**Gods Part – My Part – #5: The Fruit of the Spirit**

**Phil. 2:12, 13. Galatians 5:16-26**

We’ve been looking at how so much of the church today has been led to believe God does everything for us in salvation and we don’t have a part to play. We’ve seen (I hope) that this is wrong, and it’s harmful, because it keeps us from fully experiencing salvation and carrying out our mission in the world. What is needed today is a return to the disciplines of Christianity as taught by Jesus, His apostles, and early disciples.

John Wesley said, “It was a common saying among the Christians in the primitive Church, ‘The soul and the body make a man; the spirit and discipline make a Christian;’ implying, that none could be real Christians, without the help of Christian discipline. But if this be so, is it any wonder that we find so few Christians; for where is Christian discipline? In what part of England (to go no farther) is Christian discipline added to Christian doctrine? Now, whatever doctrine is preached, where there is not discipline, it cannot have its full effect upon the hearers.” (sermon 116) Wesley was talking about the role we human beings must play in Christian life, the very subject I’ve been preaching for the last 4 weeks! That’s why I’m continuing on with this theme today.

You see, Christians cannot live a truly spiritual life just because their pastors exhort them to. They cannot do it because they feel guilty or because their emotions are whipped up at church services for a brief time. It only comes about through purposing to be disciples, which means practicing spiritual disciplines in our lives.

A great obstacle to this is confusion about what salvation by grace means. We easily excuse lack of spiritual application and effort because we know we cannot *earn* our salvation. But as Dallas Willard so rightly explains, “God is not opposed to effort but to *earning*.” (quoted by Hull, The Kingdom Life, 128). We must not think that practicing spiritual disciplines earns us our salvation or the favor of God.

At the same time, we must not think that a truly spiritual life can be ours *without* discipline and effort. After all, even the words disciple and discipline are formed from the same root. Jesus told us, “take my yoke upon you and learn of me” (Matt. 11:29), and such language was understood in that day to mean one was taking on the *discipline* of a rabbi, with the goal of becoming like him.

Did you ever notice how the apostle Paul wrote about Christian life as if it were an athletic event (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He talked about the need to sow to the Spirit, which surely speaks of spiritual effort (Gal. 6:7-9). While clearly giving credit to the Spirit’s work within him, he nevertheless also wrote of the great effort he himself put into his life and ministry (Col. 1:29-2:1), just as he exhorts us to do in our theme text.

Early Christians in the East understood this need for human effort without confusing it with legalism. Orthodox believers seem to have understood better than Western Christians that discipline wasn’t some kind of merit system; it was just how we cooperated with what God wanted to do in us. One author I read said they saw grace as “the presence of God within us that demands constant effort on our part.” (Karkkainen, 71)

This statement aligns perfectly with our theme text and with Titus 2:11-13: 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. NIV

God’s grace is present with us today through the Holy Spirit, because of what Christ accomplished, and this has been revealed to us through the Gospel. But does grace in this passage mean we may be passive spectators while some force or energy sent by God does all the work? No, Paul says that the grace teaches us what we must do in response to it. We must say no to something (ungodliness, worldly passions), while choosing to say yes to a life of discipline and self-control that conforms us to the image of Christ and transforms us from the inside out. So grace is God’s power, wanting and waiting to work out His will in us, but we have to cooperate with that grace, and work out our salvation day-to-day over the long haul.

Another biblical passage which teaches divine-human cooperation is Paul’s section on “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16-26). All Christians realize that when the Spirit of God comes into our lives, He changes us from the inside out, and the “fruit” that comes from our lives is very different from what it was before our conversion.

But is the fruit of the Spirit really the work of the Spirit alone? Is it something He does in a believer without any cooperation or involvement on their part, or is human participation required? To answer this question, one need only read the rest of the Book of Galatians. If the Spirit produces the fruit without human involvement, why did Paul feel the need to write this epistle? Why did he have to urge the Galatians to stand firm in the way of faith and grace instead of legalism, to avoid the yoke of bondage (5:1), to be sure to stand in faith and not fall back into legalism (5:2-6), to not indulge their flesh (5:13), to love instead of biting and devouring one another (5:13-15), to live by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit and keep step with the Spirit (5:16, 18, 25)? Why did he exhort them in chapter 6 to restore fallen ones, while being careful lest they be tempted (6:1), to bear one another’s burdens (6:2), to be humble (6:3), to sow to the Spirit, not the flesh (6:7, 8), and to not become weary, but to be constant in doing good, (6:9)? See, Galatians (and the whole Bible) was written to teach them and us how we’re to *respond* to God’s grace! We have an important part to play. We can respond rightly or wrongly.

Think about it: If the fruit of the Spirit is totally of Him without any human involvement, why do some have more of it than others? Why did Paul have to struggle so with the Corinthians, but not so much with the church in Thessalonica? Why does Jesus (in the Book of Revelation) have only words of rebuke for the church of Laodicea, and only words of praise for the church of Philadelphia, if in fact, the Spirit makes us godly in equal measure with or without our participation? Why, in fact, is there a need for a Final Judgment, if God produces all the fruit and we have no part to play in it?

Obviously, the fruit of the Spirit is actually the fruit that comes from *human cooperation* *with* the Spirit. It is not something He alone produces without human participation. R. T. Kendall says it this way: “the fruit emerge in proportion to our obedience.” (172). This is a mysterious reality all Christians wrestle with and Christians of all persuasions have recognized. I’ve mentioned what Orthodox theologians said. But throughout Church History we see the same thing. St. Augustine wrote of our need to “struggle” against sin and weakness, while also asserting that it is only by God’s help we can win (Enchiridion, 81). It is referred to in the works of ancient and Medieval believers. All of the Protestant reformers likewise taught it as well. Even John Calvin, the theologian most famous for emphasizing God’s sovereign work in us, spends chapters in his most famous book, Institutes, urging self-denial, consciously seeking to put down the impulses of our flesh and submit ourselves instead to God, and exhorting believers to be disciplined in obeying what scripture teaches as our human responsibility.

John Wesley, a man on the other end of the spectrum from Calvin, devoted countless sermons and written tracts to the need for human participation in the things of the Spirit. I began this message quoting from his *Sermon on the Inefficacy of Christianity*. In another of his most famous sermons, he declared that the fruit of the Spirit will only be produced in those who are *led* by the Spirit, thus demonstrating the need for human cooperation. (Sermon 76, The Works of Wesley). He said fruit is produced when Christians obey Paul’s exhortation in Rom. 12:1, 2, to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God (Sermon 76 – On Perfection).

In a website article devoted to the fruit of the Spirit, R. C. Sproul lists all of the fruit and very consistently indicates the Spirit unilaterally produces them. Then in his very last paragraph, he sums up by saying, “These are the virtues our Lord wants us to *cultivate*.” (emphasis mine). Even this very careful man of God, despite the fact that he was writing at a website dedicated to the idea that our salvation is all of God, could not refrain from saying human beings must “cultivate” the fruit in order for it to flourish. What does this mean, if not that human beings play a role in the fruit’s production? Just as in agriculture, God makes plants grow, but humans must prepare the ground, sow the seed, water, cultivate, and harvest them, so it is with the fruit of the Spirit!

J. Rodman Williams was the theologian who established the theology department at Regent, where I got my M.Div. He wrote about the gifts and fruit of the Spirit, saying, “In all the gifts there is both a divine and a human activity,” (332) and in all manifestations of the spiritual gifts, “The human element is fully present.” (333). Likewise, Williams said the fruit of the Spirit have to be “put on,” which requires, “a continuing action of the will” that believers had to keep *working* at. He taught that the fruit of the Spirit come about through human cooperation with the Spirit of God.

Wayne Grudem is another well regarded theologian. In his Systematic Theology, he says what I’ve been saying about how many of us don’t properly understand the respective roles of God and of man. He says humans have both passive and active roles, and unfortunately, an overemphasis of the passive at the expense of the active “will lead Christians to become lazy and to neglect the active role that Scripture commands them to play in their own sanctification.” (754) He goes on to discuss how believers must cooperate with the Spirit by saying no to immorality and other forms of evil and saying yes to that which will “build up patterns and habits of holiness.” (755) So again, the fruit of the Spirit, is produced not unilaterally by the Spirit, but through divine-human cooperation. We have a part to play, and if we don’t understand that and get busy, we’ll miss out on what God has provided for us in Christ!

In today’s message, I have referred to the apostle Paul and the New Testament, but also to no less than 7 major theologians of the past and present, who all say the same thing! We Christians need to listen and learn that Christian life, the spiritual life we so want and need to live, does not only depend upon what God has done, but also upon our response and active participation in what God has done and is doing! We must work out our salvation, our spiritual lives, by actively cooperating with God, who is ready and waiting to work in and through us. Will you say yes to God this morning? Will you purpose to begin practicing the little day to day disciplines that make that possible?

Final prayer and final hymn.

Benediction: Heb 13:20-21 - 20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. NIV