

1. Character under Construction

Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23

Galatians 4:19

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

2. The purpose of the Holy Spirit in your life is to transform you into the likeness of Jesus. God calls you as he called Samuel; we must allow the Holy Spirit to transform our thinking; let it guard our hearts; surround ourselves with good company. But for what? That Christ is formed in you. And today we consider what that looks like. The obvious answer is that we will be Christ-like, imitating him so much of this morning we will consider what Jesus was like. We are reading a familiar passage but I want us to learn a little about what character under construction means.

3. Read Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature 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. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

I have read the context because there is a danger we think all we have to do is sweat out these precious characteristics and we will arrive. That is not what God's word says.

It says live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

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

This is a life long process heading to glory in heaven itself. It begins at the foot of the cross when we turn away from our sins and ask for God's forgiveness and receive forgiveness and new life. But then we have to live! We have to *we live by the Spirit, and keep in step with the Spirit.*

Jesus said in Matthew 7:16-20 “*By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*

So when you look around this morning and chat over coffee, look for these characteristics of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*. Look for Jesus in our fellowship. I would go further and beg of you to pray for these qualities to be evident in each of us. And then rejoice when you see God answering your prayers.

I also want to remind you what Jesus said about fruit . In that passage in John 15 about the vine, we read in verse 8

This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

SO lets briefly consider each of the fruits here in terms of how the are characteristics of Jesus.

First

4. love,

As John says in 1John 4:16

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete

among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

It is a characteristic of Jesus. He is love. And he reveals the love of God. In the previous chapter we read *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.* ² *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* ³ *All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.* To understand what love is we must understand Jesus. I want just to put down two specific markers here.

4a. **First love is about sacrifice.** I don't need to remind you that God so love the world that he gave... Jesus having loved his own, loved them to the end and freely offered himself as the once and for all sacrifice for sin. Love involves giving and sacrifice.

4b. **Second marker is forgiveness.** Right through the Bible, God is revealed as a God who forgives. Jesus forgiving sin was a major irritant to the Pharisees. He forgave sins they knew nothing about in the man who was let through the roof, he forgave the sins of the Samaritan woman, the woman taken in adultery, the dying thief on the cross and the roman soldiers who crucified him.

To love as Jesus loves we have to have his spirit living in us. We cannot love like Jesus without him his love running through us.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

¹⁴ *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*

¹⁵ *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.* When translated into Igatu, the translators felt that compels was not good so they translated it "*the love of God runs through you like malarial fever*". The challenge for us this morning are we willing to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit to allow him loose in our lives.

5. It will cause us to love in four directions

5a. Love God with all your heart, mind soul and strength

5b. Love your neighbour as you love yourself

5c. Love one another as I have loved you

John 13:35

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

5d. Love your enemies, do good to those who do you harm.

Jesus lives these four loves out. And we are commanded to do the same. Alone we cannot even scratch the surface, so our cry is more, Jesus, more of you, more of your Holy Spirit.

Now there is a little problem because Paul says *Against such things there is no law* but we will see we are commanded to be them. What Paul is saying is that the Law is against evil the key word in the 10 commandments is NO! No idols, No adultery, No stealing, no envy, .. but we are called positively to *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

The key element we need to understand is that is we live by the Spirit and are led by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit we will want what the Spirit wants, we will react as Jesus would have us react and we will do what God calls us to do, willingly without demands or threats. Our Christian freedom is to do what we want when Christ is formed in us.

6. joy,

In Jesus, there is no space for being perpetually miserable. The children of Israel are actually commanded to be joyful at festivals Deut 16:14 Communion is a serious matter but it is a joyful occasion as we celebrate that Jesus triumphed over sin and death and by grace we are forgiven, we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts and we are on our way to heaven.

Nehemiah 8:10 says *The joy of the Lord is your strength*

It is not that we can put on the fixed smile of the celebrity, looking good on the outside while a deep darkness lies within. The joy of the Lord comes from resting in his promises that you have a Saviour, he will never let go of you, we are on our way to glory.

James 1:2

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Jesus, we are told, for the joy that was before him, endured the cross. Joy triumphs over adversity, it triumphs even over depression because it is embedded in what God has done and what he values not how we feel about our life.

Joy, like peace, is not a product of our environment, our circumstances or even our personalities. In fact, if you struggle with these be encouraged, God is honoured by your struggles. God's glory is that he takes sinners and makes them whole. He brings joy to the sad and peace to the troubled.

7. *peace,*

The peace of God is not so obvious until you step back and take a big view of history. God created the world and it was good. When sin entered the world, that did

not disturb God's peace, he always had a plan of salvation for his people, based on the sacrificial death of Jesus and trust and forgiveness. In agony on the cross, Jesus cries out 'My God, My God why have you forsaken me' but his peace is not destroyed because he can trust God to raise him from the dead so he concludes his life with It is finished in triumph even as he experiences death itself and awaits resurrection.

For us, peace with God is the foundation of our peace. It does not depend on our feelings or our circumstances, it depends on God's promises which are utterly reliable. Jesus slept in a storm because he knew he was tired and he was confident in God.

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We have anxious minds, we worry about everything but it does not help us. Paul is speaking about prayer. This is where I peace is developed. Listen to God's word.

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry,

whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

If you are anxious, pray. And trust God. Trust he cares for you. Fill your mind with his word rather than the next hospital appointment/ interview, dentist/ family crisis, or whatever it is you are worrying over.

8. *patience,*

1 Timothy 1: 15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

God has been patient with you. He is still being patient with you and he will go on being patient with you. Remember he objective is that Christ is formed in you. He hasn't given up on me – that is evidence of God's patience.

So we need to cultivate patience in our lives. In prayer, for example, we need to be ready to pray and keep praying. For situations which we see are beyond our expectations, whether it is the salvation of the people around us or sickness or collapsing relationships. We need to wait on God, not idly, but always praying for him to move and bring the transformation we pray for. So if you are tired of praying for your family members coming to faith or whatever, get praying. We had a great time on Thursday praying for things that we have

asked for many times before. But faith requires patience. So we pray again and will continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to break out in power among us whether in small ways or big ways, what matters is we are patient. We also need to be patient awaiting the upward call to heaven. For some of us, life is a struggle but we wait patiently trusting God , living the peace until the taste of heaven we have now becomes fulfilled through death or the return of Jesus.

9. kindness,

Titus 3:4

⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Reflect on God's kindness to us in Christ Jesus and then replicate it when the beggar seeks your help, the friend asks for help at an awkward time, smile at passing strangers, have a friendly word for the people around you even if they ignore you.

10. goodness,

Exodus 33:19

*And the Lord said, “I will cause all my **goodness** to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

God is good. That is axiomatic as he defines what is good or bad but recognise what his goodness is like and imitate it. Two words dominate this verse, mercy and compassion. Jesus had compassion on the crowds so he fed them, he treated each person with goodness, whether they impeded him on his way to do good as the woman with internal bleeding or he sought them out at the Pool of Siloam. And we are called to love and good works.

11. *faithfulness,*

John 10: 27

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

²⁹ *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all^[c]; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.*

³⁰ *I and the Father are one.”*

2timothy 2:13

if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

We are called to be faithful. Faithful to God, faithful to each other, faithful in our dealings with others. And Christ-like faithfulness remains faithful when others are faithless.

12. *Gentleness*

Galatians is not the only list of fruits of the Spirit. In each gentleness is listed. Listen to these verses and reflect on what God wants you to become in Christ.

Philippians 4:5

Let your **gentleness** be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, **gentleness** and patience.

1 Timothy 6:11

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and **gentleness**.

1 Peter 3:15

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with **gentleness** and respect

Finally we come to

13. *Self-control*

Another word for self-control is temperance which we tend to think as the opposite of alcohol abuse. But when we look into the character of Jesus we find it has a wide meaning. The first temptation is that of self-indulgence. Command these stones to be bread. But he is clear that

what God wants is more important than food even though he was starving. He reproves his disciples for wanting to bring fire on a Samaritan village, when the crowds are enthusiastic, he moves on to other villages. IN front of Pilate he is fully aware that he has the power and authority to take on the Roman Empire. But he chooses the way of the cross. He will accept the cup of suffering so that you and I can be free and alive. It is not that he is holding himself in some struggle of self-restraint, he chooses to go God's way. He was secure in the Father's love. That was enough for him to relax and be himself. So it is with us. Self-control which fights every step of the way is not the Jesus way. Mind you that is where most of us are. We need to be overwhelmed by his love so that for the joy of his fellowship we will willingly give up what is needed to follow him.

14. review

Time does not allow to make a complete analysis this morning. Most of the New Testament is about this transformation of the Holy Spirit in our lives and how we have to engage with him in developing these characteristics.

A moment then to reflect on which characteristic has most challenged you this morning. Pray to Father God for his Spirit to go a good work in you in forming Christ in you in the coming week.

When peace like a river attendeth my way