

FRUITABLE

Galatians 5:22-26

Newbegun United Methodist Church

June 24, 2018

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About 15 years ago the West Ohio Conference had a bishop that was very outspoken with her opinions. Some of those opinions were, for lack of a better word, controversial. In her opening sermon to the conference that year, her last one before her retirement, she made a comment about letters she had received from church members. Some agreed with her; some disagreed; and some were despicable. She said she wasn't surprised that people disagreed with her, what surprised her was the degree of hostility towards her she read in some of the letters. She was called vile names; she was threatened; she received false accusations about her behavior. What shocked her was that these were good church people; children of God; and sheep of Jesus fold. The words on the pages of some of the letters were way out of line with the fruit of the Spirit.

There are nine fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Whenever I have a confirmation class I require them to memorize three things: The 10 Commandments; the Lord's Prayer, and the Fruit of the Spirit. Out of those three I think the most important one is the one we emphasize the least – the fruit of the Spirit. I hope to rectify that a little in the following weeks by examining the fruit of the Spirit and

coming away with all of us memorizing those nine fruit. I hope that by the end we will all be fruit-able.

Going back to the beat-up bishop, when people have an informed opinion, does that give them the right to be mean and hateful; even if they are in the right? Not by New Testament standards. Throughout the New Testament we encounter a different measure of spirituality. It is not based on the opinions you derive; it is based on the life that you live, and the person you are. True mature Christian spirituality is marked by Christian character, and Christian character is defined, to a great extent, by how you treat others. This is why Paul wrote, "We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col. 1:9-10) Having the fruit of the Spirit is how we measure up. Notice one thing, right away; there are nine different fruits, but Paul refers to them in the singular – the fruit of the spirit. All nine go together and build upon one another. Why is this important? Because they are a unit. It is not a buffet. You can't say: I'll take peace and joy, but self-control and patience aren't my top priority. They all come together as one. And they are not listed in order of importance. They are all equal in quantity and value.

One more thing, the fruit of the Spirit is non-negotiable. You are not given a choice nor are you allowed to opt out. Once a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, then the Holy Spirit takes over and the fruit of the Spirit becomes internalized. So, do not look on the fruit of the Spirit as you might a spiritual gift. Gifts

of the Spirit are individual; fruit of the Spirit is given to everyone, regardless of who they are. Gifts of the Spirit might change over the course of a life time. You might spend years looking for your gift, only to find that it has changed or you have taken a new direction in your life and you now need a different gift, which the Lord will supply. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit never change. They are with you always, just as they are and just as you are, no matter when.

So, I think the fruit of the Spirit is vitally important. I blame myself for not doing this sooner. I also am very saddened that other denominations, including United Methodist, have not stressed this for their members. This fruit of the Spirit is who we are! So, let's take a close look at them. But before we do, I want you to do two things for me so this will work.

First, promise God, right now, that you will take this week to prepare your heart. Whenever I hear that phrase I can't help but think of the Old Testament verse about King Rehoboam: "And he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord. (2 Chron. 12:14) Preparing your heart is much like preparing the soil for the garden. You are breaking up the fallow ground. You are getting beneath the hard surface and you are getting into the areas where the seeds of growth can take root.

You might do this by praying for me, your pastor each day. Pray that I will be given wisdom and the right words to speak. Pray also for yourself, that you will be open to the message and willing to hear. Above all, pray for a humble and seeking heart. One that is able to admit that their heart can still be enlightened and that is the reason you are going to come and participate in the fruit of the Spirit. You get the idea, prepare your heart this week by making your heart expectant – come expecting to be blessed.

The second thing you can do is to promise to make a commitment to practice each quality. Do you know how to get better at loving others? The same way you get to play at Carnegie Hall: you practice. Do you know how to become more patient? You practice. Do you know how to develop self-control: you practice. Here is a paradox of the Christian life – You can't become spiritually mature by you own effort. Neither can you become spiritually mature without your own effort. I've heard people say: If God wants me to be patient; he will just have to make me patient, because I have no patience. But that is a total cop-out. Because the fruit of the Spirit lives inside each Christian, then it your heart's desire to become patient. Yes, God will make you patient as you desire to practice patience all the time. And like any skill, the more you practice the quality, the more God will make it grow. See, how you and God work together in this thing? So promise that you will practice each fruit as we go through them for the next few weeks. In Philippians 4:9 it reads, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice those things, and the God of peace will be with you."

Anyways, the most important part of life is walking in the Spirit of God. That is what I want to share with you as we look at the nine fruit of the Spirit. Promise that you will prepare your hearts this week to receive and promise that you will practice each one. Then, expect to receive a blessing each Sunday and come prepared to grow. Amen.