

## DEALING WITH WEEDS

Calvin Coolidge served as president of the US from 1923-1929. He was known as “Silent Cal” because he was a man of few words. At one dinner party there was a diplomat seated next to him who said, "I made a bet today that I could get more than two words out of you." He replied, "You lose." One day, President Coolidge was walking home from church and reporters gathered around him. They asked, “What subject did the pastor preach on today?” Silent Cal gave them a single word answer, “Sin.” The reporter continued, “Well, what did he say about sin?” The President simply said, “He’s against it.” So, what is my message about today. It is about sin, and I am against it – and so is God.

Today we are concluding our series entitled Rooted. We have talked about planting in good soil and pruning for productivity. Today I want to talk about something that all gardeners understand. To have a nice garden, sooner or later you are going to have to deal with weeds.

How many of you listening to me today enjoy making lists? There are people who just love to make lists. They make grocery lists, and honey-do lists for their husbands. Some make prayer lists. Many people make a daily to-do list. People make a bucket list of things they want to do before they die. Even Santa makes a list, and he checks it twice. Making lists is a smart thing to do. Albert Einstein said, “A short pencil is better than a long memory.”

Today I want to look at a list that is recorded in the book of Galatians. It is actually two lists – one bad and one good. One lists fifteen different sins, which are the weeds of the flesh and one lists the nine fruit of the Spirit.

Gal 5:19-23 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self- control. Against such things there is no law.

In any garden you have the plants you want and the plants that you do not want. Naomi and I do not know a lot about gardening. We bought our very first home in 2001 in Port Dalhousie just outside St. Catharine’s. It had a big garden in the back yard, and in the spring all these perennials started popping up. We had no idea of what was supposed to be there and what was just a weed. Having never gardened we did not know the difference between them.

There are a lot of people today who are like that when it comes to morality. Spiritually speaking, they do not know the difference between a daffodil and a dandelion. What is morally right and what, according to God’s standard, is morally wrong. Let’s compare the weeds of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit.

### 1. Weeds of the Flesh

In Chapter 5 of Galatians, Paul is talking about being controlled by the sinful nature vs. being controlled by the Spirit. One produces one kind of behavior and the other produces the opposite. Paul gives 15 examples of what being controlled by the sinful nature looks like. You see that he ends this list with the words ‘and the like’ meaning that this is not an exhaustive list. These fifteen different weeds of the flesh fall into four basic categories.

## A. Sexual sins - Sexual activity outside of marriage is wrong

In the NIV we see three words (sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery) that all refer to sexual immorality. In the original Greek Paul actually uses 4 words. The first is the word MOICHEIA which means adultery, sex with someone who is not your spouse. The second is PORNEIA from where we get the word pornography. It is filling your head with sexual images. The third is AKATHARSIA which means unclean. It refers to sexual conduct that is unnatural like homosexuality. The fourth is ASELGEIA which means something that is open and flagrant – like flaunting sex at a pride parade, drag shows and in movies.

We live today in a sex crazed society, very much like the Roman empire in the first century. In those days sexual immorality was rampant. Prostitution was not only legal, but it was considered a normal religious act to engage in sexual activities at the pagan temples. If you ever have the chance to see the ruins at Pompei you can see by the murals that people had painted on their walls that sexual immorality was common.

Let's be clear, sex is not something that is dirty or forbidden. God created it. He made us male and female for a purpose, it was His idea. He created it to be a deep act of intimacy between a husband and wife within the bonds of marriage.

Heb 13:4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Sex is like a fire. Confined to a furnace it can keep the whole house safe and warm. Released it from these confines and it can burn the house down. When sex gets outside God's boundary of marriage, there is always destruction. Sex within the relationship of a husband and wife is a wonderful, beautiful thing in God's sight. And other sexual activity, whether it is adultery, homosexuality, premarital sex, or incest is sin according to the Word of God.

Tim Tebow played professional football and baseball. He was also an outspoken Christian. In 2010 he wore eye paint with the message John 3:16. For the next 24 hours it was the highest ranked Google search term – generating over 90 million searches. He is also a strong advocate for faith-based abstinence. Before getting married in 2020 he came under fire for claiming to be a virgin and waiting until married to have sex. Of course, our immoral culture was skeptical about his claim. In 2012 one website that helps married couples commit adultery advertised they will pay one million dollars to any woman who can prove she slept with him. This is our culture today. It laughs at morality and makes jokes in movies about anyone who is a virgin.

The opposite of this is the first fruit of the Spirit – love. Agape love that sacrifices for others.

## B. Religious sins - Trusting any person or thing other than God (idolatry)

The next two sins that Paul lists are idolatry and witchcraft. The word idolatry means image worship and the Greek word for witchcraft is PHARMAKEIA from where we get the word pharmacy. In the first century, sorcerers and magicians often combined hallucinogenic drugs as part of their magic and potions.

Most of us think of idolatry as a person with a little shrine with some image of a deity associated with it, but idolatry simply means putting anything in your life before God.

J.I. Packer once wrote: “What other gods could we have besides the Lord? Plenty. For Israel there were the Canaanite Baals - those jolly nature gods whose worship was a rampage of gluttony, drunkenness, and ritual prostitution. For us there are still the gods of Sex, Shekels, and Stomach (an unholy trinity constituting one god: self). Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some. Indeed, the list of other gods is endless, for anything that anyone allows to run their life becomes their god.”

The opposite of this is the fruit of peace. Peace with God leading to peace with self and others.

#### C. Social sins - Self-centered living destroys relationships

Of the fifteen different sins Paul lists, over half of them have to do with our relationship with other people. They include, “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.”

God created us to be in relationship. One of the interesting things about weeds is that they are the result of neglect. You have to be intentional about growing flowers and keeping your lawn in good shape. It takes a lot of work and constant attention. Weeds just happen. You do not have to plant them or work towards them, they are the natural product of neglect. I am sure we all have that person on our street who has the perfect lawn. It is always green and well-trimmed without a single weed in sight. And you also probably have the opposite. The person whose entire lawn is just weeds and they cut it once a month because they have to, but it always looks terrible.

These sins listed are the natural product of neglect. It takes no effort to be hateful or jealous or have envy. These are all traits that we are born with. You do not have to teach kids to sin, they are born with it. It is part of our fallen human nature to gravitate towards these things. Good relationships require effort. A good marriage is hard work!

The opposite virtues of these sins are the outward fruit of patience, kindness, and goodness.

#### D. Sins of excess - Unrestrained appetites lead to addiction

Paul end the list with “drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” Again, the words ‘and the like’ mean that you could add on and on to this list. Drunkenness and orgies really summarize the weeds of the flesh. It is about control. What is the driving force behind your life?

Eph 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

In others words, do not let anything or anyone ever control you except for God. Do not allow yourself to come under the control of any substance or situation. When you are drunk, you are controlled by the alcohol. If you are driving drunk and the police pull you over, you cannot simply snap your fingers and become sober. It is impossible. When you give any substance control of your life it will make you do things that you regret.

The word ‘orgies’ is the Greek word KOMOS and it means literally ‘letting loose’ – as in reveling or rioting. It means getting caught up in what is happening around you and being controlled by a mob mentality. It is like being at a party where everyone goes wild so you feel that you have the freedom to do so as well. Just look at the rioting and looting that has been happening in Chicago for the past few weeks, to the extent that major department stores like Walmart are pulling out. When you remove all restraints, mob rule is the outcome.

The corresponding fruit that stands opposed to this kind of behavior is self-control.

If you have ever had to deal with weeds you know that you cannot simply remove the part that you see. You cannot just pull the head off a dandelion and expect it to go away. You cannot just mow over the weeds and think that they are then gone. You have to be ruthless with weeds. They must be pulled out by the root.

Col 3:5-8 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

That is the attitude that we all need to have when it comes to weeds. We do not simply focus on the symptoms of our fallen nature; we need to eliminate the root. We have to put the old nature to death. Do not treat sin with a weed whacker, simply hacking away at the symptoms. You have to get to the root. The issue is a heart problem, not a behavior problem. Jesus taught that the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart.

Mark 7:20-23 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "

Maybe you are thinking at this point, "Wait a minute, I have committed some of those sins?" Paul says, "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Does that mean I am not saved? Notice that Paul does not say that those who commit these sins will not inherit the Kingdom of God. He says those who "LIVE like this." That is an important distinction. We will all blow it from time to time, but the life of a believer should be different.

1John 3:9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

Christians may sin and struggle with addiction, but if the Holy Spirit lives in you, He will have a holy fit if you continue to live this way. However, there are many people who profess to be Christians who do not possess the Holy Spirit. They are counterfeit Christians.

As one pastor wrote, "While it is true that all of us fall into these sins at one time or another, true Christians feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit and we eventually turn our hearts once again toward heaven. There is a true sense in which exclusion from heaven is man's responsibility. He will not come to God because he loves the pull of the flesh too much. Heaven will be inherited by every man who has heaven in his soul. Those who live like hell will one day live in hell."

## 2. Fruit of the Spirit

The opposite of the weeds of the flesh is the fruit of the Spirit. Notice that this list of 9 positive virtues begins by saying, "The FRUIT of the Spirit is ..." Have you ever wondered why it does not say fruits? Why does it not begin by saying, "The fruits of the Spirit are ..." There is one fruit, but it is expressed in nine flavors. It is like a box of Fruit Loops. You have one bowl but many different flavors in each bite.

Fruit of the Spirit is different than Gifts of the Spirit. There are over fifteen different gifts of the Spirit, which are supernatural abilities for ministry that God gives you. No Christian has all of them. You may only have one or two gifts of the Spirit – maybe you have the gift of service but you do not have the gift of mercy. When it comes to the fruit of the Spirit, you can't say, "Well, I have the fruit of joy, but I don't think I have the fruit of patience." When the Holy Spirit is controlling your life, you will display all nine of these virtues.

These nine fruits easily fall into three different groups;

A. I relate to God through love, joy, and peace

When we understand all that God has done for us we respond to his mercy, grace and love by returning that love to Him. The word for love used here is AGAPE which means a deep sacrificial love. That love expresses itself in joy. In England, the royal flag flies above whatever palace the Queen is residing in. Joy is like a banner that shows Jesus is living in my heart. My relationship with Jesus gives me peace with God which then spills over into every other area of my life.

B. I relate to others through patience, kindness, and goodness

Our fallen sin nature seeks to place us first in everything. You do not need to teach a baby to be selfish, it is just part of our nature. Selfishness leads to things like hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy. When everything in life is about you, your wants and needs, then this is the result. Through the Holy Spirit God is able to take our eyes off ourselves and on to others. Jesus gives us the strength to put others first. The result is patience with others (understanding how patient God has been with us!) It shows itself in kindness and goodness towards others and we reflect God's love.

C. I relate to myself through faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

When we allow the Holy Spirit to control us, God is able to develop healthy habits in our lives. This is expressed in faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are all qualities Jesus will produce in me when I allow His personality to overpower mine.

These nine virtues are not something that come naturally to us, they are not OUR fruit but the Fruit of the Spirit. As we grow and become more like Jesus these are the traits which will become more evident in our lives. As we talked about a few weeks ago, we do this by abiding in Jesus.

The key to overcoming sin is not by trying harder, it is in remembering that your sinful nature is dead. The secret of a life of fruitfulness is found in the verse that follows these lists;

Gal 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Jesus did not come just so that we could be better, he came so that we could be born again. The Christian life is not about moving from bad to good, it is about moving from death to life. It is expressed through Paul's exhortation to the Christians in Galatia;

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in

the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. That is the secret to the Christian life. That is the key to a spiritually weed free garden.

Imagine a person who comes home and finds his house flooded because he forgot to turn off the bathtub faucet. Frantically he grabs a mop and begins sweeping out the water, but the bathtub faucet is still running wide open. After a few frenzied swipes, he sees that he is not making any headway against the water, so he goes out and gets a bigger mop. Determined to live in a victoriously dry house, he enrolls in a seminar on Effective Mopping Techniques, and once again wades into the battle. But still the water pours out faster than he can mop it up. As the situation worsens, he rededicates himself to better mopping, vows he'll never again leave the faucet on, and once more takes up the mop. Weary and waterlogged, he finally concludes that God never intended him to live in a dry house, so he buys a pair of galoshes and a waterbed and settles down to live the rest of his life in a flooded house.

Does that make any sense? I'm not against mopping, but if the faucet is still running it is a waste of time. The solution is ridiculously simple, isn't it? Stop the flow at its source: turn off the faucet. The water on the floor is our daily sins. The open faucet is the sin nature - the source of the sins. And the sin nature can produce sins faster than we can mop them up. We've been mopping sins when we should have been crucifying self. A great many believers have thrown in the towel, or rather, the mop, and have settled down to live the best they can in a flooded house. But God has made provision for a life of daily victory. It is the birthright of every Christian. Don't settle for anything less!