

The Spiritual Fruit of Freedom

I have really enjoyed staying with you,” said LaVaughn. He was sitting at Ashton’s breakfast nook, finishing his coffee and cinnamon bun. “I feel like I’ve grown spiritually.”

LaVaughn had come to Colorado Springs to visit his old college friend, mainly because he had never been before, and also to meet up with a cousin in Denver.

“First thing in the morning, I hear you playing some kind of Bible recording, then you are watching some minister on YouTube. It really does set the tone for the day. Also, you don’t seem to binge watch television like I do.”

Ashton was conscious of expanding his spiritual appetites. What he found out was the more he filled his life with Christ and godly things, the less time and opportunity he had for other things to pull him away for what he now wanted first and foremost—communion with God.

“You have really grown spiritually,” LaVaughn said. “I wish I could be more like you. You’re almost like a preacher or something.”

“No, I’m not called to preach,” Ashton smiled. “I’m doing more of what Christ wants for all of us, and that is to walk in the Spirit. The more you do it, the more you want to do it. And the more it keeps you, comforts you, and changes you.”

1. *What does it mean to live by the Holy Spirit’s direction?*

2. *Why might people find it difficult to break away from previous lifestyles to fully and freely live by the Spirit?*

3. *What things might we do to practice living by the Spirit?*

Flesh and Spirit in Opposition

Galatians 5:16-18, KJV

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Galatians 5:16-18, NIV

¹⁶So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The threat of the Judaizers was the biggest problem in the Galatian churches, but it was not the only one. Between Galatians 5:16 and 6:10 we see that Paul's readers also had a problem with immorality. Converts coming out of pagan cultures had a difficult time adjusting to Christian morality.

The Greek noun rendered "flesh" is one of the most frequently used words in Paul's vocabulary—it occurs 17 times in Galatians. He associated the term with a number of meanings, including the human body (2:20), but the noun's seven occurrences between 5:13 and 6:8 are all in an ethical context.

By giving "flesh" an ethical meaning, Paul was not implying that the body is evil. Instead, he meant that ever since the Fall, human nature has been corrupt or sinful. Furthermore, Paul often placed the "flesh" in conflict with the "Spirit." That's because when the Spirit comes into a believer's life, He begins transforming that person's nature from one that is dominated by sin to one that desires to please God.

Paul stressed in 5:17 that we may want to do good, but if we follow the dictates of our sinful human nature, we will not do good. We can do good only when we live by

the Spirit. The reason is that (as noted above) our sinful nature and the Spirit are in opposition to one another, and each have incompatible goals. When we are led by the Spirit, we do not do the wickedness prompted by our sinful nature, and neither are we living under the condemnation of the law of Moses (vs. 18).

4. *What does it mean to “walk by the Spirit”?*

5. *In what way is the flesh opposed to the Spirit?*

Works of the Flesh

Galatians 5:19-21, KJV

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21, NIV

¹⁹The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Up until this point in his letter, Paul had talked generally about how wrong it is to indulge one’s sinful nature and how right it is to live by the Spirit. Now, the apostle got specific about what he meant by these two diametrically opposed options, first by describing the negative consequences of giving into the “flesh” (vs. 19).

For instance, when the wayward impulses of one’s fallen human nature are gratified, the results are “obvious.” This probably means that it is plain to see these acts are wrong and spring from the sinful nature.

Paul cataloged 15 ungodly acts to stand for all the ways

people do evil. The representative nature of the list is clarified by his addition of “and the like” at the end (vs. 21).

Paul might not have intended to list the 15 acts of the “flesh” (vs. 19) in any particular order. Nonetheless, they seem to fall into four categories. The list includes three vices of sensuality (sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery), two vices associated with pagan religions (idolatry, witchcraft), eight vices of interpersonal conflict (hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy), and two vices related to the misuse of alcohol (drunkenness, orgies).

Paul warned his readers about the consequences of these sins. As the apostle had told the Galatians earlier when he was with them, those who practiced such things would not “inherit the kingdom of God” (vs. 21). This declaration of Paul indicates that people who continually commit these acts of the sinful nature demonstrate that they are not following Jesus and have no place in His unending kingdom.

6. *What results when the flesh is in control?*

7. *What warning did Paul give to the believers in Galatia?*

Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-26, KJV

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one

Galatians 5:22-26, NIV

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and

another, envying one another. | envying each other.

To balance the inventory of acts of the sinful nature, Paul presented a catalog of godly virtues produced by those who yield their lives to the Spirit. This list, too, is representative rather than exhaustive.

Paul used a singular Greek word for “fruit” (Gal. 5:22). He could have said “fruits,” but he did not. He might have wanted to suggest that the aspects of the “fruit of the Spirit” grow together like a bunch of grapes. They are not separate pieces of “fruit” existing independently of each other. All the elements of the “fruit of the Spirit” should be found in all believers.

“Love” is at the top of the apostle’s list because all the other virtues develop from it. Love is the opposite of the selfishness of the flesh. “Joy” and “peace” follow. Paul then listed “forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Jesus’ followers receive the Spirit when they trust in the Messiah. At the moment of salvation, their sinful nature (in one sense) is “crucified” (vs. 24) or put to death. Because of what Jesus did on the Cross, He sets believers free from the death grip of sin when they believe in Him. However, though believers have the Spirit living in them, they need to consciously let the Spirit lead and empower them. Because the Spirit is the source of every believer’s life, they should allow Him to chart life’s course.

Paul gave a few specific examples of what he did not mean by keeping “in step with the Spirit”: being “conceited,” “provoking” others to anger, and “envying” others (vs. 26). Most likely, these were particular problems among the Galatian believers. They are also some specific kinds of unspiritual behavior that we should avoid.

8. *What results when the Spirit is in control?*

9. *What place does the Cross of Christ have in the lives of believers?*

A Messy Struggle

Two teams stand opposite each other, each player grasping the rope. Perhaps without any obvious signal, one team tugs on the rope. The muddier the playing field, the higher the stakes. The more people on a team, the more force exerted. Many feet trample the mud into a mucky, slippery mess, making it nearly impossible to gain traction and secure footing. Each team strives to drag their opponents down, through the mire, across the line and into their own control. The rough rope frays, with individual fibers tearing into players' hands. An ankle may twist, weakening one with a burst of pain. The struggle is real.

Our struggle against the desires of the flesh is equally real, but more treacherous and with higher stakes. Much of the battle Paul describes begins in the mind, then extends outward to physical actions. Our sinful nature is hostile toward God, resulting in a battle for control.

Finally, one team overcomes the desires of the opposition to win the contest. Players drop their hold on the rope. The strife is over.

In our Christian lives, we walk away from the conflict with the goal to live in harmony, as if we're on the same team with one another. We claim victory over the sinful nature that would drag us down into opposition against all God desires for our lives. When we choose God's team, it's as if we have the strongest player of all at the end of the rope, pulling for us. He'll guide us onto firm footing where we won't easily slip. Living by the Spirit enables us to walk away from the tug of war.

10. *What freedom(s) do we experience when we choose to live by the Spirit?*

11. *Why is the fruit of the Spirit a valuable part of the believer's life?*

12. *What is an area of your life in which you struggle to yield to the Spirit?*

Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit

After Paul listed various types of sinful behaviors that can lead people astray, he listed active virtues that exhibit our willingness to yield control of our lives to the Spirit and follow God's leading. Loving service to others, as demonstrated by these qualities, is the fruit of Christian freedom. Cultivating this fruit in our lives is one way we can live by the Spirit, in step with our new life in Christ.

► *Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit comes easiest for you? Which aspect would you like to ask God to help you cultivate more? Pray about one specific action you can take this week to demonstrate a particular aspect of the fruit of the Spirit.*

KEY VERSE

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

—Galatians 5:25, KJV

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

—Galatians 5:25, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 30 through June 5

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Jeremiah 29:8-14— Babylon's Days Are Numbered.
- Tue.** Psalm 79— Let Your Compassion Come Speedily.
- Wed.** Mark 13:1-13— Persecution Foretold.
- Thu.** Mark 13:28-37— Keep Awake!
- Fri.** Psalm 74:10-23— Rise Up, O God!
- Sat.** Isaiah 47:1-9— The Humiliation of Babylon.
- Sun.** Isaiah 47:10-15— No Security in Wickedness.