

Who do you Respect?

- Who do you look up to, respect, admire?
- I guess each of us has a range of folk who we respect & admire:
 - perhaps **personalities**, sporting, political, intellectual, people we admire from a distance, perhaps whose endeavours we have benefited from in some way... David Beckham, Steve Redgrave, Nelson Mandela, Stephen Hawking...
 - perhaps **leaders** we have been inspired by or who have drawn greater performance out of us, less distant than the personalities, but perhaps not personal friends: school teachers, Christian leaders, a good boss at work...
 - and finally, there will be close **friends and family** who we admire, whose advice we value, whose character we'd love to emulate.
- Fascinating, privilege doing **funerals**:
 - sometimes very hard, seeking to help people who are at their lowest point;
 - incredible privilege to be allowed to come into the heart of a family's life at such a critical time;
 - I find it intriguing that when someone dies, the family and friends who gather most often respect and admire that person's character far more than their achievements;
 - *(and often their achievements only in so far as they reflect their character!)*
- In other words, what is most important, that which is most admired, is **not** what someone has **done**, but **who that person is**.

What Does a Christian Look Like?

- Paul was concerned for the Galatian Christians, because they were in danger of being deceived:
 - tricked into thinking that they needed to add certain things to their faith; in particular that they needed to **do** certain things, such as circumcision and ceremonial washing, or they wouldn't be real Christians
- He warned them off, reminding them that the **good news** of Jesus' message is that **He has done it all for us!**
- But that, inevitably, leads to another question:
 - if you can't tell what a Christian life should look like on the basis of external things, circumcision, or simply by regularity at worship, or involvement with the organisations in the church...
 - **what should a Christian life look like?**
- And it's that question that Paul is coming round to answering in the part of Galatians 5 that we read earlier.

Exegesis

- What he does is:
 - present it as a one-liner: (v14) **The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."**
 - notes the contrast between that Spirit filled and directed life and a life lived with the unchecked human nature to the fore (**vs.16-18**)
 - paints a fuller picture of each side of that contrast, starting with the human nature in **vs.19-21**, and moving on to the Spirit filled life in **vs.22-26**.
- In other words, he has this one thought that he is trying to develop through the whole of the section we read:
 - **"Love your neighbor as yourself."**; that's the opposite of living for yourself - that leads to clear sin! No, loving your neighbour means acting with **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...**
- Let's try and draw out that contrast in terms that we can understand:

According to Sinful Human Nature

- vs.19-21 list some of the characteristics of a life lived with the human nature allowed free reign.
- The sins listed are probably able to be grouped into three rough groups:
 - **first**, in v.19, **sexual sins**; anything which is outside of stated God's will - sleeping with someone to whom you are not married, as well as lust! Its becoming increasingly hard to be different as a Christian in this area!
 - **second**, **sins of false religion** (v.20a); looking for meaning and guidance in life to anything other than God: our equivalents today might include New Age books and seminars, Tarot cards, horoscopes, consulting a medium, Ouija Boards, etc, etc.
 - **and third**, in the rest of v.20 and into v.21, **sins of relationship**; these are sins of our behaviour whose principal impact is on those around us - hatred, discord, factions, envy, selfish ambition. Putting ourselves first and others second.
- Did you catch the stark warning Paul gives?
 - (v.21) "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."
- **Ouch!**

According to the Spirit

- What, then, does Paul say should replace such a lifestyle?
- He uses an analogy that would have been familiar to his 1st Century Mediterranean audience: **fruit growing on a tree**
- He likens the character qualities God's Spirit grows in us to fruit growing on a tree:
 - there are **individual fruits**, though they are all part of the **same crop** - so we can't say I'm "good at" self-control so it doesn't matter that I'm "bad at" joy!!
 - fruit trees are a **long term investment**; they don't grow overnight, and you don't see a crop quickly; so with character...
 - fruit trees can be **fragile** - a single frost can damage a whole year's growth! So with our character, it is in some ways fragile - a single action can take us back a long way in the nurture of our characters
 - fruit trees need feeding and nurturing, sometimes pruning, cutting back, painful times, so that the crop is the best it can be;
- Paul spells out something of that process of nurturing in **vs.24-26**:
 - **first**, will-power, discipline is involved in growing character; we need to make decisions about what is important and stick with them; **v.24** refers to us **crucifying the sinful nature**: taking tough and painful decisions so that character grows;
 - *less or different TV? different money priorities? positive things like reading Bible daily, or time in prayer*
 - **second**, **v.25** talks about keeping in step with the Spirit, living dependent on Him. Prayer - God help me be more like this, 'cos I can't do it on my own!
 - **and third**, **v.26** hints at a relational aspect to this character development; we don't grow in character on our own, but as we live alongside others, learning from them, accepting from them support and direction, opening ourselves up to others so they really know us. Community.

The Fruit

- Its in that kind of context that these 9 fruit of the Spirit will grow:
 - **Love**: summary of all the rest, a love for God and for people
 - **Joy**: not grinning at a funeral; glad at what God has done
 - **Peace**: settled in identity as son/daughter of the living God, nothing to prove, no fear of what others think, or of the future
 - **Patience**: with others, and for God to act as we do what is right
 - **Kindness**: above and beyond the call of duty; *Karen - back from honeymoon - looked after our flat*
 - **Goodness**: I find this hard to define, though I can think of people who I'd instinctively describe as good!
 - **Faithfulness**: not giving up on people

- **Gentleness**: not being harsh with people
- **Self-control**: taking decisions over lifestyle, and sticking to them!

Conclusion

- Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control
- Its funny, but those are the qualities people most value in those they admire and respect.
 - sure, they admire the qualifications, the income, the responsible job, whatever;
 - but when push comes to shove, what is truly important are exactly those qualities of character that come from the Spirit of God;
 - that come as fruit, growing slowly, steadily, as it is tended and nurtured;
 - that grows as **self-discipline as exercised**, that grows as **accountable relationships are built**, and that grows as a **deeply dependent relationship with God** is fostered.