



**By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. (Galatians 5: 22-23)**

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul includes in his message to that church something which is typically found in Paul's letters. As part of his exhortation and teaching, Paul shares what may be called a "virtue list" with the Christians living in the province of Galatia. This virtue list follows a "vice list," or a list of attributes and actions a believer in Christ should avoid. Paul encourages the faithful in Galatia to live according to the "fruit of the Spirit," or those qualities which the Holy Spirit works to build in each of us. An example of these virtues is listed in the Scripture verses quoted above, and while this list is not exhaustive, it stands for Paul as an instructive example of what virtues a Christian should possess. While we continue to move through this era of pandemic, I thought it might be good for us to recall the words of Paul to those early Christians and realize what importance we may find in Paul's admonitions.

**Love.** A more complete examination of Paul's ideas on love can be found in the famous "Love Chapter" in 1 Corinthians 13. This chapter details the traits of someone who follows our Lord's teachings on love, and was not meant for weddings or romantic love, but for the daily love a Christian should embody (although it does work for weddings as well).

**Joy.** Joy is as much of a decision or style of life as it is an emotion. Paul's understanding is that the life of a Christian, whose faith in God's promises is foundational, is uplifted constantly by these promises and in the many ways God's love flows into the Christian's life. Even in moments when things seem darker, God's promises speak the ultimate reality in which the Christian lives each day and, as Paul writes, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

**Peace.** Paul was well acquainted with the Jewish concept of "shalom." Shalom is more than what we typically think of as peace. It is the countenance, the reassurance, in which the believer lives his/her life. Nothing can shake the believer's faith that God's care will overcome all obstacles a believer might face. Shalom is the peace that Jesus speaks, "My peace I

give to you... not as the world gives." This is the peace which passes all understanding.

**Patience.** Patience is difficult in today's world. We are accustomed to having what we want when we want it, and patience often seems in short supply, especially in such a time as this. The old adage, "Good things come to those who wait," is difficult to live, but the verse "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him," from Lamentations, helps us to see what Paul means.

**Kindness.** How much different would the world be if we began every interaction with intentional kindness? Living kindly is a way of giving the other the benefit of the doubt. It is a presumptive way of living that considers the value of each person encountered.

**Generosity.** Jesus is quoted in the book of Acts as saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It was a crucial marker of the early church, which was made up of many people who struggled to put bread on the table. In a world in which so many people are struggling today generosity becomes a key trait for the building up of the body of Christ.

**Faithfulness.** There is no community or relationship without some sense of faithfulness. We only can maintain relationship with each other and with God if there is some expectation that this relationship will be honored with a commitment that works for the good of all. We cannot build relationship with God if faithfulness is absent. Neither can we build community with each other in the absence of faithfulness.

**Gentleness.** Gentleness soothes harried hearts, fevered minds and weary souls. Paul knew that, without gentleness, life as an individual and as a community becomes overwhelming. In our moments of emotional distress, a gentle presence can bring us back to the love and joy we receive from God and each other.

**Self-Control.** Self-control is akin to selflessness. Lack of control is a selfish action which places one's needs/desires/angst above the needs/desires of others. Paul saw that acting out could hurt the faith of those in the community, especially if that acting out caused one to forego the other virtues Paul upheld. Lack of self-control is community destroying.

In Christ's Love,  
Pastor Jay