

“To Your Soul Be True: The Soul’s Virtues”
Galatians 5:22-23

What do you do with a personal fault? It could be a fault in behavior, a fault in thinking, or a personal trait. The traditional approach is to identify the fault, analyze it (even understand its origin), and then figure out possible solutions with an action plan. For example, if you struggle with having a disciplined prayer life or if you are feeling discouraged in your spiritual life, then you identify the issue, understand it, seek expert advice, come up with some prayer schedule and practices, then begin. This approach, as common as it is, often falls short of the transformation that is needed.

Today I would like to invite us to consider the spiritual wisdom of our faith where we don’t rely on our own will power but instead find our way through the grace of God’s spirit which is deeply implanted in our souls.

I was blessed recently to experience this myself. I had a holistic medicine practitioner and teacher who invited me to focus on my healed state (emotional and physical) instead of focusing on the problem issues I normally focus on. In addition, I read a book by Dr. Edward Bach entitled *Heal Thyself* in which he focused on developing the opposite virtues of the faults one might be dealing with. For example, if you are dealing with selfishness, one would focus on growing the virtue of universal love. If one is dealing with materialism, the soul focus would be on growing the virtue of simplicity. So one’s energy would be focused on what is life-giving instead of wasting energy on what is life-draining.

In the Christian tradition, we speak about focusing on the energy of the Holy Spirit because it is the pure source of our souls. It is the only power strong enough to help us let go of falsehood to live out of our soul truth. The Apostle Paul knew about the Holy Spirit and focused his teachings on that. In the Bible reading for today from Galatians 5, we hear him urging the followers of Jesus in Galatia to focus on the virtues of the soul.

Galatia was a Roman province in the highlands of central Anatolia (modern day Turkey). The letter which Paul wrote was addressed to the followers of Jesus in Galatia. There were some agitators among those followers of Jesus and Paul was trying to counsel the Galatians on how to be faithful to Christ in the midst of a church conflict.

The Church in Galatia was tempted to follow certain rules because of the group of teachers who came and told them that they needed to strictly follow the Law of Moses. The so-called agitators were telling the Galatian believers that they needed to be circumcised and eat kosher food, among other things. It was not enough for them to just follow Jesus. They needed to become culturally and religiously Jewish in order to be protected from the wrath of the Roman Empire. Focusing on the problem of division

between the Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus was their way of dealing with the issue.

But Paul offered them a different focus. Instead of focusing on the divisions and how to mitigate them, he invited them to dwell on the soul virtues that would make such divisions irrelevant. Paul knew the futility of trying to follow the rules of faith without focusing on the power of the Spirit of God. He was one of those people of faith who focused on the laws which landed him in a place of hate and bigotry.

Paul believed that only when we consent to and trust the goodness of God's grace in and around us, are we truly able to know the freedom of grace. He gave a beautiful image for the growth of their souls. Let's listen to Galatians 5:22-23:

“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.”

Paul's fruit imagery echoes the tree of life in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2) and how one can be grounded in that grace where energy is spent on what is lifegiving. He gave them this list of fruit that can make all of divisions fade into the background. They show a life that is focused on living in alignment with the Spirit of God. As the Bible Project website explains, when we participate with God, we're like new branches that are grafted into a living vine, which begin to yield the fruit of that vine (see John 15:1-11). So if God is loving, patient, and always emanating peace, then as we participate with God, we will bear that same spiritual fruit, like love, patience, and peace.

The Bible Project also has a great video summarizing the importance and power of the Holy Spirit as Paul and Jesus understood it: <https://youtu.be/oNNZO9i1Gjc>.

Instead of focusing on faults and problems and our willpower to fix them, Paul helps us to imagine a different source of power, the Spirit of God and its work in us. If you are wrestling with an issue, health or otherwise, right now or just plain feeling disconnected from the deep joy of life, allow the Holy Spirit to bring to your awareness the soul virtue that you need to focus on.

Now, I invite you to settle into your seat. Let go of the need to fix or solve anything right now. We are simply going to be present to the Spirit.

Close your eyes or soften your gaze. Take a slow, deep breath in, and exhale fully. As you continue to breathe gently, imagine yourself walking in a beautiful, sun-drenched garden. This is the garden of your soul. The path beneath your feet is soft earth. You can smell the rich soil and the sweet scent of flowers.

Ahead of you, you see a magnificent vine. Its roots go deep into the earth, and its branches reach toward the sun. You notice that the vine is heavy with fruit. It is the fruit

of the Spirit. As you get closer, you see clusters of **love, joy, and peace**. They are ripe and full, glowing with a soft light.

Now, look at the other branches. You see **patience, kindness, and generosity** hanging there, and you know these are for you. You are invited to simply receive them.

As you walk a little further, you see even more fruit: **faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**. They are just as beautiful, just as ready to be harvested.

Now, turn your attention to a particular part of your own being—a place where you have felt a fault, a struggle, a disconnection. Instead of focusing on the problem, imagine one of the fruits of the Spirit from the vine—a fruit that is the perfect, healing virtue for that struggle. Is it peace for your anxiety? Patience for your impatience? Joy for your sadness?

Imagine reaching out and gently taking that one piece of fruit. Hold it in the palm of your hand. Feel its weight, its warmth. Now, imagine bringing it to your lips. Taste its sweetness, and as you do, feel its life-giving energy flowing through you, moving to that place of struggle and filling it with divine light.

Breathe it in. Let that virtue become a part of you. You are not trying to force it; you are simply receiving the grace that is already yours.

And as you sit here, with that divine fruit nourishing your soul, hear Paul's words again: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."

Know that this is your true self. This is your soul. This is the virtue of Christ that lives within you.

Now, as you are ready, slowly open your eyes. Take one more deep breath, and carry this peace with you as we go. Amen.