

Once Works, Now Fruit

Summary and Goal

It's possible to coerce or even force someone to do something, but for an action to be meaningful and fulfilling, it must be done because the person wanted to. This is the key difference between behavior modification and heart change, changing our actions versus changing our motivations underneath our actions. In the letter to the Galatians, especially concerning the fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5, Paul taught on grace, works, and personal transformation in the light of the gospel. What we do certainly matters, but why we do what we do matters even more.

Main Passage

Galatians 5:16-26

Session Outline

1. We walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh (Gal. 5:16-18).
2. We cast off the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).
3. We bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26).

Theological Theme

Christians crucify the flesh and walk by the Spirit.

Christ Connection

In contrasting the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, Paul showed the Galatian church what it looks like to belong to Christ Jesus. To be crucified with Christ means to put away our fleshly passions and desires and to follow the Spirit.

Missional Application

God calls us to follow the Spirit in humility as we develop Christian character that sets us apart from the world.

Session Plan

Once Works, Now Fruit

Session 9

? For Further Discussion

Why should we never separate the Spirit's work in our lives from our knowledge of and access to God's Word?

How can someone abuse the claim that the Spirit is leading them to do something?

Pack Item 10: Works vs. Fruit

Pack Item 11: Handout

Put up the poster and pass out copies of the handout.

Use the poster throughout this session to help visualize the distinction between "Works of the Flesh" and the "Fruit of the Spirit."

As part of point 3, ask group members to consider which qualities, or attributes, of the fruit of the Spirit address each category of the works of the flesh. (*An argument can be made that each quality addresses each category of the flesh.*) Use this exercise to demonstrate how the works of the flesh cannot coexist with the fruit of the Spirit and must be cast off.

Introduction

Recount the Saturday afternoon scenario between a father and son concerning cleaning his room (leader p. 118; PSG p. 92).

- ? What are some ways you feel loved and valued by others?
- ? Does the heart behind the action matter to you? Why or why not?

Summarize this session on Galatians 5, which articulates the key difference between behavior modification and heart change (leader p. 119; PSG p. 93).

1. We walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh (Gal. 5:16-18).

Use the story about Hiroo Onoda to communicate how Christians wrongly approach their battle with sin (leader p. 119). Then read Galatians 5:16-18. Show how this passage flows from what came before it regarding justification by faith (leader pp. 119-120; PSG p. 93).

- ? What would crucifying your flesh look like on a daily basis?

Explain what it means to walk by the Spirit and how we can do so: pray, spend time in the Word, and obey His leading (leader pp. 120-121; PSG pp. 94-95).

- ? If Paul's concern here is that we live lives of obedience that honor God, why does he emphasize the Spirit over the law?

2. We cast off the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).

Ask a volunteer to read Galatians 5:19-21. Call attention to the inclusive nature of Paul's list—we are all tarnished in some way. Note also how we see all of the sins presented as equally serious, though they have different consequences (leader pp. 121-122; PSG pp. 95-96).

- ? Why is it so much easier to see the sin in others than the sin in ourselves?

Explain why those who “practice” these sins will not inherit God’s kingdom. Emphasize that *doing* flows from *being*; behavior problems are ultimately belief problems. Say that casting off the works of the flesh is just a part of one’s new life in Christ; we must also put on the new self through the work of the Holy Spirit (leader pp. 122-123; PSG pp. 96-97).

- ❓ How can we grow to become more sensitive to our own sin in order to cast it off?
- ❓ What are some ways we can work on putting on the new self?

3. We bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26).

Return briefly to the father-son room-cleaning scenario as a way to illustrate *doing* flowing from *being*. Then read Galatians 5:22-26. Contrast the list of spiritual fruit with the previous list of “the works of the flesh.” Emphasize that the Spirit produces these qualities in us; we aren’t passive, but we aren’t the prime mover either (leader pp. 123-124; PSG pp. 97-98).

- ❓ How has remembering your identity in Christ empowered you to serve others?

Highlight that life in the Spirit gives us a new way of looking at God’s commands: Christians will obey because they want to obey, not because they have to. Convey that this gospel-driven way of living means that we ourselves are a gospel project, always being developed and shaped by the gospel (leader p. 125; PSG p. 98).

- ❓ Jesus Christ is the King of the universe, and yet, He came to serve you and give up His life for you. How does this address the reluctance we can feel to live unselfishly?
- ❓ If Jesus died, in part, to kill sin, what does our engaging in sin say about our understanding of Christ’s death?

Conclusion

End by clarifying that while the gospel is distinct from the law, it is not antithetical to the law. Go on to say that God is not unconcerned about our obedience unto holiness but wants our holiness to flow from a heart full of grace (leader p. 125; PSG p. 99). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission”* (PSG p. 100).

Pass out bookmarks from Pack Item 12: Sanctification to help group members evaluate their hearts and fruit.

Point 2 Option

Before your group meets, enlist a volunteer to read and summarize the article “When We Say ‘Gospel,’ Do We Really Mean ‘the Spirit?’”: <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/trevinwax/2012/08/13/when-we-say-gospel-do-we-really-mean-the-spirit/>

Then ask groups of 3-4 to discuss the following questions (consider writing the questions on a board or sheet of paper for groups to have; also available on the DVD in *The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack*):

- How can our zeal to be “gospel-centered” lead unintentionally to downplaying the activity of the Spirit in our lives?
- Why does cultivating awareness of the Spirit’s work in us not minimize the gospel but rather promote it?

Christ Connection: In contrasting the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, Paul showed the Galatian church what it looks like to belong to Christ Jesus. To be crucified with Christ means to put away our fleshly passions and desires and to follow the Spirit.

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Missional Application: God calls us to follow the Spirit in humility as we develop Christian character that sets us apart from the world.

Expanded Session Content

Once Works, Now Fruit

Session 9



Voices from Church History

“It is imperative that we realize our complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit. We must not forget, of course, that our activity is enlisted to the full extent in the process of sanctification. But we must not rely upon our own strength of resolution or purpose. It is when we are weak that we are strong. It is by grace that we are being saved as surely as by grace we have been saved. If we are not keenly sensitive to our own helplessness, then we can make the use of the means of sanctification the minister of self-righteousness and pride and thus defeat the end of sanctification. We must rely not upon the means of sanctification but upon the God of all grace. Self-confident moralism promotes pride, and sanctification promotes humility and contrition.”¹

—John Murray (1898–1975)

Introduction

It’s a typical scene in countless households in our day. It’s a Saturday afternoon and a father walks past his son’s room and notices the floor is covered with clothes, books, sports equipment, and a host of other items. He sighs and finds his son watching television in the family room.

“Hey, buddy. Would you mind doing me a favor and cleaning up your room real quick? We’re having company over tonight.”

“Sure, Dad,” his son replies. “I’ll do that in a little while after this show goes off.”

“Actually, I’d like for you to take care of it now so I can know it is done before our friends get here.”

“Really, Dad. I have it. My room will be clean. I just want to finish watching this first.”

The father is getting frustrated now. “Son, I need to make dinner in a few minutes and I want to know that your room is clean before I start. I won’t have time to check on it again before our company arrives. So, please go clean your room now.”

“Fine,” sighs the son as he gets up from the sofa and heads to his room. The father can practically hear the teen’s eyes rolling as he walks by. “I don’t see what the big deal is about me doing it in a little while. Now I have to miss the end of this show.”

While the father in this story ended up with what he wanted—his son cleaning his room—*how* it happened mattered as well. What began as a simple request turned into a frustrating encounter for both the father and the son. In the end, it wasn’t really about a clean room, watching a show, or even company coming over; it was about honor and respect. The father didn’t just want his son to clean his room, he wanted him to want to clean his room. He wanted his son to do willingly what he had asked, without needing to explain his reasons.



What are some ways that you feel honored and respected by others?



Does the heart behind the action matter to you? Why or why not?

Session Summary

It's possible to coerce or even force someone to do something, but for an action to be meaningful and fulfilling, it must be done because the person wanted to. This is the key difference between behavior modification and heart change, changing our actions versus changing our motivations underneath our actions.

Behavior modification versus heart change is exactly the kind of dynamic at play in Paul's letter to the Galatians, especially concerning the fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5. In this session we're going to interact with Paul's teaching on grace, works, and personal transformation in the light of the gospel. We will see that what we do certainly matters, but why we do what we do matters even more.

1. We walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh (Gal. 5:16-18).

Even though Japan had surrendered to the Allies in 1945, ending World War II, one soldier, Hiroo Onoda, held out like a hermit in uniform for decades. With a dwindling band of men under his command, Onoda camped out in the jungles of the Philippines, waging war on the local population until 1974, when his Japanese commander finally came to inform him he could stop fighting and released him from his military duties. Onoda spent thirty years fighting a war *that was over*.

What was Onoda doing? He was obeying his last orders to continue fighting and not die. Unknowingly, he was failing to face reality, or rather, operating according to an old reality. He was fighting a battle that had already been settled.

Many Christians live the same way. When we engage in unrepentant sin or treat ourselves or others according to the laws of works-righteousness, we are living according to an old reality, a reality that, in fact, has been overturned, canceled, and crucified.

In Colossians 3:1-3, Paul says this: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God...For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Here is how Paul expressed the same concept in Galatians 5:16-18:

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Further Commentary

"Having contrasted the flesh with love (vv. 13-14), Paul now sets it against the Spirit. The only way to conquer the flesh is to yield to the Spirit. 'Walk by the Spirit' implies both direction and empowerment; that is, making decisions and choices according to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and acting with the spiritual power that the Spirit supplies. To 'walk' in Scripture regularly represents the pattern of conduct of all of one's life. 'The desires of the flesh' would mean not just bodily cravings but all of the ordinary desires of fallen human nature (see examples in vv. 19-21)."²

—Simon J. Gathercole

Further Commentary

"To 'walk' by the Spirit indicates the need to yield to the Spirit every day: at work, at a ball game, in the home, everywhere. The word for walk, *peripateite*, in its wider usage in Greek means 'to walk around after someone or to walk in a particular direction'... In the days of Aristotle, his students were known as *peripatetics* because of their habit of following their teacher around. For the Christian, to walk by the Spirit, or to be led by the Spirit, means to follow our Teacher around. We must listen to the Spirit's Word, discern His will, and follow His guidance. This is not a deeper life or higher life; this is the normal Christian life."³

—David Platt and Tony Merida



Voices from Church History

“We are not to challenge and envy one another. We are to get down from our high chairs and start walking in the Spirit. The Christian life is not a balloon ascension with some great overpowering experience of soaring to the heights. Rather it is a daily walk; it is a matter of putting one foot ahead of the other, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit.”⁴

—J. Vernon McGee
(1904-1988)

This passage naturally flows out of all that has come before it. Paul wrote this letter because he was concerned about the Galatian churches and how they were teetering on the precipice of self-righteousness. They had fallen prey to false teachers (the Judaizers) who were insisting that justification comes by the gospel *plus* (in this case, namely, circumcision). This is, in fact, what it means to fall from grace (see Gal. 5:4)—not that one has to fall into some huge licentious sin but that one can divert his or her thinking from justification by faith to justification by works. So Paul says, essentially, “If you were born again by the Spirit, you ought to walk according to that Spirit.”

When we engage in unrepentant sin (“gratify[ing] the desires of the flesh”), we are, like the Japanese soldier, living according to an old reality. In essence, we have forgotten who we are.

Recall Paul’s confrontation with Peter for his hypocrisy as one historical example of this (Gal. 2:11-16). Paul didn’t simply bring down the hammer of the law; instead, he reminded Peter of his identity. He reminded him of his justification by God’s grace, received through faith in Christ. Paul told Peter that his behavior was “not in step with the truth of the gospel,” as if he were living in an alternate (and false) reality.

“Are you so foolish?” Paul asked in Galatians 3:3, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” No, according to Galatians 5, we who have begun by the Spirit must now “walk by the Spirit.” Here we see the totality of grace, how all-encompassing it is. To follow the temptations of the devil and the appetites of the flesh is to deny our true selves and re-embrace our old self, which has been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:19-20). If we choose to live under the old reality of justification by the law, Paul warned, we should expect the penalty that comes when we fall short, since seeking salvation by the law’s demands is to be subject to the law’s consequences.

 What would crucifying your flesh look like on a daily basis?

So what does it mean, then, to walk by the Spirit? The word translated “walk” here doesn’t mean simply to move using your legs and feet, but it carries with it the idea of walking in a certain direction or even walking after someone. To walk by the Spirit, then, is to follow Him or to move in the direction He indicates. When we walk by the Spirit, we go where He goes, or more precisely, we live how He directs us to live.

Some Christians struggle with this, not because they don’t want to follow the Spirit’s guidance but because they don’t know how to recognize it. Walking by the Spirit can be a frustrating mystery, but it doesn’t have to be. If we are to walk by the Spirit, we need to spend time being quiet and listening to Him. We have to remember that God wants us to know Him. He wants us to obey Him. He wants to communicate with us. Spending time in prayer, talking to God and listening, is one way we can hear.

If we are to walk by the Spirit, we will also need to seek His will for our lives. While part of this goes back to listening to Him, there is another way to determine His will that we sometimes overlook—the Word. The more we spend time reading, studying, and meditating on the Word of God, the more in touch we will be with His will for our lives.

Finally, if we are to walk by the Spirit, we are to follow His leading; in other words, we are to do what He leads us to do. When we walk by the Spirit, how we live will change. It has to because the desires of the flesh and walking by the Spirit take us in completely opposite directions. Let's walk by the Spirit, then, since the Spirit has indwelt us and is bearing fruit in us that glorifies Christ.

 If Paul's concern here is that we live lives of obedience that honor God, why does he emphasize the Spirit over the law?

2. We cast off the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).

I sometimes hear preachers preach on sin as if only *really* bad people commit them. What I mean is, whenever these preachers want to reference sin, they always hit the obvious targets—sexual immorality, drunkenness, and so on—what many consider “big” sins. But it's less common to hear preachers highlight sins like gossip or gluttony. At the same time, we more often hear Christians express concern about sins “out there” (committed by unbelievers) than those committed “in here” (within the church).

It's certainly easier to diagnose the sins in others than in ourselves. It's also easier to highlight more obvious and glaring failings in others rather than deal with the little character issues that chip away at our witness in incremental measures. But Paul was having none of that. In his list of “the works of the flesh,” he left no room for “big” sins versus “little” sins, culturally “acceptable” sins or “unacceptable” sins. All sin is unbecoming to the cause of Christ, and it's all indulging in the appetites of the flesh instead of walking by the Spirit. He wrote:

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Further Commentary

“The sins Paul mentions can be divided into four categories: **Sexual offences.** ‘Sexual immorality’ refers to all forms of illicit sexual relationships. ‘Impurity’ refers to moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed. ‘Debauchery’ connotes an open, shameless display of these evils. **Religious offences.** ‘Idolatry’ involved the worship of pagan gods and idols. ‘Witchcraft’ often combined the worship of evil powers with the use of drugs to create a trance-like state. **Relational offences.** ‘Hatred’ denotes primarily enmity between groups. ‘Discord’ is the natural result of hatred, and was no doubt a problem in the Galatian church. ‘Jealousy’ refers to a sinful self-centeredness that often finds expression in ‘fits of rage.’ ‘Selfish ambition’ shows itself in working to get ahead at others’ expense. ‘Dissensions’ and ‘factions’ describe what happens when people quarrel over issues or personalities, causing hurtful divisions. Paul’s concentration on these community-destroying behaviours shows that his primary concern is for the unity and peace of the Galatian churches. **Self-indulgent partying.** ‘Drunkenness’ refers to the excessive use of strong drink by individuals, whereas the term ‘orgies’ refers to the drunken carousing commonly associated with such things as the worship of Bacchus, the god of wine.”⁵

—Finny Philip

Further Commentary

“The ‘flesh’ is usually understood as the sinful nature of mankind that continues even after a person becomes a Christian. Some interpreters take it to mean mankind in its unsaved state with its sinful thoughts and behavioral patterns continuing after conversion. When the desire of the flesh has the upper hand, ‘the works of the flesh’ are obvious... Some are gross sins, but many are often viewed as ‘acceptable’ behavior. Paul’s point is that this type of behavior as a pattern of life (‘practice’) is enough to cause a person ‘not’ to inherit ‘the kingdom of God’ (see the list in 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Thus, a legalist cannot be justified by ‘the works of the law’ (Gal. 2:16), and a licentious person is excluded from the kingdom of God by the works of the flesh.”⁶

—A. Boyd Luter

Voices from Church History

“If Christ has died for me, ungodly as I am, without strength as I am, then I cannot live in sin any longer but must arouse myself to love and serve Him who has redeemed me. I cannot trifle with the evil that killed my best Friend. I must be holy for His sake. How can I live in sin when He has died to save me from it?”⁷

—Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Notice how little is left out. Even in this relatively short list, we see hatred listed alongside promiscuity. We see divisiveness listed along with drunkenness. We see sins that we identify as happening outside the church included with sins we see very often inside the church. We see sins that are obviously “obvious” (drunkenness, sorcery) and sins that can be deceptive and subtle (envy, dissensions). Nobody gets left out of this indictment. Everyone’s personal scorecard gets tarnished here, and Paul’s list is far from exhaustive.

Not only do we see a diversity of sins with at least a few connecting deeply with each one of us, we also see that all of the sins are presented as equally serious. Jealousy is just as serious as sexual immorality. Outbursts of anger are just as serious as idolatry. Selfishness is equal to sorcery. Paul was intent on exploding the thinking that some sins are more serious than others, or turning that around, that some sins are not as serious as others.

While sins have different consequences, they all share the same legal impact—condemnation before a holy God. And for those in Christ, each of these sins presents a false picture of who God is and what He has done in His people. Each of these works of the flesh is serious and needs to be cast off.

There’s one other thing to notice. Some of the works of the flesh can be seen by others because they are external in nature—such as drunkenness and fits of anger. But notice that some are internal. Someone cannot see hatred in us. Or jealousy. Or strife. Or envy. But these postures of the heart need to be put away as well. While they may not show themselves immediately, they will work themselves out of us in one way or another.

All of the works of the flesh, both internal and external, need to be cast off by followers of Christ. We cannot walk by the Spirit and practice these sins.



Why is it so much easier to see the sin in others than the sin in ourselves?

The scariest part of all is when Paul says that those who practice these sins will not inherit God’s kingdom. Why? Well, because the kingdom is for those who have repented of living according to the flesh and who have committed to living according to the Spirit.

Does this mean that Christians don’t sin any more? It can seem that way, can’t it? There’s no getting around how serious Paul makes the life of sin sound in this passage. Disobedience to God is a heavy and terrible thing. But Paul’s use of the phrase “those who do such things” is helpful. Obviously Christians this side of glory still struggle with sin. But that is exactly the point—they struggle! When Paul referred to people who do things like those he listed, he was referring to people who do not feel convicted about committing these sins (indicating the absence of the Holy Spirit in their lives) or who do not seek repentance (indicating a lack of submission to the Holy Spirit). “Do” in this context refers to a commitment to a lifestyle of sin, not simply to an occurrence of sin.

Paul was saying that people whose lives are characterized by these kinds of works of the flesh—whether they claim to be Christians or not—are people who cannot expect to share in the glories of redemption. They are giving every indication of not having been transformed by the Spirit of God in salvation because it is impossible to be raised with Christ by the Spirit and not walk in the newness of life.

Doing flows from *being*. Behavior problems are ultimately belief problems. Who or what you believe yourself to be will direct how you live. So to be crucified with Christ means to put away our fleshly passions and desires and to follow the Spirit.

Casting off the works of the flesh is just a part of one’s new life in Christ, however. If we are truly going to demonstrate that our old self has died and we now no longer live but Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:19-20), then we have to “put on the new self” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). And the good news about the new self is that the promised Spirit will make this new self appear.

- ❓ How can we grow to become more sensitive to our own sin in order to cast it off?
- ❓ What are some ways we can work on putting on the new self?

3. We bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26).

Let’s return for a moment to our father and his son’s room needing to be cleaned. What does the father really want to see from his son? Not dutiful acceptance of a burdensome chore. No, what he really wants to see is his son living according to the reality of who he is—a son loved by his father who loves him in return. To *want* to clean his room because he knows it will please his father, even if it means missing a television program, is one small way a son can show love and respect to his father. To want to clean his room, then, is how a son *acts like who he really is*.

Again, *doing* flows from *being*. We always behave according to who or what we think we are at any given moment, whether we see ourselves correctly or not. You can’t get away from this concept on the pages of Scripture. Biblically speaking, when we embrace our identity in Christ, the power of Christ enables us to live accordingly.

The power of our obedience and the source of our holiness is not our own efforts but the effort of the Holy Spirit applying to our lives the finished work of Jesus Christ. It’s God who works in you to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). Your good works were ordained beforehand (Eph. 2:10). The same gospel that empowers our conversion empowers our sanctification (Rom. 6:22; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Titus 2:11-12). It is Jesus who both authors and perfects our faith (Heb. 12:2). It is God alone who is faithful both to start the work in us and to complete it (Phil. 1:6).

Voices from the Church

“The church reflects the character of God.”⁸

—Mark Dever

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

76. Sanctification

After we are justified by faith, declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ, we undergo a lifetime of sanctification where we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole of a person, transforming one’s heart, mind, and character to reflect that of Jesus.

Further Commentary

“The word ‘fruit’ is singular, indicating that these qualities constitute a unity, all of which should be found in every Christian community and in every believer who lives under the control of the Spirit...‘Love’ is listed first because it is the foundation of the other graces. ‘Joy’ is a deep and abiding inner rejoicing that is promised to those who abide in Christ. ‘Peace,’ too, is a gift of Christ... Patience is the quality of ‘forbearance’ under provocation. It entertains no thoughts of retaliation even when wrongfully treated. ‘Kindness’ is benevolence in action, such as God demonstrates towards us. ‘Goodness’ involves both uprightness of soul and reaching out to others to do good to them... ‘Faithfulness’ renders a person trustworthy or reliable like a faithful servant. ‘Gentleness’ marks a person who is submissive to God’s word and considerate of others when discipline is needed. ‘Self-control’ denotes self-mastery, primarily when tempted to engage in the sort of sinful behaviour listed above.”¹⁰

—Finny Philip

Voices from the Church

“Because it is the Spirit of God who awakens love in our hearts, it is not something we can claim as our own. Being able to love others is not the result of discipline; it is a miracle.”¹¹

—Scot McKnight

Of course, it’s not that we don’t expend any energy. We have to remember that “grace is not opposed to *effort*, but is opposed to *earning*.”⁹ Instead, it is simply that the energy we use to obey from our hearts for the pleasure of God comes from God’s Spirit (Col. 1:29). Here is how Paul explained the source of righteousness in Galatians 5:22-26:

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

The first thing to notice is how this list of spiritual fruit differs from the previous list of “the works of the flesh” (5:19-21). The works of the flesh are just that—*works*, or deeds that people do. This second list, though, the fruit of the Spirit, largely consists of what we might call *qualities* or attributes. If we can take anything away from a general comparison of the lists, it might be this: The solution to the bad things we do isn’t the good we do instead but the goodness that comes from being in Christ.

There are plenty of people who don’t have sex outside of marriage, don’t get drunk, and don’t see R-rated movies but who are loveless, joyless, impatient, unkind, and ungentle. So here we see the primary problem with so many approaches to Christian discipleship today—they are predicated primarily on *doing* different rather than *becoming* different.

When Paul calls these qualities the “fruit of the Spirit,” he’s showing us that these are things the Spirit produces. We aren’t passive, but we aren’t the prime mover either. If we have repented of our sin and placed our faith in Jesus Christ—decisions also empowered by the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit goes to work bearing the fruit of these attributes in us.

As the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control within us, we will also see that our external actions will change too. A person who is loving will act in love with others. A person who is joyful will act joyfully before others. *Being* leads to *doing*. And in this case, when we are changed to be more like God on the inside, we will live more like Him on the outside.



How has remembering your identity in Christ empowered you to serve others?

Now we've got an entirely new way of looking at the law, at God's commands and expectations. We are set free from the condemnation of the law to the spirit of the law. The Spirit is determined that we become holy. For this reason, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16) is not just a command but also a promise. We are given the holiness into which we have been called.

This in itself is good news! If you're a Christian, you will obey because you want to obey, not because you have to. The Spirit of God living inside of us ensures it. We will bear good fruit. This doesn't make us sinless, but it does make us sure of spiritual growth and it does make us more conscious and convicted of our sin.

This gospel-driven way of living means that we ourselves are a gospel project, always being developed and shaped by the gospel. And it means that we are always acknowledging that the changes in us have not come primarily through our own efforts but through the Spirit of Christ working in us. We don't get the glory. He does.

-  Jesus Christ is the King of the universe, and yet, He came to serve you and give up His life for you. How does this address the reluctance we can feel to live unselfishly?
-  If Jesus died, in part, to kill sin, what does our engaging in sin say about our understanding of Christ's death?

Conclusion

In Paul's short letter to the Galatians, he used up a lot of ink rebuking the church for giving a platform to the Judaizers who had tried to piggyback legal burdens on the gospel. In insisting that circumcision, for example, was necessary for salvation, these false teachers had essentially said, "Yes, grace, but..." And any time you add a "but" to grace, you disgrace grace (see Rom. 11:6). So Paul was heartbroken over the way the Galatians had opened themselves up to a rather insidious form of legalism and fallen away from grace (see Gal. 5:4).

As Paul developed his rebuke, he covered the biblical history of the covenant to show that he was not making this gospel stuff up. And then he wanted to demonstrate that while the gospel is distinct from the law, it is not antithetical to the law. He wanted us all to see that God is not unconcerned about our obedience unto holiness. He wanted us to see that behavioral obedience is both worthless and pointless apart from a heart full of grace.

CHRIST CONNECTION: In contrasting the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, Paul showed the Galatian church what it looks like to belong to Christ Jesus. To be crucified with Christ means to put away our fleshly passions and desires and to follow the Spirit.

Further Commentary

"Paul says 'fruit' not 'fruits.' This probably points to the fact that all of these collectively make up Christlikeness. As we abide in Christ, all of 'the fruits' of the Spirit get produced. That is not to say that each one is as strong in us as the others, but simply that the Spirit is shaping us in every way into Christlikeness. Additionally, the fruit of the Spirit as a whole is basically a character sketch of Christ. What is the Spirit doing in us? He is conforming us into the image of Jesus, the One who perfectly embodied love and every other virtue mentioned."¹²

—David Platt and Tony Merida

Voices from the Church

"It is in the midst of difficulties and hardships that we especially need the fruit of the Spirit, and it is in such times that God may especially work through us to touch other people for Christ. As we bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, others will see in us 'the family likeness of his Son' (Rom. 8:29, Phillips) and be attracted to the Saviour."¹³

—Billy Graham

Additional Resources

Once Works, Now Fruit

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Study Material

- "What Is the Right Way to Work for God?"—Chapter 13 from *Gospel* by J. D. Greear
- "God the Holy Spirit—Fruit, Gifts, Sanctification"—Article by Earl Waggoner; find a link to this article at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "Libertinism and Legalism," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Sermon

Ted Traylor: "Spirit Filled Living: Spirit Fruitification"

Find a link to this at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

Tip of the Week

A Serving Community

We were created by God for a reason. Our purpose on earth is to love and serve God and then to take that love to others. Since we cannot serve God directly, so to speak, we ultimately serve Him by serving others. We can be more effective servants when we do it together in community than when we serve alone. It is important, therefore, to establish a strong group that relies on each other. So schedule a service opportunity and do it together. Here are some practical ideas for serving as a group:

- Provide meals for a family in need.
- Change the oil on a single parent's car.
- Help widows with chores in their homes.
- Offer free babysitting to young families that could use a break.
- Pick a park and do a cleanup project there.¹⁴

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