

Begin with a reading of John 15:1-17

“*A Fruitful Life of Love*”

August, 2018

Does being a Christian believer make any difference in your life? Are you a better person having Christ in your heart?

Jesus said: **When you produce much fruit, you are My true disciples. This brings great glory to My Father.**

There is a criteria we can use to examine whether we’re growing in faith. The apostle Paul defines the measuring stick as the “Fruit of the Spirit,” referring to that which Jesus said we would produce because of our “connection” in Him!

Let me be clear: the Fruit of the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ living in you!

If Jesus is living in me then I ought to be different than who I once was. Am I right? There ought to be some signs that we no longer conform to this world, but we are being “transformed by the renewal of our minds!” (Romans 12:2)

Many of us invited Jesus into our lives so that we might avoid the fires of eternal damnation! We wanted the “fire insurance” for eternity! But did you know that inviting Him into your heart, **“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, He will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.”** (Romans 8:11 NLT)

In another place, the Bible reminds us of our new life as a gift from God: **“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”** (Galatians 2:20 NLT)

God intends for something *spiritual* to happen in you and me when we come to Jesus Christ! We are not going to be the same person we once were! And I’m thankful for that! Because I was a leach, a nitpicker, a lustful, envious, self-centered, manipulating critical cuss who wasn’t fit to be your friend.

So the test of spiritual maturity will be found by the influence of Christ in you! How well are you submitting to the authority of God’s will in your life?

Let’s look at the person who rejects the way of Christ: **READING Galatians 5:16-21**

<sup>16</sup> Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. <sup>17</sup> The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. <sup>18</sup> But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

<sup>19</sup> When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Let’s *all* hear this today – and I’m talking to teenagers and grandparents, to children and adults. Before Paul defines the Fruit of the Spirit he tells us what life in the world, the life of the

flesh is like. And don't some of you recognize this? You may be torn between two different passions. The Bible says: **The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants.** And what is the evil or the old sinful nature? Well, you know it includes **sexual immorality.** That covers a long list of stuff! **Impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, and wild parties.** Do you recognize any of these?

Some of my Hank Williams, Jr. friends would say, "That sounds like a whole lot of fun!" But the desires of the sinful nature rebels against the Spirit of Christ in your life.

Some good old red-neck may think, "If I have to give up all this to go to heaven – then hell will be fine with me!" thinking that he will be the life of the party in hell! But I assure you, hell will be no party! That's not what hell will be like at all! The consequences of a lustful, self-serving, jealous or quarreling life will be ...total isolation. It will be the absence of music and laughter, beauty and color. Jesus warned us in many places that hell is a torture that is a whole lot like a burning fire; a fire that does not go out!

But the *Fruit of the Spirit* of God begins with *love!* And that should be no surprise to us. Love is at the very core of who Jesus is. The Bible says: **"He who does not love does not know God; for God is love!"** (1 John 4:8)

READING Galatians 5:22-26

<sup>22</sup> The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

<sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. <sup>25</sup> Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

We might say love is the only spiritual fruit! All the others are but added colors in the rainbow of love. When the Love of God dwells in your life you will have Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Humility, and Self-control.

This is who God made us to be! Through faith in Jesus Christ, He is restoring us to the original plan – His best for you and me!

We might argue, "I love everybody!" But do you love the person next to you in the pew? Or across the aisle? Do you even know the name of the person across the aisle? It's easy to love "everybody." There's no personal attachment or responsibility loving "everybody." It's magnificently harder to love those in front of our face who are in need day in and day out.

Paul uses the "Fruit of the Spirit" to describe what our nature or personality will be like in heaven! Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Humility, and Self-control.

Is this fruit growing *today* in our lives? And I don't want you to think, "Boy, my spouse could use some more fertilizer for her fruit!" Let's not think about how this applies to someone else in your family or your neighbor... That's too easy. "Yea, I know this guy doesn't have the fruit of the Spirit! Joy? No way! Humility? Huh-uh!"

No, we can't care for anyone's garden but our own! So how's the fruit growing in your

life? Will God find in you what He's nurturing in the garden of your heart and mind?

The quality of our love is measured by the quality of our relationship with Jesus!

Now I have to admit, love doesn't come easy for many of us! Not this kind of love, *agape* love. If the early Christians had been so transformed by the power of love there wouldn't be a need for Paul to remind them to nurture the fruit in their lives. If love had become second nature when they confessed their sins and were baptized, Paul wouldn't fret about people's character. But he writes to a Church in conflict with the sinful nature!

Paul has to admonish the believers to have "genuine love."

We're talking today about God's love poured into our lives. The new love that Jesus introduces to the world is "agape" love, and it's different because ...

1. It's a product of the Holy Spirit, whose love is self-sacrificing and unconditional;
2. This is a "love" demonstrated by God, who sent His Son for sinners (Romans 5:5) while sinners didn't care about God and rebelled against Him!

"Love" as described in the great chapter is something special: **Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

3. A flawed and phony love is conditional. Conditional love is a love that says, "I will love you, if you will love me"; or if you will do what I expect of you. Counterfeit love is after instant gratification. It is selfish. It wants only to pleasure our own desires.

Between a male and female, a phony love is one set of glands calling out to another.

But real love is a friendship that has caught fire. It takes root and grows one day at a time. Real love is self-assured and sacrificing – serving not to *earn* a favor, but serving because my *desire* is to offer favors!

So how well do I love? I was doing a wedding with friends on a beach in Florida and it was about 10 minutes before everything started. Like everyone else, I'm making final adjustments, looking over my part and what I'm going to do when I notice a woman struggling, staggering up the beach toward our special site, the place that's decorated and designated for this well-planned event. Here she comes like the unpredictable bouncing of a football.

I thought I better intercept this wayward "intrusion" in order to protect our setting.

Notice that I thought of her as an interruption and not as a person. She appeared drunk. She was obviously half-baked from the blistering sun. With squinting eyes, she said something barely understandable as I approached. Obviously wanting help, I just wanted to get her on her way.

There was no heroic story on my part that day! No amazing "Jesus moment." She did leap-frog our little setting as I tried to answer her questions and moved her along. It wasn't but a moment later I wondered, "Was this the devil trying to interrupt a beautiful moment for a couple – or was this an angel testing the condition of my heart?"

I know, you might think I have some pretty squirrely ideas, but the Bible says, **Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.** Hebrews 13:2 (NIV) Jesus said whenever we have cared for the least of these among us we have taken care of Him! (Matthew 25:40)

So had this been a test or a mere random interruption? Because it sure felt like a test, and I was ashamed how miserably I felt, wanting her to just go away!

It's not enough for me to take care of those in my family, loving those in my inner circle, thinking that's all that's necessary. The Bible says: **We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.** (1 John 3:14 NRSV)

Now I know that I have passed from death to life! My life has absolutely changed because of the Spirit of God in me! I know Jesus as my Lord and Savior! But there are some obvious places where I need to confess specifically some current sin and repent, inviting the grace of God to shape me up into the person He is forming me to be!

I'm excited about what God is doing in my life! And I know He's not finished with me, because I have some rough edges that only He can smooth.

Do you want the new heart and mind that God brings when He comes to live in you?

I'm not asking whether you want the reward of heaven rather than hell! No one in their right mind would reject the offer of heaven! But do you believe that obedience to the Spirit of God is the best way to live in this world?

Do you *want* what only the Father can offer? (A decision of the will.)

And secondly, will you make the choices necessary to live into God's love? Will you be the branch that connects to Jesus so that His Spirit might flow into your life? (A matter of action.)

INVITATION: If God is love then God has to be in charge here, in your heart. Our ability to love when *self* is in control is flawed and imperfect. God is love, and He brings a different kind of love into our world! Praise the Lord!

The Bible warns that there must be a right environment before the fruit will grow (Galatians 5:25-26). Just as fruit cannot grow in every climate, so the fruit of the Spirit cannot grow in every individual's life or in every church. Fruit grows in a climate blessed with an abundance of the Spirit and the Word. "Walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25) means "keep in step with the Spirit" – not to run ahead, and not to lag behind. This involves getting into the Word, the Bible, and prayer, worship, praise, and fellowship with God's people. It also means "pulling out the weeds" so that the seed of the Word can take root and bear fruit.

This demands humility on our part; setting priorities so that the Spirit has an invitation to penetrate the ways of the world to transform our lives! Are you ready for this?

PRAYER

Many of us, Lord Jesus, have been brought up in the Christian faith; we have been going to church from our youth; we know the facts of the Bible.

But we have not always personalized what we know ...

we have been fearful of moving beyond tradition ...

we have sometimes been satisfied with head knowledge ...

we have often lacked the zeal of new birth.

Forgive us if we have been satisfied with the trivial accessories of the faith. Inspire us to personal devotion, to inner transformation, and to passionate love.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Let us remember, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him!