



April 6, 2014
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Ergo... Be Fruitful
Galatians 5:13-24

You may not know Pamiel Reed's name but you've seen her face. She is one of our new elders who was up here last Sunday, praying with Pastor Larry. You would recognize this dear soul if you saw her. But you might not have recognized her on Thursday. When Cyndi and I saw her in the ICU at St. Joe's... she looked rough!

What happened? Pamiel was on her deck washing her second story windows. As she reached out to polish the farthest corner, she slipped and fell nine feet to the rockery below. She fractured her skull and lacerated her forehead. Even worse, she landed so hard and so badly that she broke her femur in two places. Her body was heading one way and her leg was heading the other. It was grotesque and painful and traumatizing. And she was awake the entire time.

She screamed and screamed for help. Finally, someone heard her and called 911. Chief John Burgess—a member of this church—should be proud of his department. Pamiel raved about the care she received from our paramedics and fire fighters. Not only did they deal professionally with her medical needs, after she had been transported to the hospital, do you know what else they did? They rebuilt the retaining wall that had tipped over, swept up the dirt... and finished washing her windows!

This is a vivid image of what we've been learning in Galatians. Just like Pamiel as she lay there on the ground, we were in a hopeless state as human beings. We even use the same language to speak of it. We call what happened in the Garden of Eden the "Fall" of humanity. Our earthly parents chose sin—chose to eat the forbidden fruit and be their own gods—and in that moment, humanity fell hard and horribly. We reached for more than we should have and ended up on the ground... traumatized, broken and absolutely helpless to do anything about it.

Easter is in two weeks. In one way, it is the most dangerous Sunday of the year. What? It's the celebration of the greatest moment in human history... when Jesus rose from the grave and offered to his disciples the gift of eternal life. How could that be dangerous? Because we will have 2000 extra people here that morning who are not aware of how broken they are... not aware of how far they have fallen and cannot possibly rise without help. If you asked them, most would say they are

Christians; and if you asked them why, the answer would be, "I believe in God. I try to be a good person. I never miss Easter or Christmas service."

Easter is dangerous because these dear souls really do not see how broken they are. They don't have spiritual bones sticking out of their leg sideways so they don't recognize that they are as helpless and hopeless as Pamiel was in her rock garden. That there is nothing they can do to save themselves: not trying to be good, not following rules, and certainly not showing up to have their Easter ticket punched. They are broken and trapped and don't even know it.

Now I hope we fill this building four times on Easter. I hope you invite your friends and family. I hope the real message of the gospel of grace shines through, because the churches of our country are filled with nominal Christians who still believe that the gospel is about rule-keeping and being good. But it is not. The gospel is about grace—God seeing us in our broken condition, God hearing our cries for help, God coming to us when we could not come to him, God putting back together the pieces of our life as they should be, sweeping up the filth, and even washing the windows of our souls so that the light of Christ can shine through, both in and out.

That is the message of Galatians. While we were helpless, Christ died for us! He wrapped us in his holiness, and the Father declared us righteous in that moment. What is that called? Justification. And he placed His Spirit within us and began to change us from the inside out... making us more and more holy. And that process is called what? Sanctification! I know I'm repeating myself, but this is the gospel. This is the heart of the gospel. And if you hear nothing else this year, but you hear and understand this... that is enough.

So if that is the gospel—this idea that God loves and saves because he wants to, not because we earn it—so what? That's what the last two chapters of Galatians deal with. Therefore! The "therefores" of our Christian life... If it is true that God has saved us this way—therefore... ergo—this is what our lives will look like.

What was last week's therefore? Freedom! Galatians 5:1: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." The first wonderful "therefore" of the Spirit-filled life is this: we are free! Free from our past, free from our guilt, free from our shame, free from the power of sin that haunts us and twists us and wants to destroy us. And here is the key point from last week's text: if you are in Christ, you **are** free. You don't have to earn it, gain it, or strive for it. All you need to do is live into what you are! Be free! Believe God and **be free**. Amen? That's the incredible, restoring grace of Christ. If you trust him—if you receive the gift of his sanctifying Spirit—you **are** free. So live free!

But here's the problem: if it is true that I am not saved by my rule-keeping—if it is true that God's grace reaches down to heal me when I am twisted and broken on the rock heap of life—then what is the next natural question? Why try? If it

doesn't matter how I live—if my salvation is not dependent upon what that I do but only upon what Christ has done for me—then why not just live the way I want to? Live it up? Live recklessly. If I don't have to obey the rules in order to be saved... well then, why obey the rules? Paul deals with that in the next passage.

“Be **free**” Paul urges us. Live into the freedom that is yours in Christ. But listen to the next line: “But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.” Do you know what the actual Greek word for “sinful nature” is there? Flesh! Paul talks throughout his writings about the conflict between our “flesh”—our sinful nature—and the “Spirit” who is at work within us. “Yes, you are free,” Paul says. “But don't abuse your freedom. You are not free to sin... you are free not to sin.” Do you get that? In our flesh—in our broken state—we could not not sin. That's the problem with the Law. It tells us what we must do to be holy, but it doesn't tell us how to do it nor does it give us the strength to live that way. It is only when we turn to Jesus—only when his Spirit comes into our lives and begins to transform us—that we actually have the power within us to live obediently. Only in the Spirit can we live without sin.

But it's not like our sinful nature disappears. As long as we live on this earth, there will be an internal, spiritual battle taking place. A battle between our flesh—our broken spiritual state which the Devil wants to hold onto—and the Holy Spirit who is in the process of kicking him out of our lives! Is it our battle? No. It is the Spirit at work within us, but we make daily decisions about whether we will submit to the work of the Spirit or keep dabbling in the flesh. ¹⁶ “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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 do not do what you want.”

And then Paul gives us a whole long list of the acts of our sinful nature. This is the sort of thing that is born out of our flesh, and it is not a very nice list. You heard it in the NIV. Let me read it from “The Message.”

¹⁹“It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; ²⁰trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; ²¹the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.”

But we don't want him to go on, do we? That is not good news. It is ugly and harsh news, and we recognize too many of those broken bones sticking out of the flesh of our lives, don't we? So what do we do? If we are in Christ—but we still see the fruit of the flesh coming through—what are we to do about it?

Remember last week I told you about my plane ride from Denver? About the poor woman across from me who had a bloody nose the entire flight? Well, that was only half the story. Right behind that woman, under the aisle seat next to me, was a cute little pink carrying case. And from inside that carrying case, here is what I heard after I sat down in my seat: “Yip, yip, yip.” It was a yappy little Chihuahua. And every time it barked, his owner would kick the pink carrying case. The dog would shut up for a while. And then, it would start again. That was my flight for three hours. A fountain of nose blood in front... and a Chihuahua next to me who was getting the yip kicked out of him.

You know, that yippy dog is a lot like Paul’s list of vices. And the way its master dealt with the Chihuahua reminds me of how we are inclined to deal with our sinful habits. We know these behaviors don’t belong in public although we know they are likely to reveal themselves, sooner or later. But we still want to keep our sin close by! We may try to disguise it—put it in a pretty carrying case so that no one can tell what is really going on inside—but sooner or later, it starts barking. Sooner or later, the stuff in our life that we are trying to cover up—trying to hide, trying to keep under control—is going to come to the surface. And then it becomes all about sin management.

We may try to kick it into submission—we may try to keep it under control so that no one notices— but we can’t do it. We can’t kick our sin nature into submission. That’s just another form of rule-keeping. We can’t say, “Okay, I’m going to try harder not to lust, try harder not to be a cutthroat in business, try harder not to have a foul temper, try harder not to view people as tools to accomplish my purposes.” Paul doesn’t give us this list of vices to say, “Okay, here is your check list. These are the things you need to work on to be a better person.” It’s not like a prescription; it’s a diagnosis. These are the things you are going to see if your flesh is in control. This is the nasty fruit of a rule-keeping lifestyle.

But, Paul says, if you surrender to Jesus—if you invite his Spirit to come in and clean you up, if you cooperate with the Spirit and trust him to do what you cannot do—then you begin to see a different kind of fruit coming out of your life. Let’s read on: 22-24.

How many of you have lived in a fruit-growing region? I grew up in Yakima and was surrounded by apple orchards. I still remember the sights and the smells of those fruit trees. What I don’t remember is any sounds. I don’t remember walking through the orchards by my house in the spring and hearing, “Unnnnnnn... unnnnnnn.” I don’t remember hearing those trees straining to produce fruit. The orchard is not a labor room. Apples are not babies. Fruit just happens. It is the natural byproduct of a tree that is planted in good soil, watered, pruned in the fall, smudged in the winter. Fruit just happens.

If you are living in the Spirit—if you are surrendering to Christ and allowing his Spirit to have reign in you—then this is the stuff you will begin to see coming out

of your life. And here's the point Paul is trying to make: producing good fruit is no more about our hard effort than controlling bad fruit is. We don't find victory over bad habits by kicking the dog... by trying harder to cover up or quiet down what is bad. And we don't produce spiritual fruit by trying harder to be good. In fact, the word for "fruit" is singular, not plural. It is not fruits of the Spirit; it is fruit of the Spirit. This is not like a salad bar where you walk by and say, "I think I'll have a spoonful of love and joy and peace... but I'll pass on the patience and kindness."

No, what Paul is saying is this: when the Holy Spirit is at work in your life, you are going to begin seeing evidence of His presence. That evidence is an increasing harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. You will not have to strain to produce it; it will not pop out because you decided that this week, you were going to produce the goodness fruit. No, it is the natural outcome of surrendering more and more of your life to the work of the Holy Spirit. Or to put it differently, the first "therefore" of the gospel is freedom. You are free in Christ, so be what you are: be free. The second "therefore" of the gospel is fruitfulness. If the Holy Spirit lives in you, He will bring forth fruit. So be what you are... be fruitful!

Are you getting this? We are not saved because we try harder. We are not saved because we disguise the dog or kick the dog into temporary silence. We are saved because the Spirit comes—and does what I wish the flight attendant had done—removes the dog and begins to grow something new in its place. It is as simple and as hard as that.

Friday I came to realize that, over the last few months, I have been self-absorbed at home. I had been leaning heavily on Cyndi for emotional support and, frankly, forgotten that I wasn't the only one in that marriage who was carrying a heavy load relationally. As that sank in, I felt embarrassed and selfish. So I sat Cyndi down on my lap, confessed that to her and asked her forgiveness. She was great, of course. But guess what I started doing after that? Kicking the dog... playing it over in my head and heart, feeling lousy about it all over again. So I decided to try and listen to my own sermon. What a surprise: my flesh is self-absorbed! So instead of replaying my failure, I began praying the same thing over and over again: "Holy Spirit, please fill me anew. Please make me more like Christ. Please complete the work you have started in me."

If you belong to Jesus, your life will bear the fruit of Jesus. The more of yourself that you surrender to his Spirit... the more bountiful the harvest of your life will be. And it is all his work, not yours. You can receive that grace gift and watch with amazement as your life begins to look more and more like Jesus, or you can keep kicking your dog. It's up to you!

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. The first half of Galatians tells us that we can do nothing to earn our salvation; that it is all a gracious gift of God. If so, how do we understand this text? Are supposed to "try" and be fruitful? Isn't this just another effort at works? At earning God's favor? If not, why not?
 2. The word "fruit" is singular, not plural. If you can't pick and choose which fruit of the Spirit you want to exhibit, what is the implication of that for your own spiritual journey?