

Text: Galatians 5:13-26

Title: “Greener Grass”

ILLUSTRATION – A few months ago I was looking at my next door neighbors, Butch and Sandra Gautier’s, yard and noticed how green it was. I looked at my yard and wondered why it seemed to be struggling. Maybe you’ve heard the old proverb that says, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” In the harsh winter we had a couple of years ago I lost a big part of the grass. The ice sat on top of the grass for a couple of weeks and it just froze it out. Last summer I tried to coax it back, but it just never seemed to recover. The guy who helps with my yard told me that there were several problems. One was the trees had grown up so thick so that there was no sunlight getting through to the grass. The trees needed to be pruned. The ground had become so hard that the roots had a hard time catching on. The ground needed to be tilled up and some better soil brought in. Then some new sod could be laid in the places to jump start the yard. And finally, I needed to keep it well-watered so the roots could take hold. The more I heard the more depressed I got. It sounded too much like hard work to me.

“The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” That proverb really isn’t about yards. It speaks to the human tendency to be envious of what others possess. I’m preaching this series on the family called “Home/Hope” and, yes, there is such a thing as *marital* envy. We look at other people or couples and think, “Life would be so much better if I were married to that person ... if our marriage was like their marriage.” Well, sometimes the grass is greener on the other side because that guy is working harder to keep it greener. Sometimes the grass is greener in that other marriage, not because they don’t have the same problems you have, but because they’ve just worked harder to overcome them.

The Good News is that there is hope for your marriage. And that hope is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not just about getting us saved and secured for heaven. The Gospel is about the new life we can have in Jesus. The Gospel is God’s way of solving our basic problems as human beings and as families. Through the atoning death of Christ, the powerful resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us there is the possibility that our hearts can change and we can begin to love our mates the way God wants them to be loved.

Now turn to Galatians 5:13. Please have your Bible open in front of you. I’m going to walk us through these verses and I want you to see how the Holy Spirit can transform your life and your marriage in a way that the grass will be greener on your side of the fence. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to some believers who were beginning to doubt the power of the Gospel ... if it really worked. Some of them were going back to a man-centered religion of keeping rules and trusting man’s ability to change himself rather than trusting in God’s power to transform. But when we trust in Christ we are freed from our sins and from the Law but we aren’t free to live just any way we want to live. So Paul corrects this thinking.

Galatians 5:13 - You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

That verse describes for us the battle that rages in our lives and in our homes as believers. Am I going to indulge my sinful nature in selfish living or am I going to live out my new nature in Christ

by serving others in love? Christ came, lived, died, rose again and went back to heaven in order for the Holy Spirit to come to live in us to transform us from the inside out. And this frees us from selfish behavior so we can serve one another in love. That's what God wants.

Galatians 5:14 - The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Remember, FIRST LOVE (loving God with every fiber of our being) precedes SECOND LOVE (loving others with selfless, serving love). One infallible way we know that we are loving God with every fiber of our being is that we will show it in the way we serve one another in love ... loving our neighbor as we much as we love ourselves. The first place you have to be concerned about living out your Christian life is in your relationship to your nearest "neighbors" ... the people you live with.

Galatians 5:15 - If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Sadly, this is what goes on in many homes. There are consequences to our unloving attitudes and actions toward one another. Those little hateful comments and angry outbursts can destroy our marriages and relationships. So how do we live the way we should in our relationships? It's beyond our human power. We need something to happen in us that will then flow through us.

Galatians 5:16 - So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

In these verses that follow there are three different ways we maintain our relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. We live by the Spirit (v.16), we are led by the Spirit (v.18) and we keep in step with the Spirit (v.25). And when that happens it will produce the fruit of the Spirit (v.22).

You see, the best thing you can do for your marriage is to keep your relationship with Christ strong. Living by the Spirit means that you have a minute by minute walk with the Spirit of Jesus. It starts with your quiet time. Do you have time alone with God every day? Husbands, does your wife know you are walking with God in your time alone with Him? Wives, does your husband know you are seeking God every day? Do they see the difference that living by the Spirit makes in your life and in your home?

But it isn't easy. Why?

Galatians 5:17 - For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

This explains why we feel this battle raging in us as believers. We don't always want to do the will of God; we stumble in temptation. This tells me that the big fight we have in marriage is not with our spouse ... it's with ourselves. The biggest fight we have on our hands is the fight with our own sinful nature. When we are saved we become new creatures, the old has passed away and all things become new. However that new life we have is lived out in a body that still struggles with sin. It's sometimes

called the “flesh” because it goes with being in a body that is part of a broken creation. That’s why it’s hard to live the Christ-life.

ILLUSTRATION – The image that kept coming to my mind this week was the image of the Avengers character The Hulk. If you’ve watched the Avenger movies or read the comic books you know that one minute Dr. Bruce Banner can be this mild-mannered scientist who avoids conflict. Then something happens ... someone upsets him ... and he completely changes into a monster who smashes everything and everyone around him. He’s uncontrollable. Everyone walks on egg shells around him because they don’t want to set him off. And, in fact, Bruce Jenner knows it himself ... that there is this monster inside of him and he never knows when it will rise up.

Well that “monster” in us is our sin nature, and it causes us to be selfish toward God and others. But the new life we have by the Spirit living in us calls us to be different. So there’s this battle raging in us; but we don’t have to give in to the monster. One day God will make all things new; but until then it is only possible to live the way we’re supposed to live by allowing the Holy Spirit to overcome our sinful tendencies.

What does the sinful nature look like? As I read Paul’s catalogue of characteristics of the sinful nature in vv.19-21 notice how anti-social they are.

Galatians 5:19 - The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

Those three words describe sexual sin. Nothing destroys the fabric of a home like sexual immorality (which includes pornography). It is a selfish, self-seeking quest for sexual pleasure outside the provision of God for it in marriage.

Galatians 5:20 - idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

Galatians 5:21a - and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

Selfishness keeps us so busy looking after ourselves and pursuing our own pleasure than we can’t see how God has placed us in our homes to serve one another in love.

Paul David Tripp in his book *What Did You Expect?* describes it this way: “The DNA of sin is selfishness. Sin turns all of us in on ourselves. It reduces our circle of hopes and concerns to things that touch and involve us. It makes us all focused on and driven by our wants, needs and feelings. Sin can so fill our eyes with our needs that we become functionally blind to the needs of others. We can be so focused on our interests that we have little interest in the interests of others.”

What this tells me is that in many homes, including “church homes,” there’s a spiritual problem. We’re good at going to church, but we don’t see much change in the way we live at home. We would be surprised at how little Christ-likeness there is in our homes as church people. Could it be that the main problem in your home today is that you are not right with God?

Thankfully, the Gospel doesn't just show us what's wrong; it also shows us how to fix it. Through Christ we now have new hearts. The Holy Spirit dwelling within us frees us from having to act out of the old selfish nature. We can begin to live out of the new Christ-nature given to us. The indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ gives us...

1. **THE ASSURANCE THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE**

You have Christ living in you by His Spirit. He is working in you and He is working in your mate. Trust Him. You have a resident Marriage Counselor in the Holy Spirit. You're not alone. The indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ also gives us...

2. **THE POWER TO OVERCOME OUR SELFISHNESS**

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to win the war within and to overcome the deeds of the sinful nature. Galatians 5:16 says that if we live controlled minute-by-minute by the Spirit we won't give in to the desires of our sinful nature. The indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ also gives us...

3. **THE LOVE WE NEED TO GIVE TO OUR MATES**

Remember we're called to serve one another in love. And...

Galatians 5:22-23a - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The fruit of the Spirit is the very life of Jesus lived out through us as we are filled with and controlled by His Spirit. Just think about how these Christ-like qualities would green up the grass of your home, your marriage. The first thing that will show up in your life when the Holy Spirit is in control is *love*. Just think how different things would be if your first thought when you got up every morning was, "How can I love God with every fiber of my being today?" And your second thought was, "What concrete ways can I communicate love to my mate and my kids today?"

And it may be that all these other qualities that make up the fruit of the Spirit are just an outgrowth of that Spirit-empowered love. Where there's love there's *joy* ... rejoicing in God and rejoicing in our mates. Where there's love there's *peace*, not strife. Where there's love there's *patience* ... the ability to not explode over every little irritation. Where there's love there's *kindness* ... a thousand ways to show grace to your mate. Where there's love there's *goodness* ... the word means "generous" ... not selfish. Where there's love there's *faithfulness* ... no cheating, no affairs, no infidelity. Where there's love there's *gentleness* ... the ability to not damage our mates with our words and actions. Where there's love there's *self-control* ... the ability to say no to ourselves when we want to act selfishly.

The indwelling Spirit of Christ gives us the love we need to give our mates, and ...

4. **THE HOPE THAT THINGS CAN CHANGE**

Listen, the Gospel gives you hope that you don't have to be a slave to your selfish sin anymore ... that every bad thing you've ever done can be forgiven ... that your life can be new ... that one day you will be in a place of unimaginable happiness in the presence of Jesus. And the same Gospel gives you hope that your home doesn't have to be dominated by selfishness ... that you can forgive and be forgiven ... that your marriage can be new ... and in this newness there is more happiness waiting for you than you can ever imagine.