So while baptism takes only a moment, it requires a lifetime.

What that means practically is that we need to keep putting to death the old nature within us and "the works of the flesh" that are part of the list of vices that Paul enumerates.

Another illustration of this need is found in Native American folklore. The story is told of a tribal elder was teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he says to the boy. "It's a terrible fight and it is between two dogs. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego."

He continues, "The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asks his grandfather, "Which dog will win?" The chief simply replied, "**The one you feed.**"

## **JEFF**

How do we feed the new nature that is ours in Christ? Jesus addresses this question in John 15:1-4 when he says,

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (Here it is...) <sup>4</sup> **Remain in me, as I also remain in you.** No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

<sup>5</sup>“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

To remain or abide in Christ is the goal.  
And of course, the way that we abide with Jesus is to “continue in his Word.”  
To allow the Bible to speak to us.

Some people have said to me,  
“I don’t understand the Bible.”  
And I usually reply, “That’s okay,  
the Bible understands YOU!  
The Bible interprets YOU!  
The Bible changes YOU!”  
It’s not your work, but the Spirit’s  
work through the Word.

Don’t ask me to explain how it happens.  
It’s a mystery. All I know is that the prophet  
Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, said...

so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish  
what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Exposing yourself to God’s Word daily then,  
along with practices like prayer and meditation  
are the way our relationship with God is fueled  
and grows stronger.

Since God is doing the work of growing the  
fruit of the Spirit within you, then the more  
connected you are to Him, the more fruit  
there will be!

What fruit of the Spirit do you already see  
manifesting in your life? Which of the nine  
characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit do you  
need God to grow more in you?

### **PATTI**

Let’s begin tonight by looking at the first and  
most important aspect of the fruit of the Spirit...

LOVE. You may want to turn now to the 1 Corinthians 13, which is often called, "The LOVE chapter" of the Bible.

It is often read at weddings, but as we tell couples during pre-marriage counseling, it was written to address a church fight.

We'll read the chapter in its entirety next week. But in it, St. Paul shows us three things about love.

### **1. Love is greater than any spiritual gift ( 1 Cor. 13:1-3)**

Whether your gift is knowledge, faith, giving, or something else, it will not be effective or pleasing to the Lord apart from love.

Why is love the greatest gift and fruit of the Spirit? Because GOD IS LOVE! But what does that mean exactly?

As Christians, we confess one God in three persons - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; And within the Godhead there is already a perfect relationship of love.

This relationship of love is what you and I are baptized into when we receive the sacrament.

This love is what the bible calls AGAPE or godly love, as opposed to brotherly love or romantic love.

Our culture tends to think of love as a **TRANSACTION**. The notion of transaction comes from the business world where people do things for each other with the expectation of **reciprocation**.

You may feel a bit unsteady when someone gives you a present when it's not your birthday or Christmas. In these cases, you start to wonder whether you are somehow indebted to them.

INDEBTEDNESS is the basis of reciprocity, which always leads to people keeping a mental tally of who has done what for whom. In other words, SCORE KEEPING.

And score keeping fosters [anger](#) and resentment, particularly in marriages, which are never 50/50 propositions, because one person always has a “higher score” than the other. Right now, that’s me, by the way!

## **JEFF**

Sure, honey. But seriously, as Christians we don’t love because we’re looking for some kind of reciprocity, On the contrary, 1 John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us” - because love is our new nature in Christ.

Love never thinks about what it is going to receive. It doesn’t care about winning. It isn’t results oriented or judgmental. It doesn’t punish or blame.

So when we criticize our others or foster division and competition, we are actually reflecting disunity [rather than the unity of the Trinity] and therefore dishonoring God.

But when we harden our hearts like that to another person created in God’s image, the Holy Spirit will convict us.

## **2. Love is a commitment that expresses itself in supernatural responses of action, attitude, and behavior. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)**

Our culture throws the word love around quite carelessly because it understands love as an emotion. As in...

“I love my grandkids, I love football (especially the Buckeyes, and the Browns when their winning), and I love pizza.”

But St. Paul insists that love is much more than a feeling. It is something that can be seen, experienced, and demonstrated.

v. 4 of 1 Corinthians 13 says that **love is patient**.

patient. But I like the King James Translation better here because KJV renders the word as “long-suffering,” implying that love doesn’t have a short fuse. It doesn’t lose its temper easily.

Agape love endures. It doesn’t say, “I’ll give you just one more chance.” Because the more God humbles me with an awareness of my own sin and shortcomings, the easier it will be for me to extend grace and patience to fellow sinners.

### **PATTI**

Secondly, **love is kind.**

Patience, which is sort of passive must be accompanied by a positive response of kindness toward another person. But that doesn’t always mean giving them what they want.

Sometimes love must be tough. So in the context of the church, kindness may mean forcing an addict to go through the horrifying pain of withdrawal.

Kindness may include saying no to a spoiled child or reporting a crime committed by a friend, and we’ve done both. Kindness means to withhold what harms as well as to give what heals.

How best can you express these positive aspects of love this week, especially to the people who are closest to you?

After all it’s fairly easy to love “the world” in general; but much more difficult to love the people who are close enough to disappoint and irritate you on a regular basis (present company excluded, of course), especially in a time when we rarely apart from one another.

Next week, we’ll re-visit 1 Corinthians 13

to explore more about what love is and is not. Because the more we understand the nature of love, the more we will be able to catch ourselves when we fall short, and the more we will be able to thank God when we reflect His image to those around us.

**PRAYER:**

Holy Spirit, we love you and we thank you that you are always at work in the lives of those who belong to Christ. Would you empower us this week to crucify the flesh with its sinful desires, and to feed our new nature in Christ? Would you empower us to live beyond ourselves this week by increasing in us the fruit of righteousness, to your glory and the upbuilding of your kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.