

Sunday June 26, 2022
Lesson 4: Life in the Spirit
Scripture: Galatians 5:22-26

Context:

Our focus on life in the Spirit continues with the book of Galatians and dives into other verses of chapter five. However, today's lesson examines what happens when life is lived in the Spirit. Today we will discuss how changes occur in our relationship when we live in the Spirit.

As discussed in last week's lesson, Paul sought to help the Galatian Christians understand life in the Spirit and the freedom given to them by God. The Holy Spirit is given unto Christians so we might be a part of God's work in the kingdom on earth. It is important to note these behaviors of producing fruit are not a works to offer up to God in exchange for an eternal reward. Paul's language, "led by the Spirit," "the fruit of the Spirit," "will from the Spirit reap eternal life," suggests not human abilities to accomplish extraordinary feats which could be acceptable to God, but a simple openness to God's power to redeem and transform.¹ God is the one who is at work in humanity and it is God who gives humanity the opportunity to participate and be given the guidance.

Throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians, he makes clear there is no dualism as God's place remains certain. While there may be the opposition existing between the flesh and the Spirit, Paul still has a view of how the present evil age from which Christ has delivered his people will still need to be reckoned with as the conclusion is certain.² In our modern world, there is often a focus on how the works of those today can determine everything in the lives of individuals and institutions. And yet there is no match for the Spirit as the Spirit will always produce and be at work.

An allusion Paul uses to make his point is an agricultural one. He takes the singular fruit and asserts the fruit of the Spirit as producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This singular nature of fruit is important as it does not insist certain individuals receive one part of the Spirit like spiritual gifts; for example, saying this person has the fruit of love, the other has joy, another has patience, etc. Instead, the list points to how all are part of a life in Christ.

The list is extremely important for the Galatian congregations who are trying to figure out how to do life with one another. There may have been some caught up so much in their convictions, they have forgotten how to love others who are different. Others might feel so passionate they have no self-control about boundaries with others as they assert their will. Others might feel being mean accomplishes their desires and so kindness goes out the window.

Paul closes the section with saying if we live by the Spirit, we should also follow the Spirit. Being arrogant, provoking one another to anger, and being jealous of others is not a life in the Spirit. Instead, we become unsatisfied and discontent with the life and miss where the Spirit could be leading us as a people of God.

¹ Cousar, Charles B. "Galatians," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 138-139.

² *Ibid.* 139.

Application

This past winter and spring I had the privilege and opportunity to teach an Introduction to the New Testament course at Huntingdon College in Montgomery, the alma mater of my parents. One of the most rewarding aspects of the experience was seeing the creativity of the students. For their final project they had the opportunity to create a visual interpretation of a scripture passage including this Galatians passage. One of my students did a phenomenal job as on one side she had “works of the flesh” and included things like people calling each other names, engaging in destructive behavior like drinking too much, and next to idolatry a cell phone (that one stepped on my toes!) On the other side she had the fruit of the Spirit and had all the different fruits you could think of alongside behaviors like encouraging others, saying I forgive you, and being generous. I was blown away. How beautiful to see Galatians and life in the Spirit in such a physical form.

I would hope all of us could make a visual interpretation of this passage and be able to connect what life in the Spirit looks like. The fruit of the Spirit is laid out with powerful words like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law saying there is an end to these kinds of behaviors. As Christians these are behaviors which give us the freedom to not engage with those who try to tempt us otherwise. There is a freedom to being able to say no to the person who wants us to hate or the people who encourage us to act on impulse without thinking of self-control.

As the fruit of the Spirit plays out in our lives, we discover how being arrogant never gets us far. And we also discover seeking to make people angry only ends in heartache as we put ourselves in positions where we have invited a conflict which never should have been a thing. Jealousy only leads to a bitterness and a resentment, so nothing tastes or feels good.

If all of us are honest with ourselves, we will admit we have probably participated in these behaviors before. Sometimes it is intentional and others it is more subtle. This is part of being a human and some of these arise from deeper griefs or longings.

Yet a life in the Spirit should help us to see how these things do not have a master over us and there is a chance to live differently. If in doubt about if one’s behavior belongs in the categories above, there’s a chance you shouldn’t do that behavior. We send the temptations all the time whether it is to show our superiority on Twitter by calling someone out or sending a message to a person to start an argument or being jealous of a person because you think they have unfairly received more in life than you. A life in the Spirit reveals to us how as tempting as these behaviors may be, they are never fruitful.

Just think about the people you truly trust or feel you can be yourself around. As I read this list of the fruit of the Spirit and then the cautionary list in verse sixteen, I begin to think of different people and various situations. People who display fruit of the Spirit give us the space to grow and share with us the gift of life. When we are in conversation with them or we hang out with them, we can feel a change within us. We want to become more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, good, faithful, gentle, and practice self-control when it comes to various components of our lives. We begin to understand more fully the power of Jesus Christ and how his crucifixion showed us the power of love and the gift of the fruit of the Spirit.

Likewise, when I think of people who do not have a life in the Spirit and tend to be proud, eager to pick fights, or those who are easily jealous, I see glimpses of who I do not want to be. We can all probably name those people in our lives. We see how they seed disunity, division, and cast their pain unto others. We see how life without the Spirit can be isolating and lead us to miss out on potential relationships and opportunities for growth. Hopefully, we realize

life in the Spirit offers us a more excellent way to love God, love one another, and love ourselves.

If you could list actions with fruit of the Spirit, what would your list include? Why do you think God gives us the freedom to practice the fruit of the Spirit? Who are people you think who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit? What are times you've not lived life in the Spirit and felt it keenly? How can we exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in our lives today?

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