

ROOT to FRUIT: The Mark of Spiritual Maturity

Galatians 5:16–26

Full Disclosure: Today's sermon is not one I am qualified to preach. It is not one that I embody myself and as I've wrestled for a couple of years now with what God has been feeding my brain and spirit, I realized a couple weeks ago that preaching this sermon as one who is preaching from being an example would be a professional exercise in spiritual imposter syndrome! Rather, this sermon is about the ideal, the goal. I am not preaching from having arrived at the destination. So, as I pull up this sermon bus, you are welcome to come along for the ride. But when we get to the end, there is only one person I know that embodies what the goal and ideal are.

So, with that said, let's read God's word as found in Galatians 5: **[16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. [19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

[25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

I. Introduction - Growing Up

A few months ago, when J-T was discussing his dates for his study break, we talked about what we should do for those 4 or 5 weeks. A small book study? Topical series? I remember the meeting, we had been talking about what God was leading us through in our personal studies so we got this idea that each of us would preach on that subject. So here's a brief recap:

Jim: Jesus is Lord, the Lord is Jesus

Dave: the world is a mess, but Habakuk “reminds” God who he is (really reminding ourselves). need to change our perspective to look at things from an Eternal point of view.

Will 1: practice sin = slave of sin - But we have freedom not as orphans but sons and daughters - Spirit will teach you all things - transformed to be the KIND of people to enjoy our next destination

Will 2: Psalm 116 declares “I love the Lord” - it’s an anybody Psalm - pray, read and grow in the reality of “I love the Lord” - “I love the Lord” is not for the Lord but for us, it resets our disposition and posture

Me: God was saying: “You need to grow up”

I am 55 years old. As the kids say it these days, I began my faith journey around the age of 12. So my “spiritual” age is about 43 going on 44.

So why am I still so spiritually immature in so many ways?

If I were to give myself an honest self-assessment, I would say I’m probably at the spiritual age of 30 going on 13. Sometimes 3.

And there is this weird ratio that happens...as you grow in spiritual maturity you seem to realize just how spiritually immature you can be. Anybody feel me?

II. Child, Slave, Flesh - Posture of the Spiritually Immature

In Galatians, Paul is writing to what seems to be a very spiritually immature people. It’s important to note that he is writing to believers. But believers who are starting from the wrong posture, the wrong root identity.

Posture, in our case, can be defined as your disposition or orientation of the person toward reality. We might call this our “worldview” or how we see ourselves and how we see the world and how things work in that reality. Look again v. 16

[16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. [19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[26] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Since we're looking at the Fruit of the Spirit today, you can think of this list as the fruit of the flesh; evidence of spiritual Immaturity. It begins with its roots in believing lies about God or not believing truths about God and his promises. That posture realigns our identity back to the flesh, being a child/slave. And because our identity shifts back to flesh-child-slave, then the fruit we bear is bad fruit. Bad roots = bad fruit. We revert back to spiritually immature and undisciplined children and produce the works of the flesh.

Throughout his letter, Paul identifies a number of indicators that would demonstrate one to be spiritually immature:

Marks of Spiritual Immaturity

1:6-7 – Easily deserts the gospel | 2:4-5 – Returns to slavery | 2:11-14 – Fears people; walks inconsistently with the Gospel | 3:1-3 – Foolish; thinks flesh can perfect what the Spirit began | 3:23-25 – Lives as though still under a guardian | 4:1-3 – Thinks and acts like a child | 4:8-11 – Returns to elementary principles | 4:19 – Christ not yet fully formed | 4:21-31 – Chooses slavery (Hagar) | 5:1 – Submits again to a yoke of slavery | 5:13-15 – Uses freedom for self | 5:16-21 – Gratifies the desires of the flesh | 5:24-26 – Conceited, provoking, envying | 6:1 – Condemns the fallen or ignores them | 6:2 – Lives for self | 6:7-8 – Sows to the flesh

Spiritual Immaturity begins with at least one little root knowing they need Christ to get saved but then, either over time or sometimes rather quickly, other roots grow and form and they forget that what saves them also sanctifies them. Immature spiritual muscle-memory kicks in and they go back to what feels natural and comfortable and

easy. They go back to their former roots of identity of childish slaves, law and flesh. Paul rebukes, admonishes and calls them to realign - he tells them in...

Galatians 3:2–3 “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

Galatians 4:9 “How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world...?”

Galatians 5:1 “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

The posture of spiritual immaturity always begins with forgetting the Gospel: WHO God is and WHAT God has done, is doing and will continue to do which should be what **INFORMS** WHO we are and that informs what we do.

Because our faith is in Christ and our childish slave flesh has been crucified with Christ we get to start from a different posture, from different roots. Because of who God is and what He has done, we are Sons and Daughters, we are free and we live by the Spirit. This idea of root to fruit is actually Biblical and Paul introduces it in Col 2:

⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits^[a] of the world, and not according to Christ.

That identity informs the correct posture we ought to have and one that leads to spiritual maturity. Jump back to Galatians and look at v 24 and 25:

III. Son (Daughter), Free, Spirit - Posture of the Spiritually Mature

[24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Notice Paul reestablishes the reader's identity in Christ “you belong to Christ Jesus and your flesh has been crucified along with its passions and desire”. He’s realigning their

root belief. And throughout the book of Galatians, Paul also draws our attention to what a spiritually mature believer who is keeping in step with the Spirit does:

Marks of Spiritual Maturity

1:3-5 – Rests in Christ's finished work | 2:20 – Lives by faith in the Son of God | 2:14 – Walks "in step with the truth of the gospel" | 3:2-5 – Depends on the Spirit from beginning to end | 3:26-29 – Lives confidently as a son and heir | 4:4-7 – Knows God as Father ("Abba" -loving) | 4:9 – Knows God—and is known by God | 4:19 – Christ formed within | 4:26-31 – Lives in the freedom of the promise (Sarah) | 5:1 – Stands firm in freedom | 5:5-6 – Waits by faith through the Spirit; faith works through love | 5:13 – Uses freedom to serve others through love | 5:16-18 – Walks by the Spirit | 5:22-23 – Bears the fruit of the Spirit | 5:24-25 – Crucifies the flesh and keeps in step with the Spirit | 6:1 – Gently restores those caught in sin | 6:2 – Bears one another's burdens | 6:7-10 – Sows to the Spirit

Through faith in Jesus, the Father not only brings us out of death but to life and not just life but adopts as Sons (and daughters), we are not simply forgiven a bad debt but given - credited - Christ's righteousness. We are not simply rescued to go "figure things out on our own" but given the Spirit so that we might grow more and more into the likeness of Christ. I want to remind you that, we are given the gifts of the Spirit (the people of God to teach, serve, encourage, etc) and the armor of the Spirit (to protect us from the enemy) and, as we are going to look at in just a moment, the fruit of the Spirit (to pluck out of us growth and conformity to the image of Christ). These things are our birthright or, rather, our new-birthright!

Our new birth starts in faith with what Jim said, the confession that "Jesus is Lord, the Lord is Jesus". He is the light in the dark and chaotic world that Dave spoke to us about. Why? Because, like Will said, Jesus wants a big house with all kinds of people that have the same confession: "I love the Lord!"

And just like in our own households, there is the joyful expectation that the little ones will grow up and be able to walk alongside us. To keep in step with us. I have enjoyed every moment of watching my sons grow into the men they are today. And there is something truly special when you see them walking side by side, holding their own, doing what adults do.

What does Spiritual maturity look like? It's when we're keeping up with what the Holy Spirit is doing. Not catching up, not being dragged along, not being chased after because we decided to do our own thing.

The ultimate mark of spiritual maturity is: walking by the Spirit

Galatians 5:16 "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

So what does that look like? Hint: it's not in what you do, but it's what is plucked out of you when you're doing it. Let's look at v.22:

IV. Fruit: The Mark (Evidence) of Spiritual Maturity

[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

First, I want to bring your attention to something I've seen people overlook. How many fruits of the Spirit do you see in the passage? [Count them]

One. There is only one fruit. [EXPLAIN how you can't say "I can do love, but gentleness, that's just not me"] It is singular and it's an odd word. It's the word pluck (**smarty word**). Like plucking fruit for a tree. But it's not you doing the plucking, it's Spirit plucking it out of you, bringing it out of you. Notice too, it's the Spirit's fruit. The "fruit of the Spirit"! It ain't your fruit. You don't produce it. The Spirit does and so if you have the Spirit, this fruit resides in you. So, for me, it's time to grow up!

Paul is saying there is an outcome of walking by the Spirit, of growing in Spiritual maturity. You can think of it as Paul telling the readers that there is this root, from the root comes life, the life causes growth, evidence of that growth is fruit. Fruit that is being plucked out of you, extracted by the Holy Spirit. You're not producing it, the Spirit is.

Okay? From the root, we get the fruit. Got it?

In other words, the fruit you produce resembles the root you draw from. If I believe I'm a childish slave that craves to satisfy my flesh, then I will produce the works of the flesh. Or let's go even further back, if I don't trust God's timing and control, I get...works

of the flesh. If I believe I still have to prove myself to God or others, then I'll be self-righteous and judgmental. If I don't believe God is good and a giver of good gifts I won't be satisfied and I'll look for satisfaction in created things rather than the Creator God. And If I'm not certain that God is glorious I will make it about me every chance I get. Bad roots = bad fruit. I don't really believe God is a Sovereign Loving-Father King so I fall back on childish-slave of flesh identity. Bad roots = bad fruits.

So then, walking by the Spirit happens when we believe true things about who God is and what God has done and that informs who we are and then what we do.

So...Good roots = good fruit. If the root of belief (my posture) begins with the Gospel, God is a Sovereign Loving-Father King and I am a Son (or Daughter) who is free and I live by the Spirit then I can and will produce singular Spirit plucked fruit. And what does that fruit consist of:

Love (agape - 116) affection, benevolence, a love feast, feast of charity

You gotta know that starting with love is very intentional. Just like with the 10 commandments, you know having no other God before, if you get that right, you'll get the rest of the 9 commandments right? Same thing here. You get love right, and the rest follows. But what is love? Let's see how God defines it:

1 John 4:9–10 “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

John 15:12–13 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

Romans 5:6–8 “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

1 John 4:19&21 “We love because he first loved us. - And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

I can love the unlovable because God loved this unlovable! Love is most mature when it is about the other rather than the self.

The immature person is primarily concerned with me—my needs, my rights, my feelings, my recognition.

Because I have received undeserved love from Christ, I increasingly become someone who gives love rather than demands it.

Immaturity asks: *What am I getting from others?*

Maturity asks: *How can I love and serve others?*

Love is something that is being perfected in us as God abides in us. Spiritual maturity isn't simply knowing more about God—it increasingly looks like God's love being expressed through us. If we get love right, every other fruit will naturally be plucked out of us.

Joy (chara - 59) - cheerfulness, delight, gladness, exceeding joy(ful, fully, fullness, ous)

Joy is more than mere happiness. It's being present in your circumstance but having an eternal mindset in the midst of it. My joy becomes less dependent on today's trial, bad news, poor result or unsatisfactory response because I know for certain God's promises are true and will come to pass. Joy asks what can I learn about God in this trial?

Immaturity says, *"I'm happy when things go my way."*

Spiritual maturity says, *"My deepest joy isn't dependent upon things going my way because Christ has already given me what I could never earn."*

The mature Christian can lose something and still joyfully say, "I have Christ."

My circumstances don't determine my gladness; Christ does.

Mature joy is Christ-centered rather than circumstance-centered. Paul commands believers to rejoice even when circumstances give them little reason to feel happy.

Peace (92) - a primary verb(a state of being), prosperity, quietness, rest - create a place of peace and quiet??

I am becoming less controlled by fear and anxiety because God is sovereign over...everything.

Maturity says: "Christ is the sea of glass before the altar." That's liberating.

The mature Christian increasingly rests in God's sovereignty, God's grace, and God's promises rather than constantly trying to control everything.

I don't have to control everything because God is sovereign.

Peace grows out of trust that God's word is true, God's character is unchanging and He will keep His promises. The mature Christian doesn't necessarily have fewer storms; he has a mind increasingly anchored in God during the storm.

Patience or Longsuffering (14) - longanimity (a calm and patient disposition when facing long-term hardship, provocation or offence), forbearance, fortitude

Patience is not waiting (impatiently) for the thing to happen but in moving forward whether it happens or not. Patience is peace in the circumstance.

Immaturity says: "Why aren't they changing faster?"

Maturity remembers: "God has been extraordinarily patient with me."

Patience is fundamentally about waiting on God's timing without abandoning faithfulness. Knowing that He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.

Immature: "If God doesn't act now, I'll act for Him."

Mature: "God is working, even when I can't see it."

Kindness (10) usefulness, moral excellence

I am becoming less harsh and growing in kindness because I have been fully accepted by a gracious God.

The legalistic Christian tends to measure people. "Did they do it right?"

The mature Christian sees people. "How can I help them?"

Kindness is grace expressed in ordinary interactions.

It means that spiritual maturity starts showing up in how we talk to the waitress, respond to the difficult person, treat the weak, interact with our spouse, and respond when somebody annoys us.

Mature kindness flows from having received God's kindness. We don't merely become nicer people; the Gospel changes how we treat people who have wronged us. We remember how God treated us when we wronged Him.

Immature: "I'll be kind when people deserve it."

Mature: "I've received grace, therefore I give grace."

I don't merely avoid harming people; I actively do them good. I can endure difficult people without becoming a difficult person.

Goodness (4) - virtue of beneficence

I am seeking to be righteous because He is righteous

Grace does not eliminate holiness. Paul isn't saying: "Forget about righteousness." He says to be holy as he is holy.

The Spirit plucks out of us a person who increasingly desires to do what is good —not merely because a rule says so, but because God is changing the heart. Holiness matters to God. Because we walk by the Spirit and the Spirit is drawing his fruit out of us, we are to be Holy because He is Holy!

Law says: "You must."

Spirit-produced maturity says: "I get to and I want to."

That's a huge difference.

Goodness is the visible outworking of a changed identity. You were darkness; now you are light. Therefore, *be light and walk according to the Spirit.*

Immature: "I'm saved, so what I do doesn't really matter."

Mature: "Because Christ has changed me, I want my life to reflect Him."

I don't merely know what is right; I pursue what is right.

Faithfulness (244) persuasion, credence, moral conviction, the truthfulness of God, reliance upon Christ for salvation, truth itself, belief, believe, faith, fidelity

I am becoming dependent on Christ, not myself. It is greater dependance on the truth of the Gospel and believing what God and His promises say are true.

Faithfulness is spiritual maturity that becomes particularly visible over time.

An immature Christian may have tremendous enthusiasm one day and disappear the next.

A mature Christian becomes steady. They keep showing up. Even when it's hard. Even when they're tired. And especially when they don't "feel" like it.

They keep their commitments. They keep serving. They remain faithful when nobody notices. They remain faithful when circumstances are difficult.

Faithfulness is consistency over time. Spiritual maturity isn't demonstrated primarily by spectacular moments but by ordinary obedience repeated over and over.

Immature: "I'll obey when God gives me something important."

Mature: "I'll be faithful with what God has put in front of me today."

Gentleness or Meekness (9) gentleness, humility - having power but holding back

I am becoming less concerned with being impressive rather using the resources (knowledge, time, talent, treasure) God has given to elevate others towards Christ

Legalism tends to produce pride: *"I know the rules, and you aren't measuring up."*

Spiritual maturity produces humility: *"You're messing up, let me walk with you as Christ and others have walked with me."*

And that's why Galatians 6:1 immediately follows Paul's discussion of walking by the Spirit with: "...you who are spiritual should restore him (the spiritual immature) in a spirit of gentleness."

The truly mature Christian doesn't use truth as a weapon. In fact, did you notice what is NOT a fruit of the Spirit? *Being* right. Winning an argument. Being a theobro.

Spiritually mature people use truth to restore. Not pummel. To give life, not judgment. To give correction, without harshness. As the great philosopher Corinne Brooks once said, "God uses means...not meanies!"

This is a particularly powerful picture of maturity because gentleness doesn't mean weakness. The mature Christian can confront error without becoming quarrelsome.

Immature: "If I'm right, I have the right to be harsh."

Mature: "I can be right without being a jerk."

I can possess strength without needing to use it harshly.

Self-Control or Temperance (4) continence

I am becoming less ruled by myself and surrendering myself (and my desires) over to the Spirit.

A posture of Son/Daughter does not mean the absence of discipline.

It means something deeper.

The immature person says: "I do what I want." That's childish-flesh thinking.

The legalist says: "I do what the rules tell me."

The mature Christian increasingly says: "I want what God wants. I'll do what God calls me to do."

That's Spiritually mature self-control—not merely controlling yourself, but increasingly having your desires brought under the reign and rule of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual maturity means learning to deny immediate desires for a greater and eternal good. The mature believer doesn't simply ask, "Can I?" but "Is this worth pursuing in light of eternity?"

Immature: "I want it, therefore I should have it."

Mature: "I can say no to this because I want something greater."

Self-control is saying: *My desires are subservient. They are not master. I only have one Lord. The Lord is Jesus! I love the Lord!*

V. Root to Fruit: Maturity reflects Jesus

I said at the very beginning that this is not a sermon that I am preaching from a place of having arrived. The simple fact is, in many ways, I'm a walking case of spiritual impostor syndrome. How often I fall back into bad roots and produce bad fruits. But, by God's grace, I also see times where my steps line up with the Spirit and I see evidence of good roots producing good fruit.

I also see that the fruit of the Spirit that demonstrates spiritual maturity is fully evidenced in one man: Jesus.

Jesus demonstrated sacrificial **love** by willingly laying down His life for sinners who did not deserve it. (*John 15:13; Romans 5:8*)

Jesus endured the cross "for the **joy** that was set before him," showing joy rooted in the Father's purpose rather than pleasant circumstances. (*Hebrews 12:2*)

Jesus demonstrated **peace** by trusting the Father completely, even in the midst of the storm and ultimately in the face of His own death. (*Mark 4:37–40; John 18:4–11*)

Jesus showed **patience** as he taught, corrected, and continued loving His disciples despite their repeated misunderstanding, arguing, doubt, and failure; their own spiritual immaturity. (*Luke 9:46–48; Mark 9:32–34; John 13:1–17*)

Jesus repeatedly stopped for people that others overlooked or rejected, such as the leper, the blind, the children, and Zacchaeus showing **kindness** instead of rebuke. (*Mark 1:40–42; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 19:1–10*)

Jesus consistently demonstrated **goodness** and did what was right, even when doing so brought opposition, such as healing the man with the withered hand despite the Pharisees watching for an accusation. (*Mark 3:1–6*)

Jesus modelled **faithfulness** to the Father's will all the way to the cross, praying, "Not my will, but yours, be done." (*Luke 22:42; Philippians 2:8*)

Jesus restored Peter in **gentleness** after his devastating denial rather than humiliating or condemning him, asking three times, "Do you love me?" and entrusting him with His sheep. (*John 21:15–19*)

Jesus demonstrated perfect **self-control** when He was falsely accused, mocked, beaten, and crucified, refusing to retaliate and entrusting Himself to the Father. (*1 Peter 2:23; Matthew 26:52–53*)

Jesus did all those things. As Will said, Jesus has a big house and he has gone to prepare a place for us. But I think what Jesus meant is that he is preparing us for that place. Jesus is using the Spirit to pluck these qualities out of us so that we might live as Sons and Daughters, free and full of life, adapted to His kingdom. So that we can live out eternity with our Heavenly Father, under the reign of Jesus Christ our King, sealed in adoption through the Holy Spirit as Son and Daughters. As Ephesians 4 says: **“we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”** From the good root of the Gospel, comes the good fruit of the Spirit.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen