

GALATIANS 5:16-26

3: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT



Historical Context & Background

Paul wrote this letter to the region—not just an individual church—of Galatia. We aren't exactly sure what land area that all entails, but we do know is that it was part of North-Central Asia Minor (modern Turkey). When Paul left Galatia, a group of believers were trying to convince the Gentiles (non-Jewish) Christians they had to follow the Jewish law in its entirety. He writes this letter to inform believers that because of the cross there is no separation between Jew and Gentile anymore. This letter is a call back to believers to remember the true gospel and freedom that comes from Jesus Christ and His death on the cross.



Related Passages

Acts 2:1-4 - The coming of the Holy Spirit

John 3:6-8 - People born of the Spirit

Romans 8:2-6 - Flesh vs. Spirit



Key Terms

“Fruit”: Greek word, *karpos*, is in the singular. We tend to read it as plural, meaning many fruits or different kinds of fruit. The way Paul is intending for this to be read is not by naming different kinds of fruit the Spirit gives, but instead describing the grace that allows you to cultivate all of these characteristics a Spirit-driven life produces.

“Sinful Nature”: Greek word, *sarx*, is often translated into “flesh.” The flesh in the New Testament refers to the sin-desiring aspect of our being as opposed to the God-desiring aspect of our being. It is not describing our physical bodies.



Key Themes

Fleshly desires vs. Spiritual desires: There are two things at work in a Christian's heart: the battle between the Spirit and the flesh. At some point in our lives we will “live by” one and not “satisfy” the other. Paul in this chapter is encouraging the Galatians to “live by the Spirit.” Our fleshly desires (*Sarx*) are opposed to our Spiritual desires. Our spirit can be thought of as our renewed Christian heart that is ruled by the Holy Spirit. Our old self (flesh) used to rule before we were made new in Christ. Paul calls our “desires of the sinful nature” *epithumia* which means an

“over-desire”, or “inordinate desire.” Usually our heart isn’t desiring “bad” things so much as it over-desires good things. This leads to a good thing becoming our “god”—an idol we worship. Sin creates this feeling that we have to have this or that other thing we don’t yet have. David Powlison says, “If ‘idolatry’ is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then ‘desires’ (epithumia) is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for that same drift...The New Testament merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires...for lust, craving, yearning and greedy demand.”

“The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh...” (v 17). The structure of this verse shows the Spirit has longings and desires, too! Here we come to the question, “what does the Spirit long for?” Jesus teaches us that the Holy Spirit will come to “glorify me,” that is, Christ (John 16:14). So, while the flesh wants to glorify all things that are human nature and of this world, the Spirit glorifies and seeks to honor Jesus. The Spirit speaks of the beauty and greatness of Jesus Christ.

Traits to Cultivate: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. These seem like some pretty good character traits, right? The real question is, “how do I actually have these things in my life?” By asking this question we’re missing the point. Trying to create these traits in our lives through our own strength is like trying to grow grapes without a grapevine. It’s impossible. The fruit of the Spirit must be cultivated by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is the one who produces His fruit.

Paul uses the imagery of fruit to illustrate four different things:

1. Our growth as Christians is gradual, as the maturing of an apple on a tree. With botanical growth, we never see it happening. We only measure it after a time. With the growth of the fruit of the spirit, it might be growing in our lives, but we won’t realize it until we have to use it in a situation where it might not have been as easy to call upon a few years prior. For instance, let’s say you have a big exam coming up and you decide to stay in and study instead of going out with your friends. That is evidence of growing self-control in your life! It can grow in you unnoticed.
2. The growth of the fruit in our lives is inevitable if we submit ourselves to the Spirit. There will be growth in our lives. If we have the Spirit in us the fruit will grow! Tim Keller says, “We are saved by faith, not by growing fruit; but we are not saved by fruitless faith.”
3. The fruit has internal roots in our life. It is not about having certain traits or characteristics, but about a change much deeper than that. Think about an orange tree. Do the oranges on the tree keep the tree alive? No, but they are a sign that the tree is alive! The life of the tree produces the oranges, not the other way around.
4. Our growth is symmetrical. Paul specifically uses the word “fruit” to describe a list of things that grow in a Spirit-filled person. The real fruit of the spirit all grows together, they are one. Jonathan Edwards says this “There is a concatenation of the graces of Christianity.” This means, we do not get one part of the fruit of the spirit without all the other parts growing, too. What a great promise!

Keeping in step with the Spirit: When Jesus walked the Earth he had zero resistance to the Holy Spirit. What that looked like was “whatever the Father does, the Son also does” (John 5:19).

And what that meant was where my Father leads that's where I go. That was what a Holy Spirit-driven life looked like. That is what led to the FRUIT of the Spirit produced in Jesus' life because He let the Spirit guide him and carry him wherever the Spirit went. We don't mature into being independent beings. We mature into being fully dependent on God and on the Holy Spirit. A lot of times we pose the question "Jesus didn't need the Holy Spirit, right? Because He was fully God?" Wrong. He absolutely had the Spirit with and in Him (Luke 4:1)! Jesus was in perfect communion with the Father, taking on human nature He was God incarnate, and the Spirit lived in Him.

As we mature as Christians, we need to mature into being fully dependent on the Holy Spirit. Not running ahead to graduate with the degree that's going to bring us the most money or lagging behind because we're too fearful to commit to a decision, but fine tuning our heart and mind to be attuned to the way the spirit would like to lead us next.

☞ Quotes & Illustrations

"The union between the Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. I know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club, or a trade union, people talk about the "spirit" of that family, or club, or trade union. They talk about its "spirit" because the individual members, when they are together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they would not have if they were apart. It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course, it is not a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that is just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God. This third Person is called [. . .] the Holy Ghost or the "spirit" of God."

C. S. LEWIS, MERE CHRISTIANITY

"Every human being has a longing for God. Christians go one step further—not only do we long for God but we have the treasure of his presence always with us."

MOTHER TERESA

"Every growth of spiritual life, from the first tender shoot until now, has been the work of the Holy Spirit.... The only way to more life is the Holy Spirit. You will not even know that you want more unless He works in you to desire it.... "

CHARLES SPURGEON

! Three Main Points

1. There are two enemies waging war for my attention. My life should be governed by the power of the Spirit.
2. It's not out of our own strength that the fruit of the spirit is produced in our lives. As we

grow closer to God, His character is developed in our lives.

3. Our heart's intention should be set to be in step with the Holy Spirit. A life of dependence is a sign of maturity for Christians.

Discussion Questions

- Where do you feel the Spirit has naturally gifted you?
- When you hear "Holy Spirit" what comes to your mind?
- Is your heart turned toward the Spirit or against?
- Do you spend time listening to God when you pray or do you have a tendency to do all the talking?
- Jesus said he was sending his "helper" to "dwell within us." What does this mean for our lives?
- Out of the list of fruit, which one is the hardest for you to cultivate?
- How do you move toward a life that has naturally flowing fruit?
- Do you see dependency as a sign of weakness or strength?
- Where do you see Jesus model the fruit of the Spirit?
- Do you think any of the fruit of the Spirit look like weakness?
- Why does Paul use "fruit" instead of "fruits"?
- Is it difficult for you to give up control to The Lord?
- What is an area of your life that you hold a little too tightly? How can you surrender to the Spirit and allow Him to guide you?
- Are there "desires of the flesh" that you let rule in your life?
- Jesus said "I am sending something better" when He talked about sending His spirit. Do you view the Holy Spirit the same way Jesus did?
- How do you call on the Spirit in your day to day life?
- Do you feel as if you're in constant communion with this Spirit?
- Romans 6:10-11 says, "The same power that rose Jesus from the dead, lives in you." Do you believe that to be true in your life?
- If so, how does that change the way you live out the rest of your life here on Earth?
- We often say "I can't wait to get to heaven and ask the disciples what it was like to WALK with Jesus and LIVE alongside Him." But, do you ever think about when they ask "What was it like to have the power of Jesus living INSIDE of you?"

Application & Practice

Get Outside. Take your bible and journal and go on a walk with The Lord this week. Go somewhere quiet, turn your phone off and meditate over the fruit of the Spirit. Where do you feel like God has naturally gifted you? What do you think He wants grow in you? What areas have you seen growth in your own life?

Memorize. Memorize Galatians 5:22-23. Every day this week recite it to yourself.

Prayer. Spend an hour in silence this week. No agenda, no phone, no music, just you and God. Listen to what the Holy Spirit wants to say to you in this time of your life. Ask God “am I following in step with what the Spirit is wanting from me or am I leading my own life?” and listen for a response (a word, a scripture, his silence). Use a pen and paper and reflect on this time.



Going Deeper

Podcast: “Growing Roots” – Jonathan David and Melissa Helser

Book: Rees Howells: Intercessor – Norman Grubb