

**The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity  
6 September 2026  
Galatians 5:16-24**

**Fruits of the Spirit—Not Man**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Epistle appointed for today from St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians, the fifth chapter.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

It is tempting, when we come to the lists of sins which St. Paul sprinkles throughout his epistles, to just skip the list and get to something we think is worth reading. This is especially true when the list begins with something like sexual immorality.

We like to think that because we are pious Christians, and because some of us have been Christians for our entire lives, that these lists of sins just don't apply to us. They are descriptions of other people: people who aren't here this morning, people who have never crossed the threshold of a church, bad people.

But we don't stop there. We do the same thing when we encounter the good lists. We assume that we must be doing all of those things already because we are Christians after all. When it comes to ignoring the Word of God, we are great at coming up with what we think are good reasons. The real reason, of course, is that we are sinners. We live in constant rebellion against God, and we don't think that He really has anything to teach us.

We think we know how to be good people. If you are a good neighbor, pay your taxes, kiss your wife, play with your kids, and work hard at your job, then you must be a good person. God couldn't possibly have any problem with you. We want to think that any god worth his salt would be lucky to have a guy like us on his side.

O foolish Washingtonians! Who has deceived you? Though he originally wrote these words to the Galatians, Saint Paul could just as easily have been writing to us. But when Paul calls the Galatians fools, the word is far worse than what that word brings to your minds. The word means thoughtless or perhaps even brainless. The Galatians are acting as if they are incapable of thought, and so are we.

When we marginalize the words of St. Paul, we are not just setting aside the word of a first century theologian. We are setting aside the very Word of God. The Holy Spirit saw fit to give us these lists for our instruction. We would do well to listen.

A good place to begin our consideration of the Lord's words is in the way that St. Paul describes the lists themselves. In verses 19-21 we have the "works of the flesh." In verses 22-23 we have the "fruit of the Spirit."

If we do not pay close attention to what St. Paul says, we will expect the two lists to be mirror images of each other. It seems like the first list should tell us what we do when we act according to our sinful flesh and that the second list should tell us what we do when we are led by the Spirit.

This is not so. There are two significant differences in the way that Paul describes the lists. The first is the word he uses. The sins in the first list are called the *works* of the flesh. It is in this list that we learn what we actually do. The second list is called the *fruit* of the Spirit. It has nothing to do with what we do. It is entirely focused on what the Spirit produces in us.

The second difference is in number: works on the one hand, and fruit on the other. Our works are manifold in their wickedness. There is hardly a single aspect of life which the list doesn't touch, and each and every one of these works of the flesh is deadly to our soul. Using a Ouija board, adultery, and anger all fall under precisely the same condemnation.

And the condemnation is particularly severe. Those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. They will be forever separated from their Savior. They will receive none of the benefits which He won for them on the cross. Instead, they will receive only what they deserve and what their flesh desires. Eternal separation from God and His mercy.

But it's worth noting what word Paul uses when he says that those who "do" these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. It means much more than what we usually mean with the word "do." It means to do something over and over again. It means to be in the habit of doing it. This word would never be applied to something against which you struggle. It's not talking about occasionally having one beer too many. It's not talking about losing your temper once in a while. It's not talking about having a lustful thought cross your mind for a moment when someone passes you on the street.

Galatians 5:21 is talking about being in the habit of indulging the works of the flesh. It is talking about walking in the path of wickedness. At this point, you are probably considering Paul's list and asking yourself whether you fall under its condemnation. Have no doubt about that, dear brother or sister. You do. We all engage in these sins from time to time. We all stumble and fall under the sway of the evil one. But there is a more important question to consider.

Are you one who practices the works of the flesh? The answer to this question is tricky. Do you have sins for which you never feel remorse? Are there transgressions which you enjoy so much that you plan for them? Do you spend time trying to justify in your own mind things which you know in your heart were wrong? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then you might be a person who has given himself over to the works of the flesh.

You are in grave spiritual danger. Even if the spark of faith remains in you, it might not for long. Faith and an unchecked desire to indulge the desires of the flesh cannot coexist for

long. Either you will listen to and believe the Word of God or you will give yourself entirely over to what your sinful flesh wants.

But even if you haven't completely given yourself over to the dominion of the evil one, you have still done the things which our Lord condemns. In fact, you do them every day. You are still a sinner. Even if you are on the path of righteousness, you still have days when you hear the bump-bump-bump of the spiritual rumble strips on the side of the road. You stray into paths which are dangerous—paths which can kill you—paths which hurt you even if you only stray onto them for a moment.

We Lutherans love to rejoice in the power of the Gospel. We know with absolute certainty that our sins are forgiven and that Christ has won eternal life for us with Him. It is impossible to overestimate the value of the comfort which that certainty gives us.

But sometimes we use the certainty of our salvation to ignore the power and the reality of sin. Sin isn't just bad because it can lead us into unbelief and a complete rejection of what God has won for us in and through the cross of Jesus. Sin is bad because it hurts you in the here and now. It damages your relationships with others. It scars your soul. It causes internal pain and grief. It makes you suffer and embitters the lives of those who love you. And, worst of all, it makes it easier for you to engage in the same sin in the future.

There is only one way to deal with the sinful desires of the flesh. Our sinful flesh is like a wolf which is burning with the madness of rabies. It cannot be healed. It cannot be rehabilitated. It can only be put down. The longer it is allowed to live, the more it will kill and destroy. And this is why Paul writes, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Note the way that Paul expresses this, and rejoice at it! Paul does not say that if you belong to Christ you must crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. Paul says that if you belong to Christ your fleshly desires have already been crucified.

And this morning, Samson has been gracious enough to give us live example of how. Paul writes in Romans 6. “All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death.” Your fleshly passions are crucified with you when you are baptized into our Lord’s death and resurrection.

This means that what Paul says at the beginning of the chapter from which our epistle is drawn is true and applies to you in the here and now. “For freedom, Christ has set you free. Stand firm, then, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Each of us was born a slave. We were enslaved to sinful desires by our sinful flesh. Each of the sins listed in Galatians 5 were our constant desire. They weren’t second nature to us; they were first nature to us. They were all we knew and all we wanted.

But thanks be to God! He has sent His Son to the cross in our place so that our bodies of sin might be crucified with Jesus. He has washed us in the waters of Holy Baptism so that we might benefit from all the gifts that Christ won for us in His death.

And so now we are a new kind of creature entirely. We are no longer enslaved to our inborn passions and desires. We are no longer subject to the sinful whims with which our flesh assails us. We were bad, fruitless trees who could only do what our fallen natures demanded of us.

Now we are a new sort of tree. A tree which is led by the Spirit and bears good fruit. And just as there is one Spirit, there is also one fruit. You might think of it like the apple: one fruit with many varieties. Just as you can choose from Braeburns, Fujis, Honey Crisps, and Galas, so

also does the fruit the Spirit produces in you come in many different flavors: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And against these things there is no law.

And so rejoice, dear brothers and sisters. Because you are baptized, you are no longer in the shackles of spiritual slavery. You are free from everything which the devil and the world want to use to drag you down into unbelief and despair.

Because you are free, you can produce the fruit which the Spirit gives you to bear. You live in the forgiveness which Christ has won for you and delivers to you today. Come, eat the fruit of the cross and drink of its nectar. Rejoice, because your body of sin is dead, and you are alive. Rejoice that in your baptism your flesh is crucified with Christ, and you are forgiven for all your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—  
Amen

Sermon based on one by the Rev. Charles Lehmann