

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

November 11, 2018, Pastor Jeff Harrison

Cultivating (Galatians 5:16-25)

Introduction:

A. A garden illustrates poor cultivation

Good morning friends. And Happy Veterans Day. A huge thank you to everyone who has served in our military! May the Lord bless your life of service! Now, as we look together to God's Word, let's ask Him for help...

So we're continuing our sermon series in Bible book of Galatians, today covering the famous fruit of the Spirit passage. Now if there was ever a sermon crying out for a gardening illustration, I mean *fruit* is right there in our passage. And so let us mourn this preaching tragedy that Dave is not up here this week delivering a gardening illustration for all its worth.

You should know you're not in good hands this morning, for the only garden I've ever had was an involuntary one. When we moved into our house here, the previous owners had a nice garden going with herbs like parsley, basil, and rosemary. And today, only rosemary remains, and it's only there because it can live while being ignored for months on end.

It's not that I set out to kill the other herbs, but if you rarely water and do nothing for the soil and never replant, eventually everything that's not rosemary withers away.

B. We're in danger of cultivating poorly

Now I bet I'm not the only one here who has cultivated something poorly. Sometimes we cultivate poorly because we're just not paying attention, like my garden. Busyness and other priorities keep us from giving something the attention it needs. This benign neglect can be a struggle in many areas of our lives.

Other times we pursue something we know we shouldn't, like hanging out with friends who are a bad influence.

But whether we're choosing the bad, or just neglecting the good, cultivating poorly has its consequences. Some are small, like my garden, but others are not. Some of us are in trouble at work, or in a relationship, or in our spiritual lives because we're cultivating poorly. Now we're in a broken world with other broken people, so not every bad thing in our lives is our doing.

C. Galatians 5 speaks about cultivating

But still, what we cultivate makes a huge difference, and the Bible book of Galatians speaks to this important topic. So if you've got a Bible, turn to the New Testament book of Galatians, chapter 5. Galatians chapter 5, verse 16. If you're new to reading the Bible, the big numbers you see are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers. This letter Galatians was written by Paul, a very key leader in the early church, to churches located in modern day Turkey.

I. Cultivating poorly

A. The flesh and Spirit in conflict (Gal 5:16-18)

Here in chapter 5 of Galatians we'll see two key ideas. The first is *flesh*, mentioned five times in this passage. *Flesh* is a metaphorical way of describing our sin nature, that in us which is apart from God and against God.¹ Our sinful *flesh* wars against the second key term in our passage: God's *Spirit*, Who is mentioned seven times.

The *flesh* pulling us toward sin, God's *Spirit* leading us towards love and godliness. Let's check out this conflict, starting in verse 16.

¹⁶So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For 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 are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

B. The false teachers' false solution to the flesh

Verses 16-18 set the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, towards cultivating poorly or well. And like the Galatian church, we've heard different ideas about how to handle the fleshly pull in us toward destructive things.

The Galatians got some bad advice on how to handle our evil impulses from a group of Jewish false teachers called the Judaizers. The Judaizers' bad advice was, "Christians, faith in Jesus is good, but it's not enough. To get good standing with God, you must believe in Jesus and follow all 613 commands in the Old Testament Law. And you Galatians will never be able to live a good life unless you put yourself under the Old Testament Law. You need the law to fight off your flesh, following Jesus isn't enough."

Now if you read the entire letter of Galatians, some of the Galatian Christians were listening to the Judaizers' false teaching. Some Galatians started mistakenly thinking that

¹ *BDAG* entry describes σάρξ (*sarx*) here as "...all parts of the body constitute a totality known as *sarx* or flesh, which is dominated by sin to such a degree that whatever flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in the *sarx*."

perhaps they needed to put themselves under the Old Testament Law to resist the flesh and ensure good standing before God.

If you've been journeying with us through the book of Galatians, you've heard many times that no law, not even Old Testament Law, has the power to overcome our flesh. Whether the laws in the Old Testament, or the laws of our country, or any other law, a law code can clarify what is wrong and expose things and restrain wrongdoing to some degree, but no law can give life.

C. Fleshly living includes sexual, religious, relational, & drinking sins (Gal 5:19-21a)

As we look honestly at the history of humanity and everything in our hearts, it's clear that we need something more than more laws. No law can empower us to say no to all our bad desires, or heal all the broken parts in us, or give us what we need to live a life filled only with love, truth, and beauty. When we look to the law to save us, it can't, fleshly living comes out one way or another, which Paul describes in verse 19.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;
²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

The list starts and ends with the kinds of things you expect to hear as acts of the flesh. Verse 19 lists sexual sins and verse 20 starts with religious sins, and then the list ends in verse 21 with sins related to abusing alcohol. All these sins, sexual ones, religious ones, substance abuse ones, can cause enormous harm in our lives and in the lives of those we love.

But there in the middle of the list we see another category that might not come to mind when you hear "acts of the flesh", but which also cause destruction in our lives and homes and even in our church: relational sins. The middle of the list has eight relational sins: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy.

None of us have the power to avoid every sexual and religious and relational and drinking sin. And those categories are just a few of the many ways we can act fleshly, the list ends with "and the like".

D. Fleshly living has serious consequences (Gal 5:21b)

And fleshly living has serious consequences. As the end of verse 21 says, "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Galatians is addressed to Christians. So Paul is giving Christians here a warning about a lifestyle of fleshly living.

Now at the beginning of our passage Paul talks about the conflict inside all of us between the flesh and the Spirit. So the Christ-follower is not someone with no battle in their hearts, we all feel the lure toward sin and sometimes sin.

And Paul has also made clear throughout Galatians that we can't earn our way to God's favor, that our only hope for reconciliation with God is through faith in Jesus. Jesus living a perfect life in our place, on our behalf, and then taking the penalty for all our fleshly living on the cross, and then rising from the dead to display His victory over sin and death. Anyone can get in on this incredible promise, trusting that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead, and being welcomed into God's family as a beloved son or daughter, forever.

And because our standing before God is only through faith in Jesus, I think that's why Paul's warning here in verse 21 is not a warning about entering God's kingdom, that's based on what Jesus has done, thank God! Rather, verse 21 warns about not inheriting the kingdom of God.

We all struggle against sin, but when Christians' lives are characterized by sexual sins or religious sins or relational sins or drinking sins or any other lifestyle of sin, there are serious consequences. A lifestyle of sin harms our bodies, and our mental health, and our fellowship with God, and our relationships, and our fruitfulness. It harms the people we love, sometimes profoundly, and it invites God's loving discipline to help us get back on track.

And a lifestyle of sin even impacts our experience of eternity. As you read the New Testament, you see that every Christian enters God's coming kingdom, and that it will be indescribably wonderful for all. However, not every Christian has the exact same experience in eternity, fleshly living can lead to losing out on eternal rewards.

As temporary people living in a broken world, it's difficult to imagine what enjoying eternal rewards in a perfect world in God's presence will be like. The New Testament writers do their best by using images that try to paint a picture of these incredible rewards. Images like an imperishable wreath, like a crown of righteousness, like sitting on Christ's throne with Him.

And so Paul says about fleshly living, "I warn you." And it's a warning important enough it's not the first time he's given it. The passage says, "I warn you, as I did before." It's because

there are serious consequences for Christians who live fleshly, terrible consequences to ourselves and others now and missing out on indescribably awesome rewards we could enjoy forever.

So let's take seriously Paul's warning here and never cultivate a lifestyle of sin. Rather, let's take our gracious Savior's invitation to "store up treasures in heaven".

III. Cultivating well

A. Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)

If there's anything worth cultivating our life toward, it's this. But we've seen we can't on our own. We can't overcome the flesh by putting ourselves under a law or just trying harder. No, but verse 22 shows us the way:

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

What we need to live well is God's Spirit working powerfully in our lives. As the list of fleshly acts was not comprehensive, so this list of fruit isn't every way God works. But a life characterized by the Spirit's work will produce love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

One way to think of the fruit of the Spirit is in threes. That the first three (love, joy, and peace) are godly internal states. And the next three (forbearance, kindness, and goodness) describe godly relating with others. And the last three (faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) are godly principles that guide our behavior. So as we walk by the Spirit, we live with a godly internal state and we relate with people in godly ways, and we live by godly principles.

And as Paul notes at the end of verse 23, "against such things there is no law." So if we want to follow God's ways, trying to keep more laws is not how to go about it. Rather, the Spirit working through us is the way to living lawfully.

Now each fruit of the Spirit won't grow at the exact same pace in our lives, but we are to exhibit each fruit, not just the couple easiest for someone with your personality. So the person with a joyful zest for life will know the Spirit is working not only when they are joyful, but when they are also self-controlled. And the person who is gentle with others will know the Spirit is at work when they sense their gentleness flows not out of fear of what others think, but from love.

Here's Pastor Samuel Chadwick's description of what it looks like to exhibit this fruit:

"The Fruit of the Spirit is an affectionate, lovable disposition, a radiant spirit and a cheerful temper, a tranquil mind and a quiet manner, a forbearing patience in provoking

circumstances and with trying people, a sympathetic insight and tactful helpfulness, generous judgment and a big-souled charity, loyalty and reliableness under all circumstances, humility that forgets self in the joy of others, in all things self-mastered and self-controlled, which is the final mark of perfecting.”²

B. Gardening metaphor helps us cultivate well

Piece of cake, right? So how does the Spirit bring about these fruits? It’s interesting that Paul described fleshly living in verse 19 as “acts of the flesh.” However, Paul does not describe the Spirit’s work in our lives as “acts of the Spirit”. Rather, Paul uses the image of fruit.

Which brings us back to our gardening metaphor, if only Dave was up here. We may not always think of it this way, but gardening is a battle. There are threats from weeds, lack of rainfall, too much heat or cold, diseases, certain bugs, Peter Rabbit. That’s my son Grant when his school had a dress up as a literary character day.

So to cultivate a good garden over the long run, you’ve got to address the weeds, and water, and plant in the right season, and try to protect against the elements, and provide the right nutrients, and protect against predators.

And it’s the same in our spiritual lives. There’s a battle, we’ve got fleshly desires within us, and people hurt us, and there’s a spiritual enemy bent on our destruction. So we need to cultivate well.

Like the gardener, we can’t make fruit grow. The gardener is dependent on sunlight and good weather and the pre-existing potential for life in the seeds. But that doesn’t mean the gardener sits around doing nothing, the gardener actively seeks to cultivate the right conditions for the garden to grow.

Our spiritual lives like this. We can’t make godly fruit grow, we can’t effort our way into a life filled with love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We’re dependent on God’s Spirit to produce that fruit.

So the message this morning is not to pull yourself up by your spiritual bootstraps and try harder. That’s not the focus because you can’t produce the fruit. Yet at the same time, like the gardener, we don’t sit around doing nothing. So our relationship to the Spirit is one of active dependence. We cultivate a life growing in awareness of God and dependence on God. It’s a

² *The Way to Pentecost* by Samuel Chadwick, quoted accessed online on 11/7/18 at <http://www.whydidtheydisappear.com/resource/chadwick/chadwick45.html>

relational thing, enjoying God's love, yielding to His will, not wanting to grieve Him, inviting Him to produce fruit in our lives.

Pastor Samuel Chadwick describes it this way: "Everything is in the word fruit. It is not by striving, but by abiding; not by worrying, but by trusting; not of the works, but of faith."³

And as we cultivate, the image of fruit reminds us that growth takes time. We don't just pray once to be a loving person and then we're done. Rather, the Spirit matures us over time into a more loving person as we yield our lives more to His loving work.

C. Jesus' work helps us to cultivate well (Gal 5:24)

As we seek this, verse 24 gives a helpful reminder, saying:

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Verse 24 encourages us to remember that our flesh, our sinful nature, has already been defeated by Jesus on the cross. That God's work in our lives is more powerful than the sinful desires within us.

And we didn't defeat the flesh in our power, Jesus crucified it. Gifting to us not only forgiveness, but the Spirit to help us battle our flesh today, and the promise of one day removing our fleshly nature altogether.

Conclusion:

A. Cultivate well by connecting with God's Spirit (Gal 5:25)

So God forbid that this be a week of fleshly living, getting cozy with what crucified our Lord. He loved us enough to take the wrath we deserved for all our sins, not begrudgingly, not bargaining with us at all on the price; paying it all with His blood and then gifting us the Spirit. So let's cultivate well by connecting with God's Spirit. Verse 16 started by calling us to walk by the Spirit, and verse 25 ends by saying:

²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

B. Cultivate connection now through confession

As we seek to cultivate that connection with God, to keep walking in step with the Spirit, a great place to start is by confessing our sins together and asking God for mercy and help.

There's a prayer of confession on the screen. In a few moments, you're invited to join me in reciting it. You don't have to recite it, but if it reflects what's in your heart, if you're grieved by the ways you've gotten comfortable with what crucified our Lord; and if you desire

³ Ibid.

the Spirit to produce more godly fruit in your life, we'll pray out loud together after pausing to pray. I invite you now to pray out loud with me:

Most merciful God,

We confess that we have sinned against you

in thought, word, and deed,

by what we have done,

and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,

have mercy on us and forgive us;

that we may delight in your will,

and walk in your ways,

to the glory of your Name. Amen.

C. Cultivate connection with God's Spirit each hour today

Amen. And thanks be to God that in Jesus we are forgiven all our sins. There's no better news than that, saved by grace through faith in Jesus, and given God's Spirit to empower us to live in God's ways, because we can't do any of it on our own.

And so our "next step" today as a church family is to cultivate our relationship with God's Spirit. We'll do this by setting an alarm every hour for the rest of today. If you've got a phone, please take it out now and set alarms today for 1pm, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Each hour, when your alarm goes off, connect with God's Spirit. As you're setting those alarms, let me give some examples of this. Maybe at 1 you're still eating lunch, and when the alarm goes off you thank God for those around the table and ask for His love to flow through you.

Maybe later you're watching football and the alarm goes off, and you just spend a moment marveling that God is right there with you as you sit on your couch. Maybe another hour the alarm beeps when you're on your computer, and you pull up YouTube and play that song we sung about God's Spirit this morning: *Breathe*, by the Brilliance.

With another alarm, just pause and look out the window and watch the wind blow through the leaves of a nearby tree as you sit in God's presence. Another hour, if you've got free time, you could ask God to bring to mind a way for you to serve someone today. Maybe another hour the alarm goes off as you're looking at your phone, so you pull up your Bible app and read Galatians 5. Another hour you connect with God as you're doing the dishes.

Maybe one hour today, or every hour, you find yourself stressed out about something and then the alarm goes off, and you pause, and invite God into that situation.

Maybe another hour when alarm goes off you confess a recent sin and ask God to change your heart. I've been setting my alarm to connect with God as I've been working on this message. The first night, I was getting frustrated with how homework time was going with my son, Peter Rabbit. And then later as we're putting the kids to bed the alarm goes off. I normally have calls and texts on vibrate, so my son asks why my phone is beeping. As I explain about what I'm doing, I'm getting convicted about my frustration during his homework time. So I say let's pray to God, and I apologize to God and to my son about my frustration. It actually was nice.

So the kind of things I'm talking about here don't have to be long, just a minute connecting with God in some way each hour today.

D. Imagine our whole church cultivating this connection

I wonder what God might do in our church family if we all keep cultivating our connection with God's Spirit. It won't always be easy. Benign neglect, like with my garden, is always a danger in our busy lives. Other times we'll really want to indulge a fleshly impulse. Or we may resent the invasiveness of the Spirit's work as He keeps prompting and convicting us about something we don't want to do.

So we've got decisions to make about what kind of cultivating we'll do, about what we really want here.

And I know this much, a whole lot of bad things won't happen if we're walking by the Spirit, for fleshly living always leads to our diminishing in the end.

And I don't know about you, but I sure could use more love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in my life. A spiritual vitality flowing from our beholding of God.

And God's Spirit works not only with individuals, but with us as the Spirit filled community. So not only do we need direct experiences with God, we need the fruit of the Spirit to flow between us. As we put aside those relational sins and give and receive from each other the fruit. Think of, in our church, more and more love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control flowing between us.

Doesn't that sound refreshing? So let's all connect with God's Spirit every hour today as a start, and ask God to help us become more and more of this kind of community together.

Dismissal – Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.