

**WHEN THE SPIRIT REIGNS**  
**Galatians 5:16-25**

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What attributes would you seek to possess? What adjectives would you like to see connected to your name?

Would it be beauty – being handsome, physically attractive? Would that be an attribute you would pick if you could only pick a few? Of course, the problem with beauty is that it always fades. Name me the last senior citizen to be crowned Miss America. Hasn't ever happened. Never will. Physical beauty doesn't last.

Perhaps you would pick intelligence. That seems noble enough – that you would have the insight to pick bright over beauty as you're picking your adjectives. We all want our children to be smart, maybe even brilliant. Perhaps we'd pick that adjective for them. But just how smart do you want your child to be?

**Some children are extremely intelligent. They have a rare form of autism called Asperger's Syndrome. They communicate verbally quite well – in fact, quite impressively. They can memorize such trivia as exotic species of cicadas and telephone cable insulating companies. They can reel off the names of all the passengers on the Titanic, or list the provincial capitals of Brazil or even the birthdays of every member of Congress. But they cannot read the facial expression of the person sitting next to them. They have a hard time making friends because Asperger's children, as smart as they are, really must learn what most other children know inherently – that a crying person is sad, that a smiling person is happy, that a person whose eyebrows sternly scrunch together is either concentrating or frustrated or angry, depending on the other facial clues.**

**These children fail to notice, as they drone on about known varieties of Asian mushrooms or as they dutifully recite the names and features of Venusian craters, that no one else in the room is paying any attention to them. Some people call them oddballs or little professors. They are social misfits. The syndrome was discovered in 1944 by Hans Asperger who noticed that certain autistic children enjoyed extraordinary verbal skills, but also suffered intense isolation and were unable to empathize with other human beings. (*Homiletics*, January 2001)**

In fact, researchers have now concluded that EI is more important than IQ. All of us probably took an IQ test in grade school – probably the Stanford-Binet test that simply measured logic and language but which failed to measure the really important things. In fact, no less than Harvard professor of psychology, Daniel Goleman has written a book that explains why EI – emotional intelligence – matters more than IQ. EI refers to what some researchers call “soft skills” or interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. An emotionally intelligent person can identify their emotions or feelings, use their emotions or feelings for the benefit of themselves and others. They

can understand the emotions they are experiencing or the emotions that others are experiencing. And they can regulate or control their emotions. A high EI allows you to understand yourself and understand others – what motivates them, how they work, how to work cooperatively with other people. Even at Bell Labs, where everyone is smart, studies find that the most valued and productive engineers (no dumb bunnies here) are those who have a high EI. Sure, a high IQ might make you a superb fiscal analyst or legal scholar, but a highly developed EI will make you a CEO or a brilliant trial lawyer.

So when you're picking the attributes, you might think twice before you make intelligence the first on your list.

If not beauty, if not intelligence, what attributes do we desire?

I've got some good news for you. While you can't control your intelligence or your beauty – at least not very much – the nine gifts worth selecting, according to the Apostle Paul, are available to everyone within the sound of my voice.

Paul begins our passage by contrasting two different ways of life: walking by the Spirit (that is, walking under the control of the Holy Spirit which indwells the people of God) or walking in such a way as to carry out the desires of the flesh. He calls to our attention the fact that the Spirit and the flesh are at war. They stand in opposition to each other. They are diametrically opposed (Galatians 5:17). The problem is that once we are a part of the family of God, once we become a possessor of the Spirit of Christ, we have a battle going on within us. When we're not part of the kingdom of God, there is not really a battle that takes place. We can just sin and, in many ways, quite frankly, enjoy that sin – at least for a season. The problem is that once we know right from wrong, and once we have the Spirit of Christ reigning within us, the Spirit of Christ is miserable when we find ourselves in sin.

So we have a civil war in our own being – a war between our old, Adam-like flesh and the Spirit of Christ which is within us. That's what Paul says here.

Before we get to the attributes of godliness, Paul gives us a catalogue of the deeds of the flesh, which have no place in the kingdom of God. We basically have four different categories. This is not an exhaustive list of the sins of the flesh. But, this is a representative list of the sins that result by going with the flow, living in the flesh.

First is the category of sexual immorality. That is the first three sins listed here: immorality, impurity, and sensuality. Second, he gives us sins of false worship: idolatry and sorcery. Remember, in the region of Galatia there would be a lot of sexual sin in regard to pagan worship, and there would be a lot of bad worship. Paul says don't fulfill your every sexual desire, but also don't have false worship. Interestingly enough, and don't miss this, maybe you're looking at the list and saying you're okay on the sensuality sins. You're okay because you're not worshiping idols or practicing sorcery. But the third major category of the sins of the flesh is the deeds of the flesh which represent broken relationships. In fact, there are more deeds of the flesh listed that deal with broken relationships than deal with either false worship or sensuality. Look at them. In

the same list with immorality we have enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, and envying.

He gives us two categories – sins of sensuality and sins of false worship – and then emerges a third category that captures us all: the sins of broken relationships. Right above this section Paul says that there are some who are eating and devouring each other with their bickering. They are self-destructing as a church. Look at verse 15. “If you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.” So, even as he addresses the sins of sensuality and false worship, he asks, “What about the bickering among you? What about the jealousies among you? What about the anger? The dissension? The factions? What about all these things that are working in the congregation?”

These are not the attributes we desire. These are not the fruit of the Spirit. They are the deeds of the flesh.

Then he gives us a final category: sins of intemperance. Notice the last two in verse 21 – drunkenness and carousing. And just in case Paul has missed anything in giving us a list, he adds, “And things like these.”

It’s quite a list. At some point it probably captures us all. These are the things that are evident in our life when the old Adam is winning the battle. These are the things that our life produces and our heart and emotions produce when it’s not the Spirit of Christ within us who is winning the day, but our old self, our old nature. That’s the ugly side.

But what about the fruit worth finding? What about the fruit of the Spirit?

As you listen to these nine attributes – this fruit of the Spirit – I want you to think about the person in your church, the person in your life that most likely exhibits and exudes the Spirit of Christ. We might not all be able to be beautiful. We might not all be able to be Einstein. But we can all – and only with the reigning of the Spirit of Christ in our lives – have these characteristics within us, because the Spirit of Christ is within us.

## **1. The first attribute worth seeking is LOVE.**

God is described more by the word love than by any other word in the Old or New Testaments. It is love that He uses to describe Himself. It is the word used to describe God’s relationship with His people.

Listen to Deuteronomy 7:7-9.

The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all people, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

The Lord chose to love us.

When you think about the attributes worth seeking, the first one is love. Those who are letting the Spirit of Christ control their lives are people of love. Think about someone in this body of believers who exudes the love of Christ. Someone who, like God, represents love. God is love (1 John 4:7).

## **2. The next attribute is JOY.**

In Romans 14:17 the same writer, Paul, writes, "...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

And in Romans 15:13: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Joy – listen carefully – is not happiness. Happiness is what even the people of the world can possess when everything is going their way. Joy is when the people of God, by the presence of God – despite their circumstances – have a real sense of inner contentment, a sense that God is in control and everything at the end of the day will be okay.

In fact, the command to rejoice is made clear and repeated often in Scripture. And God makes it possible for us to obey his every command, even in the midst of adversity. Our joy is found not in our circumstances in life, our sicknesses, or infirmities, our finances. Rather, our joy is found in our position in Christ. Jesus teaches that we are to abide in Him, as a branch abides in the vine, so that His joy might remain in us and our joy might be full (John 15:11).

Our society teaches that happiness is a passive experience, something that happens to us. Happiness is somehow involuntary. In reality, the joy that comes in Christ is a choice that we are able to make because of the presence of the Spirit of God. We are commanded to rejoice. God's people should not be a miserable people.

It reminds me of the three men who are at the airport awaiting the arrival of the guest minister who would be preaching that Sunday morning in their church. They had never seen the man before, and they looked over each arriving passenger very carefully, trying to find their preacher for the day. A tall gentleman in a dark suit came through the door, and the spokesperson for the trio stepped forward and asked him, "Are you our guest preacher today?" The man responded very quickly, "No, I'm not. It's my ulcer that makes me look like this."

When a new parish church was built in an upper middle-class suburb, Sunday mornings in the immediate neighborhood were no longer as quiet as they once were, now that the church was worshipping. There were cars that were noisy. There were homes that were being parked in front of in the area. There was a powerful organ and vigorous hymn-singing could be heard for some distance. Some of the nearby residents who liked to sleep through their Sunday mornings circulated a petition to curtail some of the noise. When the petition was presented to a certain Jewish man who lived within half a block of the church, he refused to sign. "No," he said, "I won't sign that petition. Those people sing as though they really believe that the Messiah has come. If I could believe that, I would sing out even louder, and not just one but seven days a week."

We have joy because the Messiah is here.

### **3. The next fruit is PEACE.**

Jesus' first word to his disciples after the resurrection was "peace" (John 20:19). God is the God of peace, the God of Shalom. For Paul, peace related to the harmony among believers, harmony within the church. In Romans 14:19, Paul says "Let us pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another."

Peace, for Paul, is not an individual fruit – rather something that happens among the community of faith in the church, between brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus came and died to bring groups into harmony, we learn in Ephesians 2:14.

Think about somebody in this church who is really a peacemaker – somebody who guards his tongue, doesn't repeat destructive words, somebody who listens to both sides openly and who is always trying to reconcile, trying to get people to see their commonality and not their differences. You can think of somebody like that. Now think about somebody who doesn't like peace. I can think of someone like that. Somebody who – if there is not a problem, give them a few minutes and they can create a problem. Someone who can take two people sitting side by side and convince them that they are worlds apart and they need to pick up stones and throw them at each other.

There are some people who are just never happy with peace in the body of Christ. Go figure that.

**Two young boys found an unusual serpent in their garden in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. It was a two-headed black snake. One body – but two heads. They donated it to the University of Tennessee where it was studied for over a decade. Professor Gordon Burghardt says, "The two heads fight over their mouse dinner which is provided twice each month. It is a vicious struggle, and even though the meal goes to the same stomach and strengthens them both, they still fight over the mouse. If one head gets a good grip on the face of the mouse and the other gets a good grip on the tail, they can fight for hours unless you stop them." (Preaching Helps, June 1995)**

Just as ridiculous is fighting among the people of God – who are, in reality, the one body of Christ.

We have a wonderful peace here at First Baptist Church. Thank God for that peace. We don't have enmity and strife and jealousy and outbursts of anger and disputes and dissensions. Thank God for our being a people of unity. It's a sign of the presence of the Spirit of Christ.

### **4. The next attribute is that of PATIENCE.**

Now, I have to work on this one, I must admit. I'm reminded of a night in June 1998. It was a Thursday evening. I was working on my sermon. It was about 2 a.m. when I completed the sermon and went to bed. About 3 a.m. there was a little body – Ryan, then 7 years old – standing by our bed. She said, "Daddy, there is an ant in my bedroom."

Well, it was a test of my patience. I got out of bed (I had been asleep for an hour, from 2 a.m. to 3 a.m.) and went into her bedroom. And the ant wasn't in the bed. It was on the curtain in the room. And I looked and I looked and I looked, and I assured her that it had just vanished or gone or disappeared. I didn't know where the ant was, but "I can't find the ant. Good night. I'm going back to bed."

It was about 30 minutes later and there was a little body by our bed again who said, "You know, the ant is back in there again."

Now, I have no patience with irrational fears? Do you? I mean, if it's something you ought to be scared of, you ought to be scared. Run from a lion. But it's silly, it's irrational to be afraid of an ant. I'm just not patient about that.

My wife, Lisa, has taught our children to be absolutely horrified of anything with more than four legs. If anything has more than four legs, she's horrified. She would hold a boa constrictor before she'd hold an ant. That's true of my girls. No problem with the boa constrictor. But the ant has six legs. Beware of the creature with six legs.

So I say to Lisa, "It's 3:30 a.m. You taught them to be scared of ants. You go in and find that ant."

So she went in there. The ant disappeared again. So we moved the child to another bedroom that was "ant-free" so we would all rest for the night.

I told Ryan the next day, "Daddy is very tired. He's been up late this week. He likes to rest a little bit on Friday morning so he can get ready for Sunday and a wedding on Saturday. Tonight, if you come wake me up, there had better be a six-foot tall, hairy gorilla with four inch fangs hanging out of his mouth before you get me out of bed."

And I didn't get awakened for an ant ever again. A spider, yes. But never an ant.

God is patient with us, Paul says in Romans 2:4. "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

Don't take for granted God's patience toward you. And you, in turn, must be patient with others.

To be like God is to love. To be like God is to have joy. To be like God is to bring peace among the people of God. And, like it or not, to be like God is to be patient with those who disappoint you and those who fail you. That's a hard one.

## **5. The next fruit is KINDNESS.**

If patience is the passive side of love – that you wait, that you endure, that you're longsuffering – then the active side of love is kindness. (See Ephesians 2:4) In Ephesians 2:4, Paul describes how God gives us His kindness in Christ Jesus.

Thomas Carlyle said, “A great man shows his kindness by the way he treats little men.”

Are you nice to those with money? Are you nice to those with power? No surprise. So is the world. But are you kind to those who can bring you nothing? That’s how you know, in the darkness of the night, who you really are.

I once asked an eight-year-old girl in our congregation, what it means to show people you are a Christian. “How do you,” I asked this eight-year-old, “show people that you’re a Christian.” She said, “Be nice and play with everybody.”

I’ve been trying to get children in the church and in youth groups to be kind and play with everybody for years. She was exactly right. She gets it. To show that you have the presence of Christ in your life means that you don’t just play with those who are popular and powerful. Rather, you go out and you play with everybody.

God’s people are kind. Even an eight-year-old can get it.

## **6. The next attribute is GOODNESS.**

In Romans 15:14, we have it mentioned again. “And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.”

## **7. The next fruit is FAITHFULNESS.**

Faithfulness is that ability to trust God over the long haul. The ability to persevere.

Cal Ripkin, Jr., the Baltimore Orioles All-Star short stop, was chasing Lou Gehrig’s record for the most baseball games played consecutively. He broke that record. For you see, Cal Ripkin didn’t miss a game for 2,632 games. Yes, that’s right. Over 2,500 games. He began his streak in 1982 and ended that streak in 1998. That’s absolutely amazing. When asked if he ever went to the ballpark with a lot of aches and pains, Ripkin said, “Yeah, just about every day.” Ripkin had the same daily challenges and setbacks as his fellow players. But he was able to rise above them all. He had dedication, drive, and enthusiasm that has made him all but inexhaustible.

The great superstars of faith are not those with the most talent. Rather, the superstars are those who show up day after day, week after week, and press forward for the kingdom of God.

God’s people have faithfulness.

## **8. The next fruit worth picking is GENTLENESS.**

Jesus says in Matthew 11 that He is “gentle and humble in heart.” Jesus describes Himself as gentle and humble. The idea of being gentle carries with it that of being considerate toward others.

## **9. The ninth and final attribute is that of SELF-CONTROL.**

This is the fruit of the Spirit that wrestles with the deeds of the flesh, especially the deeds of the flesh that lead to sexual indulgence and intemperance. To be out of control, to follow the flesh, is to not allow the Spirit of God to direct you. But to walk by the Spirit and in the Spirit is to have the fruit of self-control.

Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. What characteristics to possess, to exude, as you walk in Christ. If you could be described by this fruit of the Spirit, then, indeed, you are only able to be described as thus because of the presence of the Spirit reigning within you.

These are, indeed, nine attributes worth picking. And they're yours – not because of who you are, but because of who the Spirit of Christ is. Let Him reign and rule in your life, that you can be described exactly like this.

Did anybody think of you as I went through these characteristics? Did anybody choose you as a model? When I said, “Think of the person who brings peace to this body of believers,” did anybody say, “Oh that’s Joe. Susan. That’s Ted. That’s Jeff.” When I said, “Think about the person who really exudes the love of God,” did anybody have you in their mind? “He’s the kindest man. She’s the gentlest woman.”

If we live by the Spirit (verse 25), let us walk by the Spirit.