

“Fruits of the Flesh Vs. Fruits of the Spirit: Proof of Your Faith”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning, welcome to church here at Pleasant Corners/Kasson UMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is a joy to be here in worship with you. Over the last few weeks we have been working our way through the book of Galatians. We are nearing the end of that journey, as this week we look at chapter five and next week we finish with chapter six. Throughout this letter the focus has been on how salvation comes to us from the Lord. Many false teachers claiming to be Jewish Christians were coming to the Galatians, who were mostly Gentiles, and were leading them away from faith in Christ first. To Paul, this is an absolute tragedy, as salvation comes through faith and not by human actions. The Jewish false teachers were saying that in order to be a good servant of the Lord one must be circumcised, follow the dietary laws, and ultimately be Jewish in form and function to be a recipient of salvation. If you pay attention throughout the book of Galatians, you can see that the Apostle Paul is frustrated that Christians who had previously been firmly rooted in Christ now were giving themselves over to these false teachings. They are, in fact, jeopardizing the truth of the Gospel by adhering to the Torah Laws that on their own do not save. Over the previous weeks we have talked about how these teachings on being saved by the Law (and consequently for us, our own actions) are not true, as we are made right by Christ and not by anything else. We remember the sacrifice that Christ makes for us that assures our salvation today, in fact, by practicing the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Working off of these facts, Galatians five then draws the attention of the readers/listeners in a slightly different direction. Over the past few weeks, having looked at how we are saved by faith

according to God's works and not our own, one might get the idea that we therefore are not responsible for our actions if we call upon Christ. This chapter, and therefore our emphasis for today, is on how our faith is proven by our actions. To sum it up, you know a tree by its fruit.

Galatians five begins with this strange (to us) call back to fighting the teaching of circumcision that is found in most of Paul's letters. Verse two says "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you." When we hear statements like this, it is important for us to remember that often he is not just talking about the act of snipping a male's genitals, but he is using it to discuss the entirety of the Talmudic Law. This Law, which is important, is fulfilled in Christ and therefore is not needed to be followed in this way any longer. Furthermore, Paul wants these people to know (because many are turning away from Christ because of these teachings!) that it is not healthy for them to continue in these practices. Verse four states "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Paul is saying that to state that you have faith in Christ, but to actively participate in actions like these expecting salvation to come from them, proves a person's heart. It's akin to going to the airport, and you assert to everyone that you trust the jet you are getting on. However, when you get on that jet you wear a parachute, a backup parachute, and carry a hang-glider with you. You say that you trust the jet, but in reality you don't because your actions don't bear that out. You trust the parachutes and the hang-glider (which are far less safe in actuality), you don't trust the jet. That is what Paul was getting at with these Galatians, who say that they love Jesus but then put all of their efforts into trying to earn their salvation through their actions. This kind of teaching is of course coming from

those false teachers, but it permeates everything in the churches and makes it so that people are no longer trusting in their Lord.

Let me illustrate how this happens with our jetliner example again. So lets say that it isn't just any old passenger getting on the plane with two parachutes and a hang-glider, but instead it is actually the pilot. He gets on the plane, assures everyone that it is perfectly safe, but he is constantly wearing all of this gear that proves otherwise. One of two things are going to happen with all those passengers. They are either going to start carrying their own parachutes and hang-gliders, or they more likely are not getting on that jet. Applying this to the Galatian church, and to ours, if we say we are saved by Christ but then demand all sorts of tertiary things to get into heaven, then we prove what it is that we place our faith in. Many will say that it is Jesus who saves, but in practice they think it is baptism, confirmation, tithing, church service, or "just being good" that gets one into heaven. All those things are good, just as following some of the Law was good for the Galatians, but it does not supplant Christ. With that being said, in the same breath Paul also makes sure that people don't try to get off the hook. Verse thirteen shows this for us perfectly "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." We are called to be free, but not into sin.

Matthew 7:15-20 reads "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear

good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.” One of the criticisms of Paul was that this teaching on faith over works makes it so that anyone who calls upon Jesus can do whatever they wish. Of course this is not true, as Jesus says “you will know them by their fruits.” Paul elaborates on this in Galatians five, before the false teachers can even get a word in by affirming that we as Christians are to be Christlike in our love. Verse fourteen is a direct quote from Jesus “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love you neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 7:12) The implications are clear, if you call yourself a Christian you are saved by faith, but you prove whom you serve by your actions.

An example that I will frequently use to explain this concept is imagine that you encounter someone in the community. At Erdman’s or Walmart you are in line behind someone, and you see them being extremely rude to the cashier. They are upset about something trivial, and their response is to cuss out the teenager who’s job it is to ring up their groceries. Then you head to church that next day and you find out that this person is the pastor, or maybe a church leader, or the person greeting you at the door. What are your thoughts in regard to that person and to their church? You would potentially argue that they are hypocritical, and you are not likely to attend that church again or at least would be highly skeptical of that person and their faith. Conversely, imagine that you are back in Erdman’s or Walmart, and the person in front of you is having a difficulty that is completely the cashier’s fault. Yet, instead of being upset or angry, they are courteous and kind. They are friendly towards this cashier who is causing them grief, and they do their best to smile anyways. Imagine encountering that person at church the next day, where they end up being the

Sunday School teacher, or a Trustee, or just a friendly member in the pews. Encounters like that are going to encourage you to attend that church again, and maybe you will even seek out that particular person as a friend. All of this happens without that person ever being overt about anything. All of this happens without that person even knowing that they are sharing Christ (or hurting another's perspective of Christ) in a small way. This is what Paul is getting at when he says in verses sixteen and seventeen "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." To put it succinctly, Paul is saying that while we are justified by faith and not by works, if we do in fact have the faith of Christ within us then we better show it. As James would say, "I will show you my faith by my works."

You may be asking yourself, "What is it that shows my faith, or my disobedience to God, within me?" Paul answers that at the end of chapter five by showcasing what we honestly probably already know. Verses nineteen through twenty-five explains this very clearly. Verses nineteen through twenty-one read "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." To challenge you, beloved congregation, know that if you act in evil ways and you think that the Lord doesn't care about your sin, then you are dead wrong. It is imperative that we live in ways that are Godly, for if we do not then there is no distinction between us and the world, and then it is

right to question salvation. Of course we all sin and fall short of the glory of God, but we know the difference between someone who sins and repents versus someone who brushes off what is right. (Think children: do they fess up to breaking the lamp, or try to hide it? Is there a difference in your reaction between these two actions by the child?) You will know a tree by its fruit... you will know a Christian by their deeds and by their heart. You show the faith that you have by how you act. If you are still trying to earn God's favor, then you prove that you don't have faith in Christ's saving power because you are trying to do it on your own... just as the Galatians were. If you say you are Christ's, but your actions don't show it, then you have to ask yourself the truthful question "Am I seeking after the Lord?"

So where are you individually at today? Are you proving your faith by your actions? Or are you trying to earn salvation? Are you proving your faith by your actions? Or are you simply saying you love Christ when you don't? Only you and the Lord know where your faith truly lies today. As we approach our time of Communion, remembering what Christ did for us, if you have been faltering in your faith now is a good time to turn that over to the Lord. As we close in prayer, let's all give over to God our anxieties about salvation and our sins. Thanks be to Jesus, we don't have to bear those anymore. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer