

## **Galatians 5:19-25 Christ makes the difference! Pentecost 6 July 18 & 21, 2019**

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

Grace and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior, who gives us strength. Amen.

God's Word to keep us in the power of Christ is from Galatians 5:19-25

These are your words heavenly Father. Sanctify us to live holy lives. Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

Last Sunday I said in my sermon that our identity is not in our occupations or family, but who we are through faith in Christ. When God looks at us, He doesn't see sinners, He sees Christ's holy life. If that is how God sees us, that is how we want to live. Hear how the Bible describes us: "*created in Christ Jesus to do good works,*" as "*children of the light,*" or as "*good trees producing good fruit*" (Matt 7:17). When people plant fruit seeds, they expect a harvest. God's has renewed our lives in Christ to produce such good spiritual fruit that even unbelievers will see and praise God! That happened to Daniel when king of Persian saw him saved from lions. Yet, our sinful nature makes it hard to live for God and others. How can we produce good fruit for God and keep our sinful nature from producing rotten fruit in us?

### **Christ makes the difference!**

**First, the difference between godliness and godlessness is like day and night.** Earlier, Paul described a battle between the sinful nature and the spiritual nature of believers. He listed examples of sins in v. 19: "*The acts of the sinful nature are...: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery.*" Those 3 words fit the Israelites in the wilderness. When Moses was on Mt. Sinai, the people worshipped an idol and committed sexual sins. When Moses returned, he was so angry he broke the 10 Commandment tablets and God punished many of the people. So, Paul made it clear that those these people used to sin like this, they must stop as Christians. Paul also listed how the sinful nature harms others through "*hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy*" (v.20). These types of sin among Christians have brought scandal and dishonor to the name of Christ in congregations and Christian homes.

Paul wrote: "*I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God*" (v.21). Our sins are serious! They can weaken our faith and cut us off from our gracious God. That happened to King David for a time when he allowed the sin of adultery to ruin his life rather than confess his sins. Think of a swimmer trying to go 100 yards. Usually no problem for many, but what if every 5 feet, they added 5 lbs. of weights? Even the strongest swimmer will and not come up. Our sins can weigh us down the same way. We must seek forgiveness as soon as possible. God's Word calls us be like the repentant Prodigal son to: see the miserable condition of our sin, be sorry for it, and to turn from it to our heavenly Father, who for Christ's sake forgave all our sins. Then, we pray that God will help us not to return to ungodly living, speaking, or selfish boasting.

In contrast to the fruit of the sinful nature, Paul describes the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, which is what every Christian wants! Paul wrote in verse 22, "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.*" These "fruits" are based on our connection with God. "*We love because He first loved us*" (1 John 3:1). Joy comes from knowing that God works everything for good to those who love Him. We have peace with God because Jesus took away our sin and restored us as God's dear children.

Paul lists more fruits of the Spirit: *“patience, kindness, goodness”* (v.22). These three express our attitude toward people. Rather than see people as enemies, we should see them as lost souls. Rather than return unkindness for meanness, we overcome evil with good. The last three on Paul’s list are *“faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”* toward others. Paul has two contrasting lists. We may feel at times that we are on both lists. At times the way we sin, may cause us to wonder if we are true Christians. The fact that we are concerned about our faith is a good sign that we are. Jesus pictured our situation in His parables: we are like good growing plants surrounded by bad plants. Anyone who has had a garden knows that not long after the good seeds are planted, the weeds are growing strong. So it is with the power of sin in us! As much as God is at work to produce good fruit in us, our sinful nature tries to stop it.

**Second, God will help us to be fruitful Christians.** How does God do this? The first thing that God helps us do is to identify sin. If we follow God’s word, it’s easy. But, if we listen to our sinful nature, it tells us that selfishness, envy, and hatred are not wrong. It makes excuses such as: “If we were born with these feelings. It’s God fault if we have them.” This is wrong. Feelings or what others are doing does not determine right and wrong. God sets the standard in His Word.

Also God has given us prayer. We pray for God to teach us the truth. We pray that God would motivate us to love Him and do His will because of His great love in Christ. We pray that God would give us a love to read and hear His Word, like King David desired God’s Word, like he thirsted for water!

Also, we need to see ourselves as God sees us in Christ. Paul wrote, *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires”* (v.24). Our sinful nature can’t be reformed or improved. It must be killed so that it has no power over us. In the Greek language, the word “crucified” is a one-time thing. God sees us as if our nature was crucified when Christ was crucified. It no longer has power to ruin our lives or harm our faith. But, unfortunately, as long as we live in this world, our sinful nature springs back to life. It continues to be a source of frustration to us as Christians.

Yet, the Holy Spirit has an on-going work in us. Paul wrote, *“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit”* (v.25). How can the Holy Spirit help us produce good spiritual fruit? Jesus spoke a parable about seeds planted in various types of soil. Many died, but some landed in good ground and produced much fruit. That good ground is God’s Word to keep us in Christ. The Gospel is powerful and active, holding on to us through the promised blessings that Jesus has given to us by His living, dying, and rising. We need to evaluate our time spent. How much time do we take to feed our sinful nature (TV) and how much time do we take with Jesus in His Word? Also, we should ask: How important is our relationship with Jesus in our daily lives? He said, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5).

Despite many missed opportunities to honor God and to do good to others, the Holy Spirit keeps our faith in Christ alive. He helps us to think about Christ’s loving sacrifice for us. When we remember this, He will produce good fruits through us for God’s honor. We may be tempted to think we’re missing out on sinful living, but God’s Word is keeping us from harm. God has forgiven our sins. We couldn’t have it any better than to be with Jesus. God will bless us, our families, and our church as we see that Christ has made the difference for us! Amen.