



The Fruit of the Spirit ... Proof that Christ Lives in Me
Galatians 5:16-25

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Fruit is the natural product of a living thing. The same is true of people as is true of plants. The fruit of a person's life is proof of the life within. Jesus said, "A good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit." And then He said, "You shall know them by their fruits."¹ In other words, *the way you live proves what lives in you*. And that's what we're going to talk about this summer.

The fruit of the Spirit is proof that *Christ* lives in us. The fruit of the Spirit includes the character traits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But there's more to it than being a good person. There are a lot of good people who are not Christians. The fruit of the Spirit is proof that *Christ* lives in us.

The Bible says that God has "predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son." Our destiny is to become more and more like Jesus. That's the mission statement of our church – In His Image ... For His Mission. God is constantly at work in us; molding us to look like Jesus, to love like Jesus, and to live like Jesus in every way. What we see in Jesus is what others should see in us.

The presence or absence of the fruit of the Spirit is obvious; in our character, in our moral choices, and especially in our relationships. How we treat each other, how we tolerate each other, how we value and love each other, prove the character within. Again, *the way you live proves what lives in you. Therefore, when you look in the mirror, do you see the fruit of the Spirit? When others look at you, do they see the fruit of the Spirit? Do they see the life of Christ in you?*

THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE IS THE CHRIST-LIKE LIFE

The Spirit-filled life is the Christ-like life. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16, ESV).

The Christians in Galatia were debating how to live the Christian life. The Jewish Christians were demanding that Gentile Christians live like Jews, and follow all the rules of the Jews. So Paul wrote this letter to address the conflict. The theme of his letter is freedom; freedom from the law, from rules and regulations, and freedom from the flesh, from the bondage and slavery of sin. The letter to the Galatians confirms that we are free from the pressure of rule-keeping and free from the bondage of our own sin. Paul declared it so there would be no doubt – "Christ has set us free."² Therefore, we can live a victorious, holy life, if we "walk by the Spirit."

When I think of walking by the Spirit, I think of steps. Add up all the steps you take and it becomes a lifestyle. Walking by the Spirit is about a way of life. The Holy Spirit is to influence all the choices, decisions, thoughts, attitudes, and actions in life. Walking by the Spirit is about a lifestyle that is Spirit-led, Spirit-focused, Spirit-influenced, Spirit-controlled, Spirit-empowered, and Spirit-pleasing.

"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16, ESV).

This is a command to be obeyed. We must do our part. But, we must remember the analogy of the farmer and God. God will not do what the farmer can do. The farmer must plow and plant. But the farmer must rely on God to cause the sun to shine, the rains to fall, and the fruit to grow. So, we must live in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

How does that work? It has a lot to do with mindset. Romans 8 says, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God” (Romans 8:6-7, ESV).³ Dr. Charles Stanley, in his book on the Spirit-filled life, writes about the battle of the mind. “Every sinful act is committed twice: once in our heads and once in our behavior. To win the behavior battle, we must first win the battle that takes place in our minds.”⁴ The spiritual battle is decided in our minds longer before it is seen in our behavior.

A mind set on the Spirit is how we yield to the Spirit, and how we allow Him to fill us and empower us. The New Testament says, “Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled” (1 Peter 1:13, NIV). “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2, NAS). “Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV).⁵ We are in a spiritual battle. And we must set our minds on the right things.⁶ Why? Because your mind tells your feet where to go. Set your mind on the Spirit, and “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

BUT THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

Victory is possible, but the struggle is real. “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” (Galatians 5:17, ESV).

We live in constant conflict between two lifestyles. Between two characters, two loves, two mindsets, two masters. And they “are opposed to each other.”

I don’t think there is an angel on one shoulder and a demon on the other shoulder, each trying to persuade us. But I do know the struggle is real. Being a Christian does not mean our struggle with sin is over. As a Christian, I don’t always practice what I preach. I’m not perfect and neither are you. In many ways, the life of a Christian is, as one person called it, a “life of contradictions.”⁷

Paul admitted that his life was a life of contradictions too. “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate ... And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway” (Romans 7:15, 18-19, NLT). Paul admitted he was a walking contradiction.⁸

The struggle is real. We experience it every day. We have an enemy who is out to get us. Satan is called the “tempter” and the “father of lies” (Matthew 4:3, John 8:44). He lies, deceives, seduces, and lures us away from God. That’s why the Bible says, “Be alert ... Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8, NIV). Satan knows how to customize a trap for every one of us. He knows when we’re vulnerable. And we need to know when we’re vulnerable. We’re vulnerable ...

- when we're busy and not paying attention
- when we neglect the spiritual disciplines of the word, prayer, worship, and community
- when we're tired and worn out
- when we're under pressure or stressed out
- when we consume large amounts of media and allow the values of the culture to shape our thinking
- when we're addicted to some kind of idol; like technology, video games, or sports
- when we put ourselves in situations where temptation is heightened
- when we're bored and looking for some fun
- when we think no one is watching

If any of that describes you, you're at risk. Don't be naïve.. The spiritual battle is real and we cannot ignore it. The struggle is real. But victory over sin is possible, if we "walk by the Spirit."⁹

IT'S OBVIOUS WHEN WE'RE NOT WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

But it's obvious when we're not walking by the Spirit. "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 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" (Galatians 5:19-21, ESV).

It's obvious when we're not walking by the Spirit, and everyone can see it. When we're not walking by the Spirit, we give in to "sexual immorality" in various forms. We give in to "idolatry"; to substitutes for God, to other loves, to lesser loves. When we're not walking by the Spirit, we become embroiled in all kinds of conflict – "enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy." We give in to indulgence. The word "sorcery" is the English word for pharmacy. "Sorcery" referred to black magic, but it also referred to drugs. Paul also mentioned the indulgence of "drunkenness and orgies." Orgies? Yes. Pornography is looking at multiple women, and nothing less than a virtual orgy! Add to the list anger, pride, selfishness, materialism, and so on, and it's obvious when we're not walking by the Spirit.

Then Paul said, "Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." This is not how a Christian acts.¹⁰ This is how someone acts who does not know Christ. Paul is talking to Christians who have slipped into all kinds of immoral behavior. It's obvious when we are not walking by the Spirit.

AND IT'S OBVIOUS WHEN WE ARE

It's obvious when we're not walking by the Spirit, and it's obvious when we are. "But," in contrast to the "works of the flesh," "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians

5:22-23, ESV). This is the “dazzling contrast” between the “works of the flesh” and “the fruit of the Spirit.”¹¹

Paul made an odd statement. “Against such things there is no law.” Well, of course, there are no laws “against” such kind behavior. A better translation is “for such things” or “concerning such things there is no law.” Christopher Wright explains what Paul meant. “You can’t legislate people to behave this way. People will do these things because of who they are, not because there are laws that compel them to.”¹² The theme of the letter to the Galatians is freedom, freedom from rule-keeping. Paul reminded them that Christ lived in them in that famous verse. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Christ lives in us! And the way we live proves what lives in us. The fruit of the Spirit is not the result of rule-keeping or trying to be a nice person. The fruit of the Spirit is result of the Jesus Christ living in us. Again, the way we live proves what, and who, lives in us.

Jesus said, “A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit ... Just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions” (Matthew 7:17-18, 20, NLT). “You will know them by their fruits” (NAS).

It’s obvious when we’re walking by the Spirit, and it’s obvious when we’re not. Quoting Christopher Wright, “What we do shows what we are. Our actions (on the outside) show what (or rather who) is on the inside. So if Christ, through his Holy Spirit, takes up residence in our lives, then more and more we begin to show the character of Jesus in the way we think, speak, and act.”¹³

The fruit of the Spirit is a beautiful portrait of the Christian life. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Our lives are to be luscious and fruitful. What do you see when you look at these photos of real fruit? Color. Juicy. Taste. Variety. Delicious. The beauty of the fruit is proof of the beauty within. The fruit of the Spirit is proof that *Christ* lives in us. And it’s so obvious when we’re walking by the Spirit and it’s obvious when we’re not.

The fruit of the Spirit is about character. Each week, we’re going to look at one of these fruits, at one of these character traits, and each week, we’re going to look at our own character. And, we’re not going to let personality be an excuse. No one gets away with saying, “That’s just the way I am.”

Each week, we’re also going to apply the fruit of the Spirit to parenting. We talk a lot about being faith builders. As parents, it is your responsibility to build character into your children. It’s much more important than academics or athletics. I am going to press you and urge you to take your discipleship responsibility of your own family seriously.

And I’ve got to confront something else. A lot of people think they are Christians because they had Christian parents or were baptized as a kid. A lot of people think they are Christians, but they are not. How can I say that? How can I judge someone? Because if there is no evidence of Christ in a person’s life, if there is no evidence of the fruit of the Spirit, then that person is probably not a Christian. If there is no spiritual fruit in your life, if the character of Jesus is not evident in your life, then you need to ask a tough question. Am I a really Christian or not? The Bible says,

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14, ESV). The proof that any of us are genuine children of God is if we are living Spirit-led and Spirit-filled lives.

This series is not about being a nice person. It’s about yielding to the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and allowing Him to bear the fruit of Christ-like character in our lives. This series is about cultivating that fruit in our children. And it’s about living such attractive lives that others will look at us and want to know more about the God we love, the Jesus we adore, and the Gospel that has saved our lives.

KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT

Paul ended this section of his letter with this statement. “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25, ESV).

The Greek word for “walk” in verse 25 is different from the word for “walk” in verse 16. That’s why the NIV and ESV translate it as “keep in step with the Spirit.” In verse 25, Paul used the Greek word *stoikeo* (στοιχέω), a more colorful and descriptive word. It means agreement, alignment, cooperation, harmony, and oneness.

In classical Greek literature, two pictures illustrate *stoikeo*. One is the picture of soldiers marching in lock step. It’s the picture of precision, of soldiers marching in perfectly aligned rows and boots hitting the ground in unison. When the Spirit takes a step, I take a step. The other picture is a shadow.¹⁴ Walking with the Spirit is like being a shadow of the Holy Spirit. A shadow exists only in relation to something else. A shadow is an exact representation of something else. We are to be an exact representation, a shadow, of the Holy Spirit. That’s why the best English translation of this word is not simply “walk,” but “keep in step with the Spirit.”

HOW TO KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT

So, how do we “keep in step with the Spirit”? Remember the analogy of the farmer and God. God will not do what the farmer can do. The farmer must plow and plant. But the farmer must rely on God to cause the sun to shine, the rains to fall, and the fruit to grow. So, we must live in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Here are some things we can do, on our part, to live the Spirit-filled life.

Remember who you are in Christ. By faith, you are a child of God, a new creation, a temple of God, and the Holy Spirit dwells in you. When I’m tempted, I often remind myself, “That’s not who I am, and that’s how I want to live.”

Stay in God’s Word! Romans 12:2 urges us, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” And the way to renew your mind is to stay in God’s word. Psalm 119 says, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word ... Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Psalm 119:9, 11). To be filled with the Spirit and to bear the fruit of the Spirit, you have to stay in God’s word.

Keep praying and talking to God. Stay in constant communication with the Father. The Bible says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7).

Know your enemy and prepare for spiritual battle. “Be alert ... Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). He knows your weaknesses and he knows how to trip you. But the Bible says Jesus “is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18, NAS). “When you are tempted, He will also provide a way out” (1 Corinthians 10:13, NIV).

Avoid tempting situations. If you’re an alcoholic, don’t go to a bar. If you have a problem with materialism, cut up your credit card. If you have a problem with pornography, when your wife goes to bed, your computer goes to bed. Starve your weaknesses by avoiding tempting situations.

Lean on friends who will encourage you and hold you accountable. You cannot grow as a Christian without friends. That’s why we emphasize small groups so much. Life Groups are about having friends who care about you when life is tough and who challenge you to press on in your faith. You won’t make it without friends.

Remember the cross. Live with gratitude for the love and sacrifice of Jesus. The more you love Jesus, the less you will love this world. As the old hymn says, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim.”¹⁵

Rely on the Holy Spirit. “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16, ESV). Willpower is not enough. We need the Holy Spirit. “Walk by the Spirit ... keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25).

Fruit is the natural product of a living thing. The same is true of people as is true of plants. The fruit of a person’s life is proof of the life within. Jesus said, “A good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit.” And then He said, “You shall know them by their fruits.”¹⁶ In other words, the way you live proves what lives in you.

The fruit of the Spirit is proof that *Christ* lives in us. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. What we see in Jesus is what others should see in us.

Again, the way you live proves what lives in you. Therefore, when you look in the mirror, do you see the fruit of the Spirit? When others look at you, do they see the fruit of the Spirit? Do they see the life of Christ in you?

NOTES

¹ See Matthew 7:17-18, 20.

² Galatians 5:1.

³ In Romans 8, Paul warns us that “the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God” (Romans 8:7, ESV). Hear that, “hostile to God.” How foolish to think that we can lean away from God, enjoy a little sin, and it won’t matter. If we don’t get caught, we don’t think it matters. The problem with thinking that is that we forget that God sees and that God is there. The mind set on the flesh is “hostile to God.”

⁴ Charles Stanley, *The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), page 91.

⁵ Per 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, we are in a spiritual battle every day.

⁶ Philippians 4 says, “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8, NAS). Fill your mind with good things and you will do good things.

⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1993, 1994, 1995), Romans 7:25, page 376.

⁸ I believe Paul is talking his Christian life in Romans 7, not his pre-Christian life. He must be a Christian because he has “the desire to do what is good” (Romans 7:18) and because he “delight(s) in God’s law” (Romans 7:22). As theologian John Stott writes, “So here is a man who not only acknowledges the intrinsic goodness of the law, but who loves it, delights in it, longs for it ... This is not the language of the unregenerate.” [John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), page 206.]

⁹ Romans 6 says we are freed from the power of sin. Romans 7 says we will still struggle with sin. And Romans 8 says the Spirit can give us victory over sin.

¹⁰ “No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him ... No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God” (1 John 3:9-10, ESV).

¹¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017), page 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, page 155.

¹³ *Ibid.*, page 104.

¹⁴ Strong’s Greek #4748, TDNT Volume 7, page 666, στοιχέω.

¹⁵ Lyrics from the hymn “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.”

¹⁶ See Matthew 7:17-18, 20.