

“9-Fruit Roll-Up”

A sermon in the series
**“Summer Memories:
Scripture Verses Worth Remembering”**
by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio
July 30, 2017

- Galatians 5:22-23 (Common English Bible)
Memorization Verse: ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this.
- Luke 6:43-45 Every tree is known by the fruit it bears.... (v. 44a)
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: We know we are the church when we see the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit abundantly evident in our relationships, in our life as a church, in our outreach into our communities and world.

How do you know you’re in a church?

You say, “Um, Jon... look around. High ceiling. Stained-glass. Pews. Don’t have those at my house. This is a church.”

Yes... but that speaks only of the facility. How do you know that the people who have congregated here this morning constitute a fellowship forged by a shared faith? How do we know we’re a church? How is a church different? How is a church distinct from anything else? How do you know you’re in a church and not a business, or a club, or a store or university or a legislative body?

Those kinds of questions – “How do we know we’re a church?” – get to the heart of today’s “scripture verse worth remembering.” And the answer to those questions is what makes this scripture passage one worth memorizing.

You’ve probably heard Galatians Chapter 5, verses 22 and 23 sometime or another because it contains a list of “nice qualities.” We’re told that they’re qualities that God’s spirit makes possible. The list is pretty straight-forward. It contains nine items. Nine. Most people can’t memorize nine items. But you can memorize three items. Anyone can remember three things. We do it all the time. I’ll prove it. Give me the answers:

- Our nation’s symbolic colors: red, white and blue.
- Persons of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Colors of a traffic light: green, yellow and red.
- The gifts of the Wise Men: gold, frankincense and myrrh.
- Branches of the federal government: executive, legislative, and judicial.
- [For those age 60 and older] The Three Stooges: Larry, Moe and Curly.
- [For those under age 21] The trio of friends from Harry Potter: Harry, Ron and Hermione.
- [For everyone] The sound made by Rice Krispies: “Snap! Crackle! Pop!”®

Everyone can memorize three items. So look at today’s memorization verse that’s printed just above the sermon title in the bulletin. If you have a pen or pencil handy, take it and draw one line under the three words “love, joy peace.” Draw another line under the three words

“patience, kindness, goodness.” And finally draw yet another line under “faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

That first line underlines three things: “love, joy, peace.” Later this afternoon I bet it would take you less than a minute to memorize “love, joy, peace.”

If you gave yourself two more minutes, you could memorize “patience, kindness, goodness,” and even add that to “love, joy, peace.”

See where I’m going? If you gave yourself another two minutes, I’m sure you could memorize “faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,” and add that trio to the first two sets of words. *Voila!* You’ve memorized *three things* plus *three things* plus *three things* – you memorized *nine* things that St. Paul calls “fruit of the Spirit”! You know those questionable snacks that kids seem to love called “Fruit Roll-Ups?” You might think of this verse as a “9-Fruit Roll-Up!”

Okay, so what? What’s so special about these nine qualities?

This list occurs in the midst of what I’ll say is a pretty complex theological proposition being laid out by the apostle Paul. This chapter of Paul’s letter involves the pitfalls of religious legalism verses the freedom of learning to trust God’s Holy Spirit. Trust me, university and seminary professors have spent their careers trying to explore the richness and complexity of these chapters in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Let me try to offer a “Cliff Notes” summary of what’s going on.

Paul is pointing out to the Galatians some errors proclaimed to them by some misguided missionaries who came to them once Paul had left them. Paul tells the Galatians that now that they are putting their trust in God, they’re becoming aware of a struggle going on in their lives – a struggle between things of “the flesh” and things of “the Spirit.” When we modern readers in this sexually overstimulated society hear the term “the flesh” we immediately assume that Paul is talking about sexual indiscretions. He is, but that is only one very small part of his concern; he “gives far more emphasis to other offenses.”¹ So the term “the flesh” is simply a way of describing all human thought and behavior that is in opposition to God’s will.

What are some examples of “the flesh,” of behaviors and ways of thinking that are in opposition to God’s ways? Conveniently, Paul offers a list. “Lists of vices were common in the Graeco-Roman world as were lists of virtues....”² In the verses coming before today’s memorization verse Paul offers a list of examples of “the ways of the flesh” that are self-centered, self-serving, disrespectful to others and to God. Paul wrote

¹⁷ A person’s selfish desires are set against the Spirit, and the Spirit is set against one’s selfish desires. They are opposed to each other, so you shouldn’t do whatever you want to do....¹⁹ The actions that are produced by selfish motives [that is, by “the flesh”] are obvious, since they include sexual immorality [see, Paul does mention “sex,” but listen how many more examples he gives!], moral corruption, doing whatever feels good,²⁰ idolatry, drug use and casting spells, hate, fighting, obsession, losing your temper, competitive opposition, conflict, selfishness, group rivalry,²¹ jealousy, drunkenness, partying, and other things like that. I warn you as I have already warned you, that those who do these kinds of things won’t inherit God’s kingdom.³

¹ New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. XI. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000, 326a

² The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 270 (annotation)

³ Galatians 5:17, 19-21 (Common English Bible)

Those kinds of behaviors are what happens when people think only of themselves, their own interests, their own pleasure. But Paul reminds the Galatians that their faith in God through Jesus the Son has shown them a new way. Instead of their former “way of the flesh” Paul urges the “way of the Spirit.” He writes, “I say be guided by the Spirit and you won’t carry out your selfish desires.”⁴

Hold that thought.

According to Luke’s gospel Jesus once gave a clear example of what Paul would later write about. As we heard from Luke Chapter 6 Jesus said,

⁴³“A healthy tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a poor tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴Every tree is known by the fruit it bears; you do not pick figs from thorn bushes or gather grapes from bramble bushes. ⁴⁵A good person brings good out of the treasure of good things in his heart; a bad person brings bad out of his treasure of bad things. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”

Jesus said, “...Every tree is known by the fruit it bears.” That was probably already a proverbial saying even back in his day. So let’s go back to the questions I posed at the outset: *How do we know we’re a church? How is a church different? How is a church distinct from anything else?*

When we invite God’s Spirit to hold full sway in our lives, the fruit of that commitment is as apparent as the apples growing on an apple tree. The sincere concern we show for one another, the gratitude we feel for the gift of life and for the world we inhabit, our commitment to justice even for the weakest and most vulnerable... those attitudes and behaviors are the result, the product, the fruit of God’s Spirit at work within us because of the faith and trust we give God. As Jesus said, “For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”

How do we know we are Christ’s church in the world? We know we are the church when we see the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit abundantly evident in our relationships, in our life as a church, in our outreach into our communities and world. As Paul wrote, “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control.”⁵

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⁴ Galatians 5:16 (Common English Bible)

⁵ Galatians 5:22-23 (Common English Bible)