

## INTRODUCTION

In the last message I mentioned one of my favorite Presidents, Calvin Coolidge. He was known as "silent Cal," because he was a man of few words. One day, President Coolidge was walking home from attending church and reporters gathered around him. They asked, "What subject did the pastor preach on today?" Silent Cal gave them a single word answer, "Sin." The reporter continued, "Well, what did he say about sin?" The President simply said, "He's against it." Well, tomorrow if someone asked you what I talked about today, you can say the message was about sin and that I'm against it, too!

How many of you like making lists? I've known some people who are compulsive list makers. They make lists of their lists. Most of us make grocery lists, and most husbands have a honey-do list. People make a bucket list of things they want to do before they die. Even Santa makes a list, and he checks it twice. Many people make a daily, to-do list. It's a great feeling to scratch out those to-do items after you've accomplished them. Making lists is a smart thing to do. Albert Einstein said, "A short pencil is better than a long memory."

If you like lists, you're going to like this next part of Galatians. There are two lists. First there's a list of fifteen different sins, which we'll call the weeds of the flesh. But thank God, there's also a list of the nine fruit of the Spirit. Starting next Sunday, I'll be spending the next ten weeks talking about each of the Fruit. I'm calling the series, "Grace Fruit: Jesus Living in You." But today, we're going to focus on the first list. The title of this message is "Rotten Living that Leads to Loss."

Galatians 5:19-23. "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Some preachers enjoy preaching about sin and they gleefully preach against it. But I always talk about it with a broken heart, because I know that it leads to loss and ruin. Someone said sin will take you farther than you ever wanted to go; Sin will keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay; and sin will cost you more than you ever wanted to pay.

In the last message we talked about how each of us has two natures that continually struggle within us. If you could compare your two natures to animals, your sinful nature is like a pig or a vulture. A pig loves filth and will eat almost anything. A vulture feeds on rotten flesh. By contrast, your new nature is like a lamb or a dove—they don't touch rotten food. They are drawn toward clean food. So, as I mentioned last week, our goal is to starve the flesh, but feed the spirit.

Let's compare the weeds of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit.

## I. ROTTEN WEEDS GROW FROM A SINFUL NATURE

Paul’s list contains fifteen different sins, but he concludes the list with the words, “and the like.” That means this list isn’t exhaustive: If you don’t find your pet sin listed, that doesn’t mean you get a pass. These fifteen different weeds of the flesh fall into four general categories.

### **A. Sexual sins: Sexual activity outside of marriage is wrong**

Paul used three words that all refer to sexual immorality. The first is the word translated “fornication” in the King James Version. It is the Greek word *porneia*, which is the root for our word pornography. Impurity referred to sexual conduct that was considered unnatural, and debauchery was a word that meant open and flagrant sexual conduct.

America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a sex-saturated society. But as sex-crazed as our society is, it was even worse when Paul wrote these words. In the first century, sexual immorality was rampant. Prostitution was not only legal, but it was considered religious to engage in sexual activities with prostitutes at the pagan temples.

Sex isn’t something dirty or forbidden. God created sex and He gave everyone a sex drive. But He created sex to be the deepest act of intimacy between a husband and wife in the bonds of marriage. In a world that is struggling to find the truth about sex, you only have to go to the Bible to find God’s purpose for sex. “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed [that’s a euphemism for sex] kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” (Hebrews 13:4) Sex is like a powerful river. Like a river that floods its banks, when sex gets outside God’s boundary of marriage, there is always destruction.

Sex within the relationship of a husband and wife is a wonderful, beautiful thing in God’s sight. And other sexual activity, whether it is adultery, homosexuality, premarital sex, or incest is sin according to the Word of God.

Of course, we’re all aware President Obama recently came out in favor of gay marriage. I firmly believe God loves everyone, including ALL of us sinners. We need to realize that those of us who believe that the definition of marriage is a permanent relationship between one man and one woman are going to be in a growing minority. God doesn’t base His morality on popular opinion polls. But your primary concern shouldn’t be the sexual behavior of someone else; it should be on keeping your sexual behavior within God’s boundaries.

Students, let me speak a word directly to you for a minute. You are being bombarded by music, videos, and peer pressure to go ahead and give in to sexual activity before marriage. If you never remember another thing I say, remember this: Do yourself a favor and do your future mate a favor. Wait until you get married to have sex.

Tim Tebow said he is a virgin and he is waiting until he gets married before he has sex. Of course, our immoral culture is skeptical about his claim. A website that helps married couples commit adultery has advertised they will pay one million dollars to any woman who can refute Tebow’s claim. There was a time when our society valued chastity, but now they make jokes and movies about anyone who is a virgin. It just goes to show that our nation is in a steep moral decline.

Whatever your sexual past may be, God can forgive you and redeem your past. Starting today, ask God to give you the strength to stay sexually pure until you’re married, and to stay sexually pure within your marriage.

Each of these categories of sins has a corresponding fruit of the spirit. The antithesis to this category is the spiritual fruit of love. Next week we’ll learn that there are many kinds of love, including *eros*, or erotic love. That the only love that truly satisfies the deepest longing of the human heart is the spiritual fruit of agape.

Whew! We’re moving on from sex, so you can breathe again.

### **B. Religious sins: Trusting in any person or thing other than God is idolatry**

The next two sins Paul lists are “idolatry and witchcraft.” Don’t think of witches on brooms casting spells. The word translated witchcraft is the word *pharmakeia*, from which we get our word pharmaceuticals. In the first century, sorcerers and magicians often combined hallucinogenic drugs as part of their magic and potions. This carries the idea of drug abuse—both prescription and illegal drug abuse. These two sins are combined, because much of the idol worship in the first century included the use of drugs for euphoric trances.

Most Americans laugh at the idea of idolatry because we think idolatry is bowing down before a statue, or a religious icon. But an idol is any person or thing we trust more than God. Our money says, “In God we Trust,” but most Americans trust their money a lot more than they trust in God.

The respected theologian J.I. Packer has written: “What other gods could we have besides the Lord? Plenty. For Israel there were the Canaanite Baals, those jolly nature gods whose worship was a rampage of gluttony, drunkenness, and ritual prostitution. For us there are still the great gods Sex, Shekels, and Stomach (an unholy trinity constituting one god: self). Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some. Indeed the list of other gods is endless, for anything that anyone allows to run their life becomes their god.” (The Father Loves You) The opposite spiritual fruit of this category is peace. People are searching desperately for spiritual, inner peace. They are turning to all kinds of substitutes and idols, but real peace can only be found in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

### **C. Social sins: Self-centered living destroys relationships**

Of the fifteen different sins Paul lists, over half of them have to do with our relationship with other people. They include, “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.” The opposite virtues of these sins are the fruit of patience, kindness, and goodness.

Sexual sins are often called “sins of the flesh,” but anger is just as much a sin of the flesh as adultery. And sometimes people are proud of the fact that they are sexually pure when they are as mean as the devil in their dealings with other people.

One of the first novels I recall being assigned to read in High School English was *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The story is about Hester Prynne who had a baby out of wedlock. To add to her public shame, she was required to wear a garment with the letter A, for Adultery, on the front. It's a powerful story about legalism, sin, and guilt.

What would it be like if everyone who lost their temper and had "fits of rage" were required to wear a scarlet A for Anger on their shirt or dress? We have made the mistake of considering these relational sins as being less severe than sexually related sins.

#### **D. Sins of excess: Unrestrained appetites lead to addiction**

Paul includes, "drunkenness, orgies, and the like." People are searching for happiness, and the antithesis of this category is the spiritual fruit of joy. The Bible is clear that getting drunk is a sin. In Ephesians 5:18 the Bible says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery [excess]. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Americans, (even Christians), are looking for a way to self-medicate themselves and alcohol is the #1 drug of choice. Many Christians choose to abstain from drinking, but some of those who don't find themselves unable to stop after only one drink. One drink always leads to another and then to another.

Alcoholism and underage drinking is a growing problem. According to the Council on Alcohol Abuse one of eight people who ever taste alcohol end up abusing it. But among teenagers who start drinking before the age of 14, one out of two become alcoholics.

Many Christians disagree about whether the Bible allows drinking in moderation. But without a doubt, if you never take a drink, then you will never be in danger of getting drunk.

The word "orgies" doesn't just apply to sexual orgies, it refers to any kind of wild, uncontrolled behavior. This includes any kind of mob mentality. It's like a party where everyone goes wild. Or it can be worse than just wild party behavior. You've probably heard of flash mobs, where a mob gathers when someone sends out a flash text. That has now devolved into "flash robs." In the last two months six stores have been flash robbed in St. Paul, Minnesota. A flash text is sent out and with the store suddenly overcrowded with the mob, salespeople can't keep up with the people who are shoplifting. That's the kind of wild behavior this word describes. The corresponding fruit that stands opposed to this behavior is self-control.

Have you ever worked in a garden? If you want to grow good flowers or vegetables you have to plant them, water them, and cultivate them. However, you don't have to do anything to get weeds. There were no weeds in the Garden of Eden. Part of God's pronouncement against sin was that thorns and thistles (weeds) would infest the ground. Weeds are a parable of our sinful nature. The Bible even speaks about "the root of bitterness." (Hebrews 12:15) Weeds crowd out the good plants and rob the soil of moisture and nutrients. When you pull up a weed, make sure you pull it out by the root, or that weed will return. That's the attitude we should have toward the weeds of our sinful nature. We shouldn't just concentrate on the sins, but on the root of the problem, which is our sinful nature.

The Bible says we should aggressively root out these weeds of the flesh. “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” (Colossians 3:5)

So don’t treat sin like a weed-eater whacking away at the visible weed—go to the root of the problem. It’s a heart problem, not a behavior problem. Jesus taught that the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. He said, “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’” (Mark 7:20-23)

At this point, you might be thinking, “Wow. I’ve committed some of those sins. Am I really a Christian? In Galatians 5:21 Paul didn’t say, “Those who commit these sins will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” He said, “Those who LIVE like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” That’s an important distinction. Here’s the point: A believer occasionally falls into sin, but he/she cannot continuously live in sin. The Bible says, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are.” (1 John 3:9-10)

The “seed” you have inside you is the Holy Spirit. Christians may sin, and some Christians even struggle with addiction, but if the Holy Spirit lives in you, He will have a holy fit if you continue to live this way.

However, there are many people who profess to be Christians who do not possess the Holy Spirit. They are counterfeit Christians. I like the comment from Pastor Ray Pritchard on this subject. He writes: “While it is true that all of us fall into these sins at one time or another, true Christians feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit and we eventually turn our hearts once again toward heaven. There is a true sense in which exclusion from heaven is man’s responsibility. He will not come to God because he loves the pull of the flesh too much. Heaven will be inherited by every man who has heaven in his soul. Those who live like hell will one day live in hell.”

## **II. GOOD FRUIT IS SEEN IN A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE**

What’s the alternative to the weeds of the flesh? There is a better way to live, and that’s by the fruit of the Spirit. Since I’ll start the series on the Fruit of the Spirit next week, I want to introduce the subject in this message. The first thing to note is that the Bible says “The fruit of the Spirit IS love, joy, peace...” Shouldn’t it say, “The fruits of the Spirit ARE?” Nope, that’s an important point. There’s one fruit, but it has nine flavors. It’s like a roll of lifesavers, there’s one roll, but different flavors. Some people confuse the Gifts of the Spirit with the Fruit of the Spirit. There are about fifteen different gifts of the Spirit, which are supernatural abilities for ministry that God gives you. There are a variety of gifts and no Christian has all of them. You may only have one or two gifts of the Spirit. You may be able to say, “I have the gift of service, but I don’t have the gift of mercy.” But when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit, you can’t say, “Well, I have the fruit of joy, but I don’t think I have the fruit of patience.” When the Holy Spirit is controlling your life, you will display all nine of these virtues. These nine fruit easily fall into three groups.

### **A. I relate to God through love, joy, and peace**

God demonstrates an unconditional love to us that sets us free to love others. I can't love unlovely people in my own strength, but God loves everyone, and He can love anyone through me.

In England, the royal flag flies above whatever palace the Queen currently inhabits. Joy is like a banner that shows Jesus is living in my heart. My relationship with Jesus gives me peace with God, the peace of God, and a peace that passes all understanding.

### **B. I relate to others through patience, kindness, and goodness**

My flesh pushes me toward impatience and anxiety. But Jesus in me gives me patience to trust God's timing. I can act kindly toward others in my human nature, but when Jesus is controlling my life, I'll be kind to every person I encounter, even if they don't show me kindness. There's no goodness in me, but God is good all the time, and Jesus wants to show that goodness through me.

### **C. I relate to myself through faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**

When we examine these three virtues we'll learn the three people most of us have trouble with are me, myself, and I. But relax. It's not up to you to develop the skills of faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are all qualities Jesus will produce in me when I allow His personality to overpower mine.

These nine virtues aren't the fruit of a Christian; they are the fruit of the Spirit. These are descriptions of the personality of Jesus. He was (and is) love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In John 15 Jesus said He is the vine and we're just the branches. Our job is to simply abide in Him, that is, to stay firmly attached to His life, and He will produce these virtues in us. That's what we're going to be talking about over the next ten weeks.

## **CONCLUSION**

When I was growing up, our pastor gave the invitation every Sunday. He asked for people to come forward if they wanted to be saved or join the church. But he also invited Christians to come forward to rededicate themselves. I probably rededicated myself about a hundred times when I was a kid and a teenager. Every time I'd goof up, which was often, I'd feel the need to rededicate myself.

Before I came to Tyler I used to invite people to rededicate themselves during the invitation song. No kidding, there was a lady in one of my churches who would rededicate herself every single Sunday. She'd come forward and say, "Pastor, I need to rededicate myself to the Lord." It just got to the point where I said, "That's wonderful. Now you can return to your seat."

Have you noticed in the last 21 years I've never extended that kind of invitation? It's because I came to understand that God doesn't want us to dedicate or rededicate ourselves. Instead He wants death to self, because our selfish, sinful nature is the problem. The key to overcoming sin is not by trying harder, it's in considering your sinful nature to be dead. The secret of a life of fruitfulness is found in Galatians 5:24: "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." That's why I quote Galatians 2:20 more than any verse, as I claim, "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ lives in me."

My friend Ron Dunn once compared the Christian life to a man who is trying to mop up a flooded house. He wrote: "Many Christians are like a man who comes home and finds his house flooded because he forgot to turn off the bathtub faucet. Frantically he grabs a mop and begins sweeping out the water—but the bathtub faucet is still running wide open. After a few frenzied swipes, he sees he's making no headway against the water, so he gets a bigger mop. Determined to live in a victoriously dry house, he enrolls in a seminar on Effective Mopping Techniques, and once again wades into the battle. But still the water pours out faster than he can mop it up. As the situation worsens, he rededicates himself to better mopping, vows he'll never again leave the faucet on, and once more takes up the mop. Weary and waterlogged, he finally concludes that God never intended him to live in a dry house, so he buys a pair of galoshes and a waterbed and settles down to live the rest of his life in a flooded house.

Ron concludes: "Now I'm not against mopping—but if the faucet is still running, it's a waste of time. The solution is ridiculously simple, isn't it? Stop the flow at its source: turn off the faucet. The water on the floor is our daily sins. The open faucet is the sin nature - the source of the sins. And the sin nature can produce sins faster than we can mop them up. We've been mopping sins when we should have been crucifying self. A great many believers have thrown in the towel, or rather, the mop, and have settled down to live the best they can in a flooded house. But God has made provision for a life of daily victory. It is the birthright of every Christian. Don't settle for anything less!"

## OUTLINE

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- A. Sexual sins: Sexual activity outside of marriage is wrong
- B. Religious sins: Trusting in any person or thing other than God is idolatry
- C. Social sins: Self-centered living destroys relationships
- D. Sins of excess: Unrestrained appetites lead to addiction

NOTE: A believer occasionally falls into sin, but he/she cannot continuously live in sin.

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### II. GOOD FRUIT IS SEEN IN A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

I relate to:

- A. God through love, joy, and peace
- B. Others through patience, kindness, and goodness
- C. Myself through faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes