

Galatians 5:16–26

FruitFullNess – For holiness

The other day my friend Scottie told me that the daycare his church runs, and that his kids attend, had to be shut down.

The reason for the shutdown was: mould. Mould had been found in the air-conditioning vents and around the centre which was a health hazard for the staff and students at the daycare. The centre had to be closed for cleaning which presented problems.

First the daycare staff were out of work and second his kids had no daycare to go to.

So Scotty, ever the pragmatist decided to run a week of professional development for the staff. Even though it's a Anglican daycare, most of the staff weren't sure about what that meant and they talked about needing some values that they could build their culture on – some non-negotiables that would guide everything they do. So Scottie decided to teach the team about the fruit of the Spirit which we find in Galatians 5:22–23:

“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”
(Galatians 5:22–23)

When he'd finished the staff were spellbound. This was everything they wanted to imbue in the children in their care, right there in an ancient book they didn't know much about. They can't wait to get back into the daycare centre to share what they've learned with the kids.

Today's we're going to look at this incredibly helpful passage for ourselves and see what we might be able to share with the people in our lives.

–the fact of Christian conflict

Our passage starts off by getting to the heart of Christian conflict. Look at v.16:

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Galatians 5:16)

From the get-go we see that we need Holy Spirit's power to live a fruitful life. We also see the main problem Paul is addressing in this letter.

Galatians was originally written to a young church in a Greek speaking region, now in modern day Turkey. The church was culturally mixed with some Jews but also a lot of Greek Christians. While Paul had planted the

church, after he left, legalists had moved in who questioned his ideas about Jesus. They questioned Paul's message and taught that while Jesus was ok, in order to make God happy you had to follow Jewish purity laws.

This meant you couldn't eat pork, you had to practice Jewish rituals, and men had to be circumcised. The Galatians wrote a letter to Paul asking for clarity and he wrote back with the letter we're holding in our hot little hands.

And if you think your life is 2000 years and 14000km away from this problem, you're wrong. The fact of the matter is the Galatians had run into a problem that's still with us today.

It's the problem of deciding whether to do what we want to do, or what we ought to do.

For the Galatians there were two ways of approaching this problem. Many decided to just do what they wanted to do. If it feels good, do it. Follow your heart. Do what makes you happy.

The problem was this created a cruel world with vast disparities between rich and poor. The powerful trampled on the weak and while some got to follow their dreams, everyone else got shafted.

For Jews this way of life was out of the question. God had given his people the law and it was to be obeyed. For religious Jews the law was the only thing that could reign in our impulses. The law told you what you could and couldn't eat, how you were to spend your money, who you couldn't marry, and pretty much every detail of life.

Legalism was a way to elevate yourself in the Jewish community. The more religious you looked the better.

Now while times have changed our brains haven't so we still have these two paths are still around today.

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt likens the human mind to an elephant and a rider. On the one hand you have the rider, your frontal cortex which is your rational mind. It's the decision-making part of your brain. On the other hand you have the rest of your brain which subconsciously controls pretty much everything else, this is the elephant. This is a vast oversimplification but stay with me.

The rider is weak but knows where to go. The elephant is strong but thoughtless. It's the same with our minds. Our rational mind overall is much weaker than the rest of impulsive mind.

And this is where the two worldviews of Galatia still clash. The non-Jewish Galatians were used to letting the elephant take control. Sure they had strong minds but by in large they let their desires control their direction.

Along comes Paul and says there is a better way to live. Follow a Jewish man named Jesus and he'll set you free. For those who received this news, the gospel of Jesus meant freedom and peace.

And this is why Paul reminds the people of the lives they'd left behind, by sharing what I like to call the anti-fruits in v.19:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. (Galatians 5:19-21)

When you let the flesh (the elephant) control your life, your life will produce anti-fruits.

John Stott divides these anti-fruits into four realms:

The first realm of sex: immorality, impurity, and debauchery. The second realm is religion: idolatry, witchcraft. The third realm is that of society and we're given eight examples: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy. The final realm is that of drink: drunkenness, orgies.

All these are ways we let our flesh break-down our relationships. When we lose control, community breakdown follows. When we let our flesh control us, we produce anti-fruit and Paul sternly warns us that those who produce anti-fruits will not inherit the kingdom of God.

And this is where a legalist will slither in and say: you need law! Without laws you can't control the elephant. You need to flog your subconscious mind into submission! And yet we know that if a rider tries simply to beat an elephant into following orders the animal will never work properly, or worse it may turn on the rider and trample it to death.

And this is the fact of Christian conflict. We'll always be in a world of elephants and riders. There will always be people telling us to follow our hearts, and others telling us to buck-up and follow the rules. We'll never make the legalist or the hedonist happy because as Christians we say that we don't just need a better elephant or a stronger rider, instead we say that we need the Spirit of God who created both.

-the way of Christian fruitfulness

This is why as Christians we live by Spirit. We will never find wholeness, we will never live holy lives until he have the Holy Spirit living inside us.

By Holy, I don't mean holier than thou. I'm not talking about people who think they're better than others because they follow religious rules and rituals and look down on others that don't. Instead, holiness is one of the most important aspects of God's character. That's why the Spirit is *Holy*. Holiness is moral perfection and wholeness found only in God, it's something God calls us to, even though we will never obtain it on this side of heaven.

Holiness is about letting God bring our conscious and subconscious together. It's about letting God bring elephant and rider into beautiful harmony, so they can work together in the way God intended.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds, God promises our lives will bear fruit.

And the fruit of the Spirit is:

“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22–23)

Again Stott divides these nine fruits into three categories. Love joy and peace is a triad of Christian virtues, primarily here they relate to God. Our first love is God, our joy is found in God, and our deepest peace is peace with God.

The second category has to do with how we relate to others. Patience is enduring with people who aggravate or persecute us. Kindness isn't just about being nice, it's about how we treat people even when their backs are turned. Goodness is about bigheartedness, striving to lift others up rather than putting them down.

The last three all relate to ourselves. Faithfulness is about being grounded in God, loyally sticking to God whether things are good or bad. Gentleness isn't about being a limp-wristed, it's about humility, reflecting the character of Jesus. Self-control is about temperance and controlling our impulses, channelling our energies in life giving ways.

Paul finishes by reminding the Galatians that against the fruits of the spirit, there is no law. If we walk by faith, and let the Holy Spirit control both elephant and rider, we don't need to live in fear of breaking the law because we'll walk so comfortably within God's guiderails that we won't even see them.

Now if all this sounds like hard work, it's because it is. As Christians we aren't saved by works, instead our work is worship to the one who saved us.

Last week we talked about being living sacrifices and this week Paul writes:

"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." (Galatians 6:24)

The beauty of this crucifixion analogy is that crucifixion took time, it hurt, but it's also final. In the same way training our flesh (the elephant) to walk in step with the Spirit will take time. Like crucifixion, putting to death our sinful nature will hurt, living as a Christian isn't easy, but it's worth it. Lastly crucifixion is decisive. When we put our sinful passions and desires to death, we don't finger the nails, and we don't go back constantly putting ourselves in the same situation. Instead we mercilessly leave our old lives behind and embrace the new.

This is why v:25 says:

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25)

Living in step with the Spirit is letting God call the shots. It's walking in the footsteps of Jesus, praying that we might become more like him. We don't become conceited or proud in this, instead we stay humble and walk in the wake of our life teacher – Jesus.

So friends let's walk in step with the Spirit, asking him to help us crucify our old selves and live lives of Christian victory. Sure it may not look to the world like we're living our best lives now, following our dreams. We may not satisfy the legalists, following laws to the t and projecting an aura of religious perfection. But in time our lives will bear fruit, God promises.

Today I can't think of a better example than that of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel who was preaching in his home church on Monday night when a teenage boy filled with hate tried to stab him. The Bishop held up a small wooden cross, and by some miracle the switchblade jammed and instead of stabbing him the boy could only rain down blows.

As the boy was wrestled to the ground the old bishop turned and laid hands on his attacker and prayed for him. That's the fruit of the Spirit. That's what a mind the has been captivated by Christ does.

And so friends as we finish I want to suggest three things we can do to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our church and perhaps you can think of some more and share them with me over morning tea.

First we must invest in our kids. Cultivating fruit takes seasons and it may take years before we see any fruit. Do you know the children in our church family? Are you praying for them? Are you investing your energy into discipling the next generation?

Second we must invest in each other. Any fruit grower or farmer knows that we need whole ecosystems in order to bear good fruit. How are you investing in the health of our church community. Are you serving, are you making time for your sisters and brothers? How can you help build up the body of Christ?

Finally we must take the Holy Spirit seriously. Do you have a relationship with the Holy Spirit? What are you doing to cultivate a life of constant spiritual growth? Are you asking the Spirit to help you bear fruit?

Like the workers in the daycare the world around us is yearning for the fruit of the Holy Spirit, whether it knows it or not.

May we ask the Holy Spirit to help us navigate the conflicts we come across, and may we follow the path of Christian fruitfulness, asking the Holy Spirit to make us whole. Amen.