

Galatians 5-6 Sermon: Fruit

Sermon APP: Doing good is hard, but right. Help one another, it matters forever.

Why should Christians do good? I reckon if you asked a random person off the streets of Huntingdon that, they'd say – to go to heaven! But I know that Jesus died for me and my sins are forgiven – I'm not going to suddenly be *unforgiven* if I wake up one morning and think "I don't really fancy being kind today". So why should I do it? It's easier to be selfish, to look after myself, to not do things for others. Why bother?

Well what Paul says in Galatians 5 and 6 is that doing good is the *fruit* of a changed life. Yes it's hard, but it's right – it's the right response to a life changed by relationship with Jesus. And it's not something we have to do on our own. We have one another to help each other. And it's going to matter for eternity.

And that's where we're going today in this passage, four things about doing good.

Doing good is hard, it's right, it's done together, and it's important – it matters forever.

1) Doing good is hard(v16-18)

But I say live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

There's a conflict! It's hard! Two sides battling against one another, fighting over us, wanting to control our actions. In the red corner we have 'The flesh' that's a Bible way of saying 'our natural desires, what we can't control, what we can't help but want' And in the blue corner – the Spirit. The third person of the Trinity – fully God, sent by Jesus after he went back to heaven, to help us to know him. This Holy Spirit, he is fighting with our desires helping us to do what pleases God.

We're near the end of our series here at CCH on Real Change – and what we've been learning can be summarised by this diagram. We are like trees, and when heat – or difficult circumstances – bears down on us, if we have bad roots, roots in sinful desires, we produce thorns, bad fruit, bad actions – or as Paul puts it in v19 "Acts of the flesh". But if we have good roots, roots in Jesus, who died for us, then we can produce good fruit – the fruit of the Spirit, which we'll look at later.

But the point is there are two sides – the flesh and the Spirit. Or if you like – the bad root and the good root. And they are in conflict! They can't compromise, one wants one thing, one wants another. They are opposed to one another. "They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want" our desires are 'fleshy' are sinful, we can't just do whatever we want, we sometimes will need to say no to our desires when they are sinful, when we naturally want to do something that is against God's word.

So how do we win this battle? How about we come up with a comprehensive set of rules that keeps us from sinning? That's not Paul's solution – that's called the law, and v18 he says "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law". Do you see that? It's not a case of

rules-based obedience, that's not who we are as Christians. We are not under the law. In fact, earlier in this letter in chapter 3 Paul says that "All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse" and "No one who relies on the law is justified before God."

Paul's solution instead is back in chapter 5v16 – "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" – that's not a command – "You will not" – it's a promise. If you do this, then you will.

What does it mean to live by the Spirit? The word actually means "walk" – walk by the Spirit. And later on Paul says "Let us keep in step with the Spirit". It's using the language of travel, of going somewhere, walking the way the Spirit leads us – following Him as our guide. So I think that means we'll want to pray that God will show us ways in which we're not doing that. Show us ways where we are giving in to our sinful desires, even if we don't realise it. And show us where we can better cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. And I think it also means making use of the things the Spirit gives us to help us know more of God's will. He will use the Bible, and Church, and Christian friends to remind us what is God's way to live – to help us say no to sinful desires and yes to the fruit of the Spirit.

Graham Beynon describes it like having the Spirit next to us in a car as we go for a drive. He doesn't grab the wheel and yank it in a certain direction. He tells us which way to go. Actually, it's better than that – He gives us the desire to go the right way.

Yes it's the Spirit's work, producing the fruit – but we don't just sit back and let him do it. If you've got a tree in the garden, that is what produces the fruit, but we still water it, pull up weeds, keep pests away. In the same way, the Spirit produces the fruit of good works in our lives, but we've got to let him lead us – to live by the Spirit. We've got to decide every day – "I'm going to live by the Spirit – say no to the desires of the flesh and yes to the fruit of the Spirit – God please help me do that!"

So when we struggle – that's a good sign! It means God is working in us, it means the fruit is fighting to come out! Don't be discouraged when it's hard, be encouraged that you're in this conflict! Doing good is hard!

2) It's right (v19-25)

And it's right! It's the right way to live.

Paul now goes into a bit more detail about the acts of the flesh – "The acts of the flesh 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." Now, we won't talk about this in detail, as this is a sermon on the fruit, we've had the thorns – or the bad fruit – already. Some of those are obviously quite a big deal, even in today's culture they might be frowned upon to some extent. But some are a bit more culturally acceptable. Sexual immorality, debauchery and drunkenness sounds to quite a few people like a good Friday night. And then envy? Selfish ambition? Fits of rage? Raise your hand if that doesn't include you?

And Paul gives a very solemn warning in v21 “I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God”. If you live a life like this, even if you claim to be a Christian – God will not let you into heaven. Now, I’m not talking about the occasional envious thought, or even a sexual sin – I’m talking about repeated, unapologetic acts of the flesh – a lifestyle, without any fight against the acts of the flesh, no conflict. We’re saved by God’s grace, yes, that is absolutely true – and I praise God that when I sin, I can be 100% confident that God will forgive me because Jesus died for me. But if I take God’s grace and go “Thanks, I’ll keep living a life of sexual immorality, witchcraft, hatred and envy” – all I can expect from Jesus is “Depart from me, I never knew you”. There is a wrong way for Christians to live.

Now I don’t mean to be bleak, but it’s there in Galatians 5. And James 2 – “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?” By living a good life – we don’t *earn* our salvation. But we *show* that we are truly saved. True faith is never without good works.

So how do we say no to these sinful desires? Do we stuff our ears to temptation and say “La-la-la not listening”? No! Walking by the Spirit is more than that! Walking by the Spirit is listening to the way He wants us to live. The fruit of the Spirit. And that is the right way for Christians to live.

Have you heard of the Greek Myth of the Sirens? An old story of women who sang so beautifully that they tempted ships to crash on the rocks. One sailor got his crew to stuff their ears with wax as they went past. Another got them to listen to more beautiful music. Walking by the Spirit is like the second sailor, not the first. We don’t just passively resist temptation. We actively go to what is better! And that is the way of life that the Spirit shows us.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Love: Caring about God and others more than yourself

Joy: Unshakable delight in God’s goodness

Peace: Deep-seated confidence that you are safe in God’s hands

Patience: Waiting in faith in every situation, without hurry, and ultimately waiting for God to fulfil his purpose in his perfect timing

Kindness: Acting in a way that is beneficial to others

Goodness: Doing what is right and beautiful before God

Faithfulness: Being true to your word, and having firm faith in God

Gentleness: Responding without temper

Self-control: Resisting temptation

If you want to know more about these, ask one of the children after the service, they've been learning more about what these mean.

Against such things there is no law. Slightly odd way to conclude, it seems to me, but I think what Paul is highlighting is that this is not a change in the way God wants us to live – it is a continuation of how God has always wanted his people to live, even since the days of the law, in the Old Testament. These fruit underpin all God's commands for his people. Galatians 5v14 "The entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command "Love your neighbour as yourself". In life groups this week we're going to think a bit more about how we can cultivate the fruit of the Spirit.

3. It's done together (6v1-6)

But now Paul goes on to talk about how we can help one another. Doing good is hard, it's right, and it's done together. "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."

You see, Paul doesn't think all Christians will live perfect lives! "If someone is caught in a Sin" It is possible for Christians to sin! Or to put it another way, if you've sinned – it doesn't disqualify you from being a Christian! Good news for me! But that's not the main point, the main point is that Christians should help other Christians who've sinned, carrying each other's burdens.

That's not caught as in "Caught in the act" – it's more like if they're stuck in it, if they've ended up in a pattern of sinful behaviour. Let's say someone in your life group, or another Christian friend comes to you and tells you they're struggling with pornography. Or regularly getting drunk. Or that they're finding themselves getting really angry really often. We should help them! It's hard, it's a burden, but we're not to leave them to it! We're all sinners, and we can be there for others, praying alongside them, asking them how they're getting on, recommending Bible passages to turn to when feeling tempted. But we're to be careful of ourselves too, that we don't get tempted, and we're to be gentle. If someone is vulnerable with us, care for them, show that fruit of the Spirit – gentleness, along with love and kindness.

I think we should let that encourage us – just to flip it around. I think we should let that encourage us to go to our Church family when we're struggling with sin! This is how people are to react, gently and in a helpful manner. We can trust each other to help each other.

And v3-5 tell us that we mustn't listen to anyone else's sins and think we're better than them. If you think you're something when you're not you deceive yourself! We should each test our own actions, and know that we're no better than anybody else – we are all sinners in need of grace! If someone comes to us and confesses a sin, our tendency might be to think "Ooh, that's bad – I've never done that, how good am I!" But Paul says we mustn't! Along with carrying each other's loads, we must carry our own. Remember we need work too!

And then v6 – I'm not clear on what this is doing here – the verb "share" is more like "participate" and it seems to imply financial generosity – those who listen to teaching have a responsibility for the financial needs of the teacher. Charlie should be able to feed his family! But it could also mean more than that, it could mean doing good works alongside your teacher, sharing in "all good things". I don't think it's about sharing personal stories of your Christian life, that's not what the verb means in the original. But whatever it means – it's an example of community isn't it? We're not alone in our Christian walk – we should have an instructor in the word, and be participating with them, whether by supporting them financially, or living alongside them, doing good works, bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Helping one another, without being proud, and sharing good things with your teacher. Doing good is done together.

4. It's important (6v7-10)

And doing good is important. In these last few verses Paul answers the question that may be on everyone's mind as we go through this Real Change material – Why bother?

You may have heard the illustration – if you imagine eternity as a piece of rope, and you colour in our life on earth in blue – it will just be a tiny dot of blue on the end of an infinitely long rope. This life is nothing in comparison to the whole of eternity. So what's the point of trying to change? It's not going to matter in 100 years, is it? Is it?

v7 "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." Let me just put the trees diagram up – I think these verses are a solid basis for this diagram. "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

Living by the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit leads to eternal life. This is the opposite of what we saw back in chapter 5v21 – Those who live like this – acts of the flesh – digging down bad roots and bearing bad fruit - will not inherit the kingdom of God. But if you sow to please the Spirit – digging down good roots and bearing the fruit of the Spirit, you will reap eternal life.

Friends, if we're looking for eternal life – we must bear this fruit! It's really important! If you're not bearing this fruit, if you're still pleasing the flesh, reaping bad fruit – are you really saved? Have you really moved from tree one to tree two?

Bearing this fruit is not what saves us – on the last day we will not stand before God with a list of all the good and bad things we've done, weighed up against each other as a decider for whether we go to heaven or not. No, we enter the kingdom, joyfully dependent on Christ's blood shed for us. But we show that dependence with this fruit. Good works are the fruit of knowing Jesus and having the Spirit working in us.

We need to hear this warning in our country. The brand of Christianity that so many Westerners and so many people in England believe is a repentance-less Christianity. "Receive Jesus into your heart and then just go on living the way you were". No that's not what Paul says! He says stay away from the acts of the flesh and let the Spirit guide you into

bearing this fruit. Don't be this tree, be this tree! And it makes a difference to your eternal future!

It sounds hard, it sounds like a tall order, but remember the promise – v24 “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh and its desires”. It's a battle, it's a conflict, but if we belong to Christ, if we're Christians – our evil desires are nailed to the cross, they are defeated, the Spirit is stronger! Ask for his help and you will not gratify the cravings of the flesh.

And as we close now, Paul's final application is clear. v9-10 “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers”

Dear friends let us do good! And it starts right here, in this room. How can you show the fruit of the Spirit today?

It's hard, it's right, it's done together, and it's important

Let's pray