

The Character of Christ

Do you know **it is possible to say “yes” to the Holy Spirit in one area and say “no” to him in another area?** Let me take you back 15 or so years. By 1988 the tele-evangelist Jim Baker had built an impressive family of Christian ministries. Then he was caught in an adulterous affair with his secretary. He had great gifts for ministry and poor Christian character. Among his fiercest critics was another tele-evangelist, Jimmy Swaggert. He called down fire and brimstone on Baker for his failings. Swaggert had 2 million people watching his “Old-time Gospel hour” each week. Gifts to his ministries totaled \$150 M each year. Then a couple of months later some photos of Swaggert taking a New Orleans prostitute into a hotel were sent to his denominational headquarters. It was the end of the line for Swaggert, who did everything he could to avoid the discipline and pastoral care that might have saved his ministry. Know who turned him in? Marvin Gorman, a rival evangelist turned in 2 years earlier by Swaggert himself for immorality. Payback time.

What happened to them all? They said “yes” to the Holy Spirit in one area of their lives (ministry gifts), but “no” to the Holy Spirit in another area (character development). It's easy to do. It can happen to an individual. It can happen to a congregation. It can happen to a denomination. Do you know why people say “no” sometimes in the area of character development? Because **character change is hard.**

What Makes Character Change Difficult?

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit... Gal 5:17

That's where you and I live as believers. We have a sinful nature and we've been given the Holy Spirit and they are at war with each other. You will know that war until the day you die. Your sinful nature is stubborn. Tenacious. Deeply rooted. And the Holy Spirit is fighting against it. Do you know the battle? Your human nature is hard to change. It is so hard to change that some people prefer other options...

Some Options...

- **Lower God's Standards...** (“God said what?”) You and I live in an international communion where parts of our communion in America and Canada and other parts are saying “Lower the Standards, that's the solution.” It's no solution. Don't let go of God's standards.
- **Lower My Expectations...** (Gary Hart was more than 20 percentage points ahead of the field in the race for the Democratic nomination in 1988. He had a lock on the nomination, but there were rumors about his character, and finally in frustration, Hart invited reporters to “put a tail” on him. They did, and discovered an actress named Donna Rice alone with Hart, on his lap, on an overnight trip to the Bahamas aboard a yacht named “Monkey Business”. Hart's famous response to reporters? “I am what I am...” He tried to lower expectations, but his presidential campaign imploded.
- **Pretend!** We put on our Sunday best and say that we are someone different than *secretly we really are behind the scenes in my real life.* A lot of us have done that. **Or there's a much better option...**
- **Seek from God the Power to Change**

We are in a new **sermon series** for the month of June called “Living Supernaturally”, and we are going to be talking all month about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Last week we talked about getting equipped for ministry with the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. This week we are talking about the power of the Holy Spirit to change our character. The Bible teaches about the power of the Holy Spirit to change us using the analogy of how trees and vines bear “fruit”.

1. What Is the Fruit of the Spirit?

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

The more you look at this list, the more you realize that...

**They Are The Character Traits Of Jesus Christ

Together these 9 character traits form **three clusters**

- **God-ward Fruit:** *love, joy, peace*

I think Paul had **Jesus’ relationship with God** in mind with these first three character traits. A first love for God that spills over to people all around you. A joy no matter what the external circumstances. A peace that the world cannot give – and that the world cannot take away. Jesus had all three. Do you know that the Bible teaches that each one of these a specifically given to us by Jesus? He promised **“my peace I give to you”** (John 14.27)... and that his followers would have **his joy**. And Paul taught that the Holy Spirit “pours” God’s love into our hearts. If you need more love and peace and joy, **God promises to supernaturally give more** if you are a follower of Jesus. He will!

- **Man-ward Fruit:** *patience, kindness, goodness*

The second cluster of fruit is what governs your **relationships**. If you find yourself irritable and short-tempered, unkind and rude to people, you need the second cluster of fruit. But sometimes God has to do some real work to grow it! I prayed for patience – and God gave me six children! Do you know how Joseph learned the patience he needed to complete God’s call in his life? By being sold into slavery. Do you know where Paul learned patience? Sitting in a jail for two years while others were out doing mission trips! God can take the hardest seasons in your life and make them the greatest moments of character development if you’ll trust him with it. Sometimes it is the hardest places that the Holy Spirit uses most profoundly in us. God doesn’t waste anything in his school of character.

- **In-ward Fruit:** *faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*

The third cluster of fruit is what governs your internal life. **Faithfulness** is the heart that is ready to be trustworthy and prompt in responding to God – whether the matter be little or large. There are no gaps between what he asks you to do and your response. **Gentleness** is the meekness of spirit that believes others are more important than you are. I was so moved by the **Reagan funeral** on Thursday and Friday this week. I was so deeply touched by the stories that were told about Ronald Reagan. I love the story about how after the assassination attempt, still weak from his wounds, he was alone in his room trying to get a glass of water and spilled it on the sink and on the floor. And his aides came in and found the President on his knees mopping up the water from around the sink because he was afraid the nurse would get in trouble if they found spilled water on his floor. That’s meekness – thinking other people are just as important or more important than you are. **Self-control** is the well honed and practiced capacity to say “no” to yourself.

Jesus had all of these in abundance. But let me say something else about the fruit of the Spirit.

**All the Fruit Are Meant For Every Believer!

Now that’s not true about the gifts of the Spirit. We’re told about the gifts of the spirit, “to one he gave this... to another he gave this...to another...” Different gifts are given to different people and we all work together as a body; all the gifts moving in us and from us. But with the fruit of the spirit, it’s different – all of the fruit is given to every individual, every single one. We’re meant to have all of these character traits. So, it’s no good saying “I’m really strong in faithfulness, but its okay if my self-control is real low” or something like that. God wants to work all of them in every single one of us. All three clusters are for you.

Two last comments on understanding fruit...

****Fruit Bearing Is Not Optional**

That's because **holiness is not optional**. Holiness is not optional because God himself is holy, and He is determined that his children should reflect the family likeness... so He gives us his **Holy** Spirit. You can't say, "Lord, give me more of your Holy Spirit but don't give me holiness." It doesn't work. You can't say "yes" and "no" at the same time.

you must be holy in everything you do, just as God—who chose you to be his children—is holy.

1 Pet 1:15-16 (NLT)

The letter to the Hebrews tells us that **without holiness, no one** will see the Lord. It is not optional. And here's the problem...

****Fruit Bearing Is Not Possible** - not by yourself

That is the problem: it's not optional, but it's also not possible, not by yourself. We don't have the capacity, we're too bent inside, we keep messing up. Your "sinful nature" is so strong that it is capable of stopping the Holy Spirit's influence in you. Paul says...

"They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what (good things) you want."

Gal 5.17

Sometimes the battle is so strong that the Spirit gets quenched! Jesus reminds us:

"Apart from me you can do nothing." John 14.5

You cannot make fruit on your own. You can't become holy on your own.

2. How Do You Grow Fruit?

Bearing Fruit Means Something or Someone Has to Die

Paul is pretty blunt about this... Listen to the paraphrase of the Message again... (remember, he's talking to the church; he's talking to Christians like you and me)

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; trinket 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; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.

This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.

Ga 5:19-21 (The Message)

Something has to die. It's that big of a problem. And the list is **way too familiar**. What do you do? Paul wraps it up in these words:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Ga 5:24

What's he saying when he says "you have crucified your sinful nature"? He's saying "you have repented." This is another description of **repentance**. Repentance means to change your head about things. Repentance is changing your life and heading the other way from the way you used to head. It means you stop doing what you used to do because it was destroying your life and get on with a new way of life. That's repentance. When Paul says to crucify your sinful nature, he used a word that he was all too familiar with... "Crucifixion" is **painful, merciless and decisive**. Whatever was crucified doesn't come back – except once. Paul knew that and that is what your attitude should be toward your old life and the things that were destroying you. Merciless and painful, if need be, and decisive. You don't mess with sin; not if you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Not if you want to be like Jesus. Too many times we try to have a foot in both

camps; we want to say yes and no at the same time. We like to ride the fence and we think we can do it. You can't do it; it doesn't work.

Sometimes this kind of repentance doesn't come at the beginning of your walk with the Lord. It sure didn't for me. I started out into a relationship with Jesus; I had no idea what repentance was about. Repentance came five years after I started a relationship with Christ. Five years before I got decisive about the things that were destroying my walk with the Lord. Often there are continuing seasons of repentance along the journey with Christ. Jesus called this "**pruning**". When I first lived in Northern Ohio - in my first parish - our first home that Bec and I lived in was a little tenant home on a big vineyard (40? 50? 60? acres of vines and this little tenant home that we lived in with our two boys who were born at that time. We lived there a couple of years with the boys and every spring they would cut back the vines. I knew this verse: Jesus said that every branch that bears fruit, he prunes. I would watch them prune these vines. You know, the vines, when they were full-grown and bearing fruit late in the season, they were probably 6 ft high and climbing up these lattice frame of wire and spilling over with hordes and hordes of grapes. And every spring, when they cut these things back, they cut them back to about a foot high. I was astounded at how far they cut back the grapes each year. I began to pray "Lord, that isn't what you need to do to me, is it? You don't need to cut me back that much in order for me to bear fruit?" Yes he does. If he needs to, he does. And I wonder if he needs to, you can say to him, "Lord, that's okay. Take back what you need to take back because I want to bear fruit."

Too many times we say "**yes**" and "**no**" to the Holy Spirit at the same time. When we do that, it is almost always a matter of **hidden sin** that we are protecting. You can't be filled with the Holy Spirit and protect hidden sin. Not if you want to be like Jesus. If you want to change. You have to be ruthless with sin. Don't mess with it. Get rid of it.

Bearing Fruit Means Someone Has *to Live*

Listen to how Jesus taught about character change...

"Remain in me, and I will 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. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit..."

John 15:4-5

Get the picture here. There is the **vine** (that's Jesus). Then there is the **branch** (that's you). Then there is the **fruit** (that's the character of Jesus in us and the ministry of Jesus through us to the world). His promise is that if we remain connected to him, **there will be fruit**. There it is. Don't miss it. "*I will remain in you.*" That's the secret.

If he lives **in** us, then **his character will live in us**. I will have **inside me** his *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*. The **disciples didn't have that** inside them while Jesus was on earth. When he was **on earth** he was alongside them, next to them - but still outside them. So he influenced them from the outside, but wasn't yet able to change the character inside them. So right up to the day he died they were arguing about who was the greatest, so sure they were ready for what they had to face - then they all ran when push came to shove because inside they weren't changed. Influence from the outside will never be enough to change your character or mine. Jesus said something more is needed and went back to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit.

Then after his resurrection when he sent the Holy Spirit, he lived **inside them**, giving them his love and peace and joy and patience and goodness and self control... from **the inside**. That changes everything. **Before, he was on the outside, unable to get in. Now, he is on the inside, moving out.** All because he sent his Holy Spirit to live in us.

If you ask the branch how it produces fruit, it will say to you, “I do not know. All I do is pass on what the vine gives to me. And then the fruit comes.” That’s how it works. All you have to do is stay connected to the vine and he promises to stay inside you. The Spirit flows from the vine to the branches and makes the fruit for the world. God does it if you just stay connected. The **Spirit flows from the vine, through the branch, to the fruit.** That is why it is so important to stay connected to Jesus and be full of his Spirit. Then you have his character flowing through you. Don’t go off by yourself. Stay connected to the vine!

And one more thing...

Bearing Fruit Means Someone Has to Follow

It is true that His Holy Spirit can change our character overnight. I have seen it happen so many times! Permanently! I’ve seen people on the spot delivered from alcohol addiction or drug addiction or sex addiction. Permanently delivered for the rest of their lives. I have seen relationships healed on the spot - permanently. I have seen character reformed on the spot - permanently. But more often than instantaneous character transformation, I’ve seen step by step by step transformation. I think that is what usually happens with us. We change **step by step** – as we follow and do what he tells us to do. Look again at Jesus’ words...

*If you **obey** my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.* John 15:10-11

You stay connected to him by following him, by obeying him, by doing what he tells you to do. Look at how Paul says it...

If we are living now by the Holy Spirit’s power, let us follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. Gal 5:25 (LB)

“Living by the Holy Spirit’s Power” – that’s God’s job... you stay connected to the vine and he puts his Holy Spirit in you... “follow the Holy Spirit’s leading – that’s your job. You have to follow Him if you want to be like him. If he tells you to **give up some sin** – do it. If he tells you to **forgive** someone or **love** an enemy – do it. If he tells you to **get connected** to a small group or get **on a mission team** – do it. Be **generous**... **fight** a temptation... **turn away from a partnership** that compromises your faith... **speak** to someone about Jesus, about His love and healing power... do it! When you follow Him, you become like him. That’s how it works.

I want to finish this morning with a little **survey**... Look at the text box on your outline this morning. Look at the list of the fruits of the Spirit.

Strong		Weak
<input type="checkbox"/>	Love	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Joy	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Peace	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Patience	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kindness	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Goodness	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Faithfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gentleness	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Self-Control	<input type="checkbox"/>

Take an honest moment before the Lord and put a mark on the left side of one or two of your strongest character traits. I know that you have two or three or four that you could check off there and its worth honoring God for what he’s doing in your life in the areas where he’s making such a difference and thank him for it. Then check off on the right hand column two or three or four areas where you need to grow and

become more like Jesus and you're not. Maybe it's been a stubborn area of resistance or a constant area of failure for you. Check off some areas where you would like the Holy Spirit to help you in with character development.

I wonder if you would jot down a little prayer that you are willing to pray to him to get that change process moving. Matter of fact, that last verse on the outline might be a good verse to rephrase and pray...

My Prayer:

I [will] obey only the Holy Spirit's instructions. [I will go where you]tell me to go and [do what] what [you tell me] to do, and then [I] won't always be doing the wrong things [my] evil nature wants you to, [but will be more like Christ].

Gal 5:16 (LB)

And maybe today, even today, there is something that has been blocking the Holy Spirit in you for way too long... arrogance, pride, self-sufficiency, or hidden sin. Maybe today would be a good day to cut it off so the Holy Spirit can flow like a river through you. That's his promise. That's what he'll do.