LED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

A Practical Study of Galatians 5:22–26

Edited by

BILL BAGENTS

HERITAGE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

Led by God's Spirit: A Practical Study of Galatians 5 :22–26

Published by Heritage Christian University

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Led by God's Spirit: a practical study of Galatians 5:22–26 / edited by Bill Bagents

p. cm.

Includes scripture index.

ISBN 978-1-956811-17-9 (pbk.) 978-1-956811-18-6 (ebook)

1. Bible. Galatians V, 22–26—Study and teaching. 2. Fruit of the Spirit—Study and teaching I. Bagents, William Ronald, 1956–, editor. II. Title.

224.1007—dc20

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022919828

Cover design by Brad McKinnon and Brittany Vander Maas.

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Florence, AL 35630

www.hcu.edu

CONTENTS

Bible Abbreviations v

1. SPIRIT OR FLESH 1
An Essential Choice
Jeremy Barrier

2. HOW DOES THE SPIRIT LEAD CHRISTIANS TODAY? 7
Bill Bagents

3. NOT UNDER THE LAW 14
Ed Gallagher

4. THE WORKS OF THE FLESH 23
Joshua Pappas

5. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 34
Love
Michael Jackson

6. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 45
Joy
Bill Bagents

7. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 52
Peace
Nathan Daily

8. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 60
Patience
Thomas Tidwell

9. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 67
Patience
Ismael Berlanga

10. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 72
Kindness
Caleb Sampson

11. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 78
Goodness
Tim Martin

12. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 87
Faithfulness
Robert Mann

13. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 94
Gentleness
Justin Guin

14. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT 102
Self-Control
Wayne Kilpatrick

15. HAVING CRUCIFIED THE FLESH 110
Todd Johnston

Scripture Index 119
Contributors 128
Credits 132
Berean Study Series Titles 135
Forthcoming Berean Study Series Titles 137
Heritage Christian University Press 139

BIBLE ABBREVIATIONS

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Ruth	Ruth
1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel
1–2 Kgs	1–2 Kings
1–2 Chr	1–2 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Esth	Esther
Job	Job
Ps	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Solomon

Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obad	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Rom	Romans
1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1–2 Thess	1–2 Thessalonians
1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
Titus	Titus
Phlm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1–2 Pet	1–2 Peter
1–2–3 John	1–2–3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev	Revelation

1

SPIRIT OR FLESH

An Essential Choice

Jeremy Barrier

Do we walk by the Spirit or by the flesh? What enables us to make this choice? Why does Paul present this choice in such stark (either/or) terms? How do we differentiate the two options? Why can't it be "some of each" or "the best of both"? What happens when we try "some of each"?

FOCUS PASSAGE: GALATIANS 5:16–26

> This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 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. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 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. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

ONE MAIN THING

You reap what you sow.

INTRODUCTION

Every Spring, I have planted a garden for the last three decades. I love summer tomatoes. By far, they are my favorite! There is nothing like fresh tomatoes, lettuce, and hickory smoked bacon on a bun, with a nice slab of mayonnaise to finish it off. There is nothing like it. However, my favorite pastime of the summer (i.e., growing tomatoes) was not always such a wonderful experience. I can still remember my 'first' garden as a young adult, where I killed off everything in the garden with fertilizer. I didn't eat any tomatoes that year! Let's just say that every year has gotten steadily better.

When I read Galatians 5:16–26, several ideas go through my mind, and one of them is planting a garden. This was also one of the ideas in the back of Paul's mind as he wrote this letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 6:7, Paul states "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If you don't tend to your garden, you won't have any produce. In other words, if you put too much fertilizer on

your spiritual garden, you'll kill it too. In Galatians 5, Paul doesn't just have an agricultural metaphor on his mind, he also has a physiological metaphor on his mind. In some instances, he compares the lives of the church to that of a human body (e.g., 1 Cor 12). This is what he is doing in chapter five of Galatians. Let's go deeper.

GOING DEEPER

One doesn't have to look too deeply into Paul's letter to the Galatian churches to realize that the specific passage under consideration comes near to the end of the letter. In other words, to use an example from modern sports, it is like tuning into the football game halfway through the fourth quarter. It doesn't mean that you cannot understand the situation or the outcomes, however, the foundations have already been laid, and Paul is laying the entire issue to rest at this point in chapter five. Therefore, a word or two explaining the 'how' we arrived at 'works of the flesh' vs. 'fruit of the spirit' might be in order. Consider the following.

The apostle Paul, an early Christian and emissary to Jesus the Christ in the middle of the first century wrote a letter to several churches of Galatia (i.e., *Galatians*), a Roman province that was located in central Turkey. This letter represents a response by the apostle to a situation that was unfolding in Galatia where the non-Jewish males of their congregations had made the decision that implementing the Jewish rite of circumcision (Gal 5:1–3; Gen 17) would—somehow—draw them closer to God and to their beloved community. To the modern ear, this situation sounds 'odd', yet not so in the first century.

Unpacking all of the details of such a situation is not

important for our purposes here, but rather to simply say that Paul wholeheartedly disagreed with their reasoning. In other words, Paul understood the Galatians to be moving away from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ if they moved forward with their decision. So what should they do? Embrace the message of Christ and henceforth embrace the Spirit of Christ. Of course, this moves us up to chapter five, where Paul has already concluded most of his arguments and ideas to persuade his audience to listen to him. At this point, he is simply trying to reinforce their decision to follow in the way of Christ. Therefore, Paul's appeal in chapter five is for the Galatians to evaluate the situation, not only in their minds, but also through an examination of their lives. In short, true followers of Christ living in the Spirit will demonstrate certain behaviors in their life. This is what we call the fruit of the Spirit. Again, the reference to 'fruit' implies the obvious: trees and gardens should produce fruit if they are successful!

There is yet one last feature in this passage that sometimes seems confusing to readers. This is where we go back to the idea mentioned above that Paul is comparing the life of the church to the workings of a human body. In this metaphor, the two key ideas are "spirit" and "flesh." In short, the word "spirit" can also be translated as "breath" or even "wind." However, translating this word as "breath" here will probably help us to see it most clearly. We are thinking about a human body, described as "flesh," while it needs "breath" to be alive. This is similar to what we first see in Genesis 2:7, where Adam's body is made "flesh" first from the earth, but it is not until God breathes into the body that Adam lives. Such is the "spirit/breath" of God in the life of the Christian also (2 Tim 3:16–17). In other

words, people who follow in the true path of God will have God's 'breath' within them, and it is visible! In other words, you can see the actions of love, joy, peace, etc. However, if one lacks the presence of God in their life, then this is no more than the formed body of Adam from dirt into flesh, but still lying there lifeless and needing God to intervene to give him life.

APPLICATION

In essence, the imagery of "works of the flesh" versus "fruit of the Spirit" seems rather clear and obvious. What level of commitment do we want to make to God? It is simply not God's desire for us to fulfill rituals of faith (e.g., attending worship, taking the Lord's Supper, etc.), if it means that there is no substantial change in our day-to-day lives. We are not being transformed! People often forget that Christianity is not a philosophy per-say. In other words, it is not solely a way of thinking. Following Christ is a practice. It is a 'doing.' Therefore, the real test is to sit down and look at the ideals that Paul has presented to the Galatians to consider. A close examination can be extremely challenging and confrontational to us all when we compare ourselves to the vices and virtues mentioned in the list. While we realize that Paul developed this specific list for his central Anatolian audience in Galatia—including some interesting vices (e.g., sorcery!)—let's not get lost in these oddities and forget that it can still challenge us today. Who doesn't struggle with some of these vices? Who doesn't need to improve their joy? Who hasn't struggled with "wrath"? These lists are two beautiful lists for us to consider today.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, whenever we are facing any struggles as a church, a good place to begin is to ask whether or not we are reaping what we sow! Are we planting a spirit of love within our communities? Or a spirit of wrath? Do we foster "joy"? These are the characteristics of the faith that Paul was encouraging the Galatians to consider. I think churches today would likewise benefit by offering up this simple test for themselves.

DISCUSSION

1. What are the specific "works of the flesh" mentioned in Galatians 5? What do they mean?
2. What are the specific "fruits of the Spirit" mentioned in Galatians 5? What do they mean?
3. If we—as local congregations—were to compare ourselves to the vices and virtues in this list, how do we stack up? What areas are we excelling in? What areas need improvement?
4. If I were to use this list personally, are there ways I can improve in my walk with God? How might my improvement benefit the church as a whole?

2

HOW DOES THE SPIRIT LEAD CHRISTIANS TODAY?

Bill Bagents

FOCUS PASSAGE

Galatians 5:25, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

ONE MAIN THING

The Holy Spirit leads, comforts, and strengthens all who walk in step with truth.

INTRODUCTION

Galatians 5:16–26, Ephesians 4:17–24, and Colossians 3:1–17 clearly document that every Christian is in a spiritual war. Though we have been given life by grace through faith (Eph 2:1–10) and though we have been made children of God by faith when we put on Christ in baptism (Gal 3:26–27), the war continues. The flesh intends to win, but God commands that we walk in, be led by, live by, and keep in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:16,18, 26).

While the paragraph above is true, the spiritual war didn't start with the coming of Jesus or the birth of His church. It began with the fall of Satan, continued in the fall of humanity, manifests through the course of Scripture, and will persist as long as this world stands. Without God's amazing assistance, it's a war that no person wins.

When Galatians 5:25 begins, "If we live by the Spirit," it is not presenting an option for disciples of Christ. "If" in this case means "since" or "because." It acknowledges spiritual reality. There is no other path to or manner of spiritual life. Romans 8 powerfully documents this truth. It is the "the law of the Spirit of life" that sets Christians "free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2). "To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom 8:6). Only "those who lie according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit" (Rom 8:7, Col 3:1–4). Only those who are "in the Spirit" and in whom the Spirit of God dwells belong to Him (Rom 8:9). The very Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in and gives life to the faithful followers of Jesus (Rom 8:11). "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Rom 8:14). Romans 8:1–14 and Galatians 5:16–26 fit hand in glove in documenting the power and victory of life in the Spirit.

There may be many questions regarding how Christians are led by the Spirit, but there can be no doubt that we must be led by God's Spirit in order to please Him. There is no life apart from the Spirit.

GOING DEEPER

Galatians 5:16–26 clearly describes polar opposites. We can walk in the Spirit and reject the desires of the flesh, or we

can resist (quench, reject) the Spirit and live for this world. "The desires of the flesh war against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other ..." (Gal 5:17). Scripture offers no option for comingling. Bluntly, those who embrace the works of the flesh "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:21). "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24). There are but two options, and their outcomes stand in stark contrast.

Galatians 5:16–26 reflects the nuance, subtlety, and balance of spiritual reality. While "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires," those desires and passions don't want to stay dead. They rear their ugly heads in the weakest of moments and in the darkest of manners. This truth is mirrored in Ephesians 4 (See also Col 3:1–17). Though the Ephesian Christians were "saints ... faithful in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:1), though they enjoyed "redemption through his [Christ's] blood (Eph 1:7), and though they "were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph 2:13), Paul still commanded them, "... You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds" (Eph 4:17). He commanded them (and us) "to put off [to continually put off] your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt ..." (Eph 4:22). On the glowingly happy side of life, he also urged, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24).

One biblical answer to "How does the Holy Spirit lead Christians today?" is that He leads us to align our lives with God's truth. He leads us to reject the values and

behaviors of this world in favor of godliness (1 John 2:15–17, Col 1:5, Titus 2:11–12). He calls all Christians to "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election" (2 Pet 1:10). He urges us "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called ..." (Eph 4:1). It's the Spirit-inspired word of God that urges us to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16), be "led by the Spirit" (Gal 5:18), and "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:26).

Another biblical response to "How does the Holy Spirit lead Christians today?" flows essentially from the paragraph above. Within the word of God, the Spirit identifies works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. He identifies in lists of attitudes and behaviors, as well as offering examples through the stories of both faithful and unrighteous people (Consider Absalom, Balaam, Cain, David, Elijah, etc).

"How does the Holy Spirit lead Christians today?" He reminds us that God does not lead us without our consent and cooperation. Would Paul have written "walk by the Spirit" if we had no choice, no responsibility, no role to play? Would he have commanded "keep in step with the Spirit" if that were not within our ability to pursue?

"How does the Holy Spirit lead Christians today?" We think of Deuteronomy 6:1–9, Proverbs 1:8–9 and 22:6, Ephesians 6:1–4, and 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:14–17. By creating, sustaining, and empowering families, God stacks the deck in favor of Christian character and faithful living. This principle of modeling and mentoring extends to those within our spiritual family (1 Cor 11:1 and 16:15–16, Phil 3:17, 2 Tim 1:13 and 3:10, Heb 13:7). The Holy Spirit strongly endorses the show-and-tell approach to growing in Christ.

"How does the Holy Spirit lead Christians today?"

Surely God's providence and laws of cause and effect play a role. From the stories of Joseph and Esther, we see "ordinary" people lean into extraordinary opportunities to save entire nations. Our stories may never be as dramatic or impactful, but when we look back on times of growth, service, and deliverance, we know nothing to do except thank the Lord and give glory to His name.

APPLICATION

A major application of the fact that God's Spirit still leads Christians today is to avoid foolish extremes. On one dangerous edge is denying that God offers any current aid to His children. On the other is asserting that the Holy Spirit could ever in any way lead a person to contradict the Spirit-inspired word. 1 John 4:1 remains exceedingly helpful: "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." Testing demands an authoritative standard, and only the Bible fully qualifies.

Jesus's letters to the seven churches offers another strong application. To each church, He said, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29 and 3:8, 13, 27). When God speaks, we need to listen as if our very souls were at stake!

A most happy application is to take heart from the fact that God's Spirit leads the faithful (Acts 5:32). Acts 9:31b describes time of joy and peace for the church in the days after Saul's conversion: "And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." Exploring the means through which the Spirit offers comfort to the church is a most worthy endeavor.

Of course the most obvious application has been

offered above. Follow the leading of the Spirit to root sin out of our lives. Embrace holiness and sanctification. "Do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). Keep crucifying "the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24). Rather than giving in to sin, joyfully live in the Spirit by cultivating and celebrating the fruit of the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

This side of heaven, we may never know all the ways that the Spirit of grace leads, helps, blesses, and protects us. But we know more than enough to be eternally grateful. God has not left us to sink or swim without His loving aid.

We dare not move to autopilot, foolishly telling ourselves, "Since God's got this, there's nothing more for me to do." God gives us the marvelous blessing of allowing us to work with Him in the saving of souls—including our own (Phil 2:12). He challenges us to the lofty goal of seeking to be holy like Him. And He blesses every godly effort and victory.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think the prospect of being led by the Spirit frightens some Christians? Why might some find it scary or intimidating?
2. What are the dangers of overreacting to those who think God's Spirit leads Christians in ways or to degrees not taught within Scripture?
3. Why would any Christian resist or reject the leading of God's Spirit?

4. In what ways or through what means could a person resist the Spirit of God (Luke 7:30, Acts 6:10 and 7:51, 1 Thess 5:19)?
5. What is the relationship between our obedience and the leading of God's Spirit? Consider Acts 5:32 as you answer.

3

NOT UNDER THE LAW

Ed Gallagher

FOCUS PASSAGE

Galatians 5:18

ONE MAIN THING

Paul in Galatians argues that through Christ believers are liberated from the law and are led by the Spirit to fulfill the law.

INTRODUCTION

In Genesis, God commanded Abraham to ensure that "Every male among you shall be circumcised" (Gen 17:10). This "sign of the covenant between me and you" (17:11) should be kept "throughout your generations" (17:12), and it applied to even those not born into the family but acquired in some other way (17:12–13). The commandments delivered to the people by Moses also stipulated that every eight-day old baby Israelite boy should be circumcised

(Lev 12:3), and any uncircumcised person could not celebrate the Passover (Exod 12:44, 48). While the Old Testament does not mention circumcision much beyond these references (a key exception is Josh 5), it is clear that the males of the family of Abraham had to be circumcised or risk being cut off from the people (Gen 17:14).

According to the apostle Paul, there are children of Abraham (Gal 3:29) who do not need to be circumcised (5:2)—or, rather, who will find themselves cut off from the family of Abraham if they are circumcised (5:4). These people do not need circumcision because they belong to Christ (3:29). In fact, "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything" (5:6; cf. 6:15; 1 Cor 7:19; Rom 2:25–29).

This insistence on Paul's part makes it sound like he believes his readers are not obligated to keep the Torah. Indeed, Paul asserts that "if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law" (5:18). This statement comes after a couple verses contrasting the Spirit and the flesh (5:16–17), and the letter before this point has already taught us to associate the law with the flesh (cf. 3:3; 4:23, 29). Christians should be led by the Spirit because they are children of God, and "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (4:6).

And yet, Paul can also say in this same letter that those who are circumcised do not keep the law (6:13), but that the law is fulfilled in a single command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14; cf. Lev 19:18)—certainly a command that Paul expects the Galatians to feel bound to obey. While these Galatian Christians are not under the law, they do fulfill the law.

GOING DEEPER

What is this law that Paul keeps talking about? The Greek word is *nomos* (νόμος), which is the word used in the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament—for the Hebrew word *torah*. This Hebrew word is now (and for many centuries) used as the title for the first five books of the Bible, the Torah of Moses or Pentateuch. But *torah* could also refer to Scripture as a whole, the entire Old Testament; such a usage of *torah* or *nomos* appears both in the New Testament (John 10:34; Gal 3:10; 1 Cor 14:21) and in rabbinic literature.[1] Then again, the word *torah* could refer specifically to the law code in the Pentateuch (see, e.g., Rom 2:13; Gal 6:13). As Stephen Westerholm asserts, "Paul sometimes uses 'law' (νόμος) to mean the Old Testament Scriptures, or more specifically the Pentateuch. But according to his most frequent usage, 'law' refers to the Sinaitic legislation."[2]

The word *nomos* appears 194 times in the New Testament, and 32 times in Galatians, second only to Romans (74x). The first appearance of *nomos* in Galatians provides a helpful entrypoint.

> ... yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law (Gal 2:16).

Paul's burden in this letter is to disassociate justification from works of law. While it is difficult to know much about Paul's opponents in this letter, they seem to be

(probably Jewish-)Christian missionaries who encouraged the Galatians to be circumcised and to observe other commands in the Jewish Torah, probably with the view that Torah observance marked one out as belonging to God.[3] Given this background, we can relate "law" here specifically to Torah (an equation we can probably make throughout the letter). Paul attempted to disassociate justification from works of Torah, "for if justification comes through the Torah, then Christ died for nothing" (2:21); and "no one is justified before God by the Torah" (3:11); and "You who want to be justified by the Torah have cut yourselves off from Christ" (5:4).

Paul sometimes says in this letter some rather negative things about the Torah, things that were no doubt shocking to some of his contemporaries. The Torah was added because of transgressions (3:19), not only to highlight the problem of sin but apparently even to intensify the problem. The authority of the Torah was temporary, merely a tutor to lead us to Christ (3:24–25). The Torah in a sense imprisoned us (3:23), but now we are freed through Christ. Indeed, the Torah is a kind of enslaver (4:1, 21–31; 5:1).

It is no wonder that Paul considers it good news to inform Christians that they are not "under the Torah," a phrase he uses eleven times in his letters. While Jews are under the Torah (1 Cor 9:20; cf. Gal 3:23; 4:4–5), those who believe in Christ are not (Rom 6:14–15; Gal 5:18), just as Paul does not consider himself to be (1 Cor 9:20). Paul wrote his letter to the Galatian Christians in order to explain this fact to some who wanted to be under the Torah (Gal 4:21).

Not being "under the Torah" means that Christians are not obligated to keep the commands of the Sinaitic law

code. (Even those "under the Torah" do not do the Torah, as both Paul [Rom 3:10–20] and Jesus [John 7:19] assert.) Sometimes Paul mentions specific commands that Christians do not need to observe, such as the circumcision command—as we have seen—but also food laws (Rom 14:14) and holy days (Rom 14:5–6). But in our focus passage for this entire study (Gal 5:13–26), Paul surely has more in view than just these ritual commands (or boundary markers, marking off Jews from Gentiles) when he says (5:18) that Christians are not "under the Torah." Paul, in fact, never says that Christians "do" or "perform" the laws of the Torah,[4] and Paul does not direct his Christian readers to the Torah in the context of laying down Christian ethical demands, such as avoiding idolatry and sexual immorality (e.g., 1 Cor 6:12–20; 10:14–22; 1 Thess 4:3–8). The only exception is Paul's quoting the Fourth Commandment, "honor your father and mother" (Eph 6:1–3; cf. 1 Cor 9:9; 14:34; 1 Tim 5:18). The Torah is holy (Rom 7:12) and provides a guide for Christian ethics (cf. 1 Cor 5:1–13; 10:1–14; Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16–17) but is not binding on Christians.

This was the point driven home by Alexander Campbell in 1816 in his famous "Sermon on the Law," a sermon that, he says, essentially drove him toward the path of what became the American Restoration Movement.[5] He insisted on jettisoning as unscriptural the old distinction between moral laws and civil laws and ceremonial laws in the Torah, with the idea that Christians were still obliged to keep the moral laws.[6] In churches of Christ, the insistence that we look to the New Testament for instructions binding on Christians rather than to the Old Testament has been an essential element of "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).[7]

And yet, Campbell—who delivered a series of chapel speeches on the Pentateuch that were later published[8]—would not agree with the statement sometimes made about churches of Christ (not only by those outside our churches) that we do not consider the Old Testament authoritative. I wish to make a distinction between authority, on the one hand, and binding, on the other. In saying that the Mosaic legislation is not binding on Christians, I also want to uphold the truth of 2 Timothy 3:16–17, which I think we can do by keeping before us these commonly agreed principles: (1) we are not saved by adherence to the laws of the Torah; (2) from the laws of the Torah can be derived principles that can guide our ethical practice (e.g., care for the poor) in harmony with principles broadly attested in Scripture (e.g., mercy, compassion, justice); (3) the laws of the Torah reveal to us something about the character of our God, including His justice, holiness, and mercy.[9]

APPLICATION

According to Paul, Christians are not "under the Torah" but they do "fulfill the Torah." The apostle makes such a claim in three passages.

> the just requirement of the Torah might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom 8:4).

> Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the Torah. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not

> covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the Torah (Rom 13:8–10).
>
> For the whole Torah is fulfilled in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal 5:14).

We've seen that Christians do not "do" the commandments of the Torah, but Paul says that those led by the Spirit "fulfill" the Torah, specifically by concentrating on a single one of its commandments, the very one Jesus highlighted as the second greatest commandment (Matt 22:34–40), the one found in Leviticus 19:18 and enjoining love of neighbor. Whereas the Torah itself threatened punishment on the disobedient but even so was not able to penetrate the stony hearts of those who fell under its obligations, those led by the Spirit serve God not out of fear but out of love through the Spirit of Christ who now dwells within them. We do not concentrate on the flesh and its works (things regulated by the commands of the Torah) but being led by the Spirit we participate with the Spirit in producing the fruit—note how each one of the fruit in Galatians 5:22–23 are aspects of Leviticus 19:18—that allows us to fulfill the righteous requirement of the Torah.

CONCLUSION

Christians are no longer under the law but are instead "under grace" (Rom 6:14)—which might sound as if the gospel includes no ethical demands. Paul immediately

rejects such an inference with a characteristic, "God forbid!" (6:15). The same ideas play out in Romans 8, but now with the language of the Spirit guiding Christians. This is the language Paul uses in Galatians 5, as he contrasts the life in the Spirit from the life under the law. Being freed from the law's demands is liberating for the believer precisely because the Spirit's guidance allows us to fulfill the requirements of the law out of love for our saving God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What positive role does the Torah play in the life of the Christian?
2. What point does Paul want to stress about the Torah by his phrase "not under law"? Why would the Galatians need to hear this message?
3. What does Paul mean about "fulfilling" the law? Is this different from "doing" the law?
4. Since Christians are not "under the law," are Christians a lawless people? What principle determines Christian ethics if it is not the law?
5. Is it easier or harder to be a follower of Jesus than to be "under the law"?

ENDNOTES

[1] Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 116–26.

[2] Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 2004), 297, and see the fuller argument on pp. 298–300. Westerholm further argues (pp. 335–40) that Paul's use of the Greek word *nomos* corresponds to the use of the Hebrew term *torah* among Hebrew-speakers. The word *nomos* could also be used in a more general way (cf. Rom 7:21); see the first definition in Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 677–78.

[3] John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 73–93.

[4] See Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New*, 433–37. This statement, as Westerholm says, assumes that Paul does not have Christians in mind in Romans 2:14–15.

[5] Alexander Campbell, "Sermon on the Law," *Millennial Harbinger* (September 1846), 493–521.

[6] Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New*, 437, agrees with Campbell, though he also points at that Paul hints at something like a distinction between moral and ceremonial laws in Romans 2:25–29.

[7] See, for instance, the sermons under this title by N. B. Hardeman, *Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons*, vol. 1 (1922; repr. Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman University, 1990).

[8] Alexander Campbell, *Familiar Lectures on the Pentateuch* (Cincinnati: Bosworth, 1867).

[9] For more on the role that the laws of the Torah can play in Christianity, see Ed Gallagher, *The Book of Exodus: Explorations in Christian Theology* (Florence, AL: HCU Press, 2020), 161–94; Ed Gallagher, *The Sermon on the Mount: Explorations in Christian Practice* (Florence, AL: HCU Press, 2021), 51–63.

4

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

Joshua Pappas

FOCUS PASSAGE

Galatians 5:19–21

ONE MAIN THING

In Galatians 5, Paul warns readers of the consequences of living a lifestyle in step with the sinful rebellion of this present fallen world (Gal 1:4). He provides a **representative** list of "works" that characterize the sinful way of life. The obvious response to the text is to test our works against the list. If the comparison condemns us, we must repent, choosing to keep in step with the Spirit's leading from now on. While the Holy Spirit certainly leads us providentially, such leading is not easily recognizable with any certainty until after the fact. The clear path of His leading flows through the written word. Those whose hearts are changed by the word will not continue to do the works of the flesh. The consequences for impenitently

living according to the works of the flesh are clear. Those who do won't inherit the kingdom of God.

INTRODUCTION

There's a wonderful time in parents' lives when their children want to grow up to be just like them. I'm pretty sure one of the reasons parents like to take pictures and videos of their kids is to get photographic evidence of this. There are pictures of me as a boy stomping around the house in my dad's boots and of me pushing a little toy lawnmower a safe distance behind him while he mowed the lawn. I know those are precious memories for my parents. I remember when my two sons wanted to grow up to be just like me. They loved to stand up on a chair behind the pulpit after church services and pretend to preach.

Somewhere along the way things change. Adolescence happens. Experiences vary, but at some point, most kids stop wanting to be just like their parents, and some decide they don't want to be anything like them at all. Then things change again as we live the grownup life. As we travel through life, we often find ourselves saying things our parents used to say, doing things the way they used to do them—basically, turning into our parents. We might as well have a sense of humor about it because there's no escaping it.

Good children love their parents and good parents love their children. This Divinely originated order of things creates a powerful circle of influence and imitation. When it goes the way God intends, parents teach and model the Faith and their children become like them, making their parents' faith their own during the transition into adulthood (Prov 22:6). Then, with God's blessing, they repeat

the process for another generation. The influence of family is powerful. The influence of community is powerful. Our environments wield a constant influence on us, and it's all powerful. We'd be fools to deny it. If the influences are good and godly, it's likely all will be well. On the other hand, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'" (1 Cor 15:33 ESV). Not even the best parents can fully shield their children from every evil influence. Somehow, some way, all of us who live long enough to grow up fulfill Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We find that our flesh, created good and born pure, has been corrupted; we find ourselves tempted to do the works of the flesh rather than bear the fruit of the Spirit.

GOING DEEPER

We're born into this world innocent (Ezek 18:20; Matt 19:14; Rom 7:9). As newborns, all our human needs and desires are already built into our natures. We begin life trying to get our needs met and desires granted the only way we know how: screaming, crying, and throwing temper tantrums. None of this is initially a serious concern or sinful in any way. We don't know any better. We just need training, teaching, discipline—to be raised up to realize life is more than just getting our own needs and desires met however we can (Mark 12:30–31; Eph 6:1–4). None of it is *initially* serious, but when enough time has passed that we should have learned better than to throw fits, selfishness becomes something quite serious, and when we reach accountability, sinful.

The Bible teaches us there are two paths; one path leads to life, the other to death (Deut 30:19–20; Prov 14:12;

Jer 21:8; Matt 7:13–14). This is no false dichotomy; there is no third way. In Galatians 5, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul describes these two paths as walking "by the Spirit" vs. gratifying "the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16–17). Flesh is not inherently sinful. There's nothing wrong with having a body with needs and desires. Jesus took on the same kind of flesh we have when He became human (John 1:14). However, the tendency to allow our fleshly desires to be enticed by evil and corrupted (Eph 4:22; 2 Pet 1:4) is so universal (only Jesus has managed to fully resist it —Heb 4:15), the phrase, "the flesh," became a symbol of sinful human rebellion against God (Rom 7:5, 14, etc.). When Paul uses the phrase, "the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16–17), he means lust, pride, dishonesty, selfishness —all the base motivations a person can think of that lead to sin. The "works of the flesh" are the fruits or results of these evil motives. If you find your life being characterized by these "works" listed in Galatians 5:19–21, you're on the wrong path.

These verses list fifteen evil works, but the list isn't exhaustive. Paul follows it with the phrase, "and things like these," which obligates us to pray for the wisdom to recognize when we may be doing something not specifically mentioned, but which flows from the same fleshly motives as the things that are.

The biblical text says, "The works of the flesh are evident" (Gal 5:19a). "Evident." What does Paul mean by evident? He means these works are evidently evil. They are contrary to God's moral nature and, as such, will never characterize the lives of those trained by His Spirit. Sadly, it is evident many people in our world do not recognize the works of the flesh as evil. Many in the world practice the works as "politics as usual." It's sad, but sadder still is

the fact that even believers sometimes do these evil works. Here's a warning to us all to open our eyes and consider the list that follows and compare it to our lives with keen introspection.

To provide simplicity and clarity, it will be helpful to list the works of the flesh one by one as bullet points. This list is based on the ESV (English Standard Version). A transliteration of the original Greek word for each work is in parentheses.

- "Sexual immorality" (*porneia*) kicks off the ugly list. It refers to any kind of fornication. Fornication is the sin of practicing unauthorized sexual activity. It includes premarital and extramarital sex of any kind. It also includes willfully indulging in lustful thoughts in one's mind and utilizing pornography in any way. The only sexual activity authorized by God is that between a husband and his wife that is both consensual and harmless.
- "Impurity" (*akatharsia*) is moral impurity in one's behavior or motives. Because impurities come in many forms, it's simpler to define what purity is than to define all the ways one can be impure. If something is pure, it's wholly one thing: undiluted, unmixed, untainted. One who is impure is of mixed spiritual motives resulting in hypocrisy. This may be someone who regularly assembles with the church, but whose life is characterized by sin, or it may refer to a church member who gives little thought to God at all Monday–Saturday, in other words,

someone who is impenitently worldly-minded while also claiming to be a Christian. See Rom 1:24, 2 Cor 12:21, and Eph 4:19.

- "Sensuality" (*aselgeia*) may be alternately translated, licentiousness or wantonness. It means lacking moral restraint, especially regarding sexual or sexually suggestive behavior.
- "Idolatry" (*eidololatrea*) is literally image worship but allowing anything to become more important in one's life than God is practical idolatry. See Rom 1:25 and Col 3:5.
- "Sorcery" (*pharmakeia*) is the practice of any kind of magic or witchcraft. The Greek word is the one from which we derive our English word, pharmacy. This has led some believers to the unfortunate belief that the Bible regards any use of drugs or medication as sinful. Not so. Luke was "the beloved physician" (Col 4:14). The legitimate medicinal use of anything is innocent. Paul commanded Timothy to "use a little wine for the sake of [his] stomach and [his] frequent ailments" (1 Tim 5:23). Translators have correctly rendered the word as "sorcery," because, despite the way we use the English cognate, the kind of concoctions included under the heading of this Greek term were those crafted as if to have magical powers, often by invoking the power of evil spirits. The practice of any kind of magic or occultism is sinful. We trust in God's willingness to answer our prayers, and in His promises, not in spells.
- "Enmity" (*echthrai*) means hatred, being an enemy, hostility, and so on. It refers to someone

who tends to be "on edge" or a habitual faultfinder.

- "Strife" (*eris*) refers to quarrelling, being argumentative, or a troublemaker.
- "Jealousy" (*zelos*), as used here, is improper zeal for something prized or desired, being selfishly possessive or controlling.
- "Fits of anger" (*thumoi*) refers to ferocity, uncontrolled wrath, temper fits. It literally means "outbursts of anger," or "temper tantrums/fits."
- "Rivalries" (*eritheai*) refers to intrigue, factions, scheming, and power-politics. Take note of 2 Cor 4:2. Any backroom dealing, underhanded ways, or manipulation of practices or policies behind others' backs is unchristian. If you can't promote it openly, don't promote it at all.
- "Dissentions" (*dichostasiai*) means disunion, divisions, or partisan and contentions quarrelling.
- "Divisions" comes from the Greek word from which we get our English cognate, "heresy" (*hairesis*). It applies to sects and sectarianism. It is the practice of dividing into opposing parties. Denominationalism is the practical result in Christendom of this work of the flesh.
- "Envies" (*pthonoi*) refers to ill will or spite, which flows from pride, self-pity, and/or a sense of entitlement. It is the motive behind covetousness.
- "Drunkenness" (*methai*) is literally "strong drink," but by implication means intoxication here. Drunkenness is sinful. So is becoming

intoxicated by any other chemical substance as indicated by the phrase, "and things like these."

- "Orgies" (*komoi*) refers to carousing, reveling, rioting, "letting loose" to over-indulge any lust.
- Finally, the list concludes with the phrase, "and things like these" (*homoia toutois*). The Bible doesn't have to specifically condemn recreational heroin use for it to be sinful. The stuff is more intoxicating than strong drink. The Holy Spirit through Paul expects Spirit-led believers to use common sense.

APPLICATION

It needs saying that enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy are all works associated with selfish ambition and the will to win in competition against others rather than to be a Christlike servant of and blessing to them. Don't misunderstand, a little friendly competition in life can be a good thing. Competing to win the best prizes at the end of each quarter in Bible class was a blessing to my childhood. It motivated me to do my lesson, bring my Bible to class, and learn my memory verses.

However, competition can easily become unfriendly. People have their senses of self-worth destroyed every day because they cannot compete against "gifted" individuals. Gifted individuals led by the Spirit must not fail to recognize their responsibilities to help bear the burdens of the weak (Gal 6:2). Even when doctrinal disagreements arise in the church, true Christians cannot lose their tempers, form divisions (or factions, NASB, NET), and split churches with the Lord's approval (John 17:20, 23; 1 Cor

1:10). The New Testament proves Paul maintained a direct, personal, good-fellowship relationship with the church at Corinth for about fifteen years, constantly working on the many problems in that church, both doctrinal and practical. He first came to the city around AD 51 and was still in fellowship with the church when he was executed in the mid-60s. None of us have the right to write a church off as hopelessly unhealthy unless we've spent at least as much time as Paul did trying to help it.

Please recognize Galatians 5 does not set up a system of works-based salvation. It exposes as futile the attempts many around us make to work their ways up into the likeness of God. If we approach the Faith as a system of salvation through our works, the works of the flesh is what we will produce. The "works of the flesh" are simply what the flesh, fallen and selfish as it is in this present age, produces on its own. Without God's help the flesh can do nothing else (Rom 7:18–8:5). Galatians 5 teaches us not to try to live self-guided lives, but to reject self-leadership in favor of the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Through prayerful, Spirit-guided study, we will learn to obey the will of our Father and good fruit will increasingly characterize our lives as we become more and more like our Savior.

CONCLUSION

In Galatians 5, Paul warns readers of the consequences of living a lifestyle in step with the sinful rebellion of this present fallen world (Gal 1:4). The **representative** list of "works of the flesh" teaches us the kinds of thing people living in sin do. If you do these things impenitently, you're living in sin, simple as that. Test your works against the list. If the comparison condemns, repent; keep in step

with the Spirit's leading from now on. The consequences for impenitently living according to the works of the flesh are clear. Those who do won't inherit the kingdom of God.

It's heartwarming to watch a little boy try to be like daddy or a little girl, her mama. It can be heartbreaking to learn older children want nothing of the sort. It's fascinating to hear and see our parents in ourselves as we age. However, the point of it all is that we're God's children and ought to want to grow up to be like Him (Eph 5:1). There's nothing wrong with being an adolescent, but we must reject a *spiritual adolescence* that wants to be nothing like God. This is a major point of Galatians 5:16–26. It's about choosing to follow God rather than our own drives, desires, or instincts. As we follow Him, He changes us, shapes us, produces fruit in and through us. It's His fruit, not ours; it's the fruit *of* the Spirit.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Spiritually speaking, how many paths through life are there? Can you list a few Scriptures that support your answer?
2. Since the phrase, "and things like these," lets us know the list of works is representative, how might we determine if something not specifically mentioned is the same kind of thing? Make a list of contemporary behaviors not specifically mentioned in the text that you believe are also works of the flesh. If studying with a group, discuss and test each others' lists.

3. Is there anything wrong with being a child, adolescent, or grownup? Discuss what the illustration about spiritual adolescence means.
4. What is the ultimate consequence of living a life that produces the works of the flesh?

5

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Love

Michael Jackson

FOCUS PASSAGE

Galatians 5:22–23

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

ONE MAIN THING

All the superhero analogies in the world cannot adequately represent the power that you have within you. That power probably isn't what you think it is.

INTRODUCTION

If you could have anything in the world, what would you want the most?

We all would answer that question a little bit differently. For a lot of us, the answer would be some possession

that would bring us happiness—a house, a car, or some special item that is out of our reach financially. Some might desire a certain job or position of authority and power.

For others, this question can reach deep down into the soul and bring out a much more powerful desire—the desire for better health, for a loved one who has passed on, or for the chance to correct a mistake made years ago that led to consequences that could not be anticipated at the moment.

The things that we want change throughout life. I can remember a time when the only thing I ever wanted was the newest video game console. As an adult, I laugh at how shortsighted that dream was. As the child with the dream, there wasn't anything bigger to wish for. Age is one contributor to changes in our wants, but life itself can change them in major ways as well. A diagnosis can shift all of life into a new paradigm of desire that couldn't have been considered before. A mistake can change relationships in ways that are hard to overcome. A loss of a loved one can shake the foundations of our identity and shift the focus of our wants and desires.

Imagine if someone granted you the power to make wishes come true. You could be a modern-day "genie" and grant everyone one wish. The restoration of health, the biggest house they could dream of, a change in some great life mistake, or any number of other wishes people asked for. You would be a popular person. You'd make the world a better place and bring happiness to everyone you'd meet. You'd revolutionize a lot of people's lives and be the apple of everyone's eye.

But, I wonder, if, in the end, you'd really have made any difference at all. Like the child who grows up and has new

wants, wouldn't everyone whose wish was granted move on to have different wants and wishes later? For instance, if you granted me health, then wouldn't I want something else? If you granted me a great house, then wouldn't I want some things to go with it? Would the granting of one wish be substantial enough to bring true happiness to all the billions of people in life that seem to be seeking happiness as the end goal of their existence?

And yet, many of us live in a constant cycle of chasing our wants and providing for the wants of others. We try to become our own "wish granters" by pursuing the things that bring us temporary pleasure. Some of us are more noble-minded and take this same approach to try to grant the wishes of our children or friends or some other group of people that we hold closely.

But, what if I was to ask you a different question: if you NEED ONE THING in this world, what do you need? How would you answer that question? Are we capable of knowing what we need most out of anything in this world?

What's funny is that oftentimes we think we know what we need, when in reality, those things are just part of the endless cycle of "wants" that we've just talked about above. Needs may change over the course of a lifetime, but there are certain essential needs that never change. And if there was one greatest need of all of the needs that we have, what would that need be? What do you need the most in this world?

Before I give you my answer, let me first ask you this question: what if you were granted the power to meet the most important need in the world of billions of people? What if you could provide for anyone in your life the thing that they need the most? What kind of power would that

be! What kind of impact would you make if you could meet this ultimate, unchanging need for all those you come in contact with? What kind of difference could you make?

GOING DEEPER

Love is the greatest need in the entire world. Real "love" is the greatest need in the entire world. Not the love that you're thinking about right now—true love—not necessarily romantic, emotional, exotic, or transcendent. True love—love according to biblical principles—is the greatest need of everyone in the entire world. From the harshest of men to the tiniest of children, for all flavor and variety of humankind—true love is what we need the most. I'll explain the concept in a moment, but for now, try to soak in this statement.

The Bible does not conceal the fact that love is the foundational need of all humanity. There are multiple examples in Scripture of love being equated to the supreme need, as well as definitive statements that say as much. You might disagree and say that these passages are not about what we need so much as what we "need to do," which is very important. It highlights how much we misunderstand the love of the Bible.

> *But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love* (1 Cor 13:13, NASB95).

> *One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall*

love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:28–31).

If you think I'm ignoring the key principles of salvation, redemption, and going to heaven as the greatest need in the world, then you're missing the point that without love, none of these concepts are even possible. Love and redemption are inseparable in the heart of God.

For salvation:

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live" (Luke 10:25–28).

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

If you think I'm ignoring the principles of discipleship, following commands, and other matters of service and obedience, then you're missing the point that all those concepts are inextricably linked together with love and are inseparable in the heart of God.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this

all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34–35).

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15).

This is just the beginning of Scripture on the topic of love. It is the greatest need of all humanity, a need that you have the power to fulfill with everyone you meet. True love —as I mentioned before, according to biblical principle— is so poorly understood, so rarely practiced in today's world, that few of us think of the right thing when it is mentioned in scripture.

What you and I need so much, and what you and I have the power to give, is outlined numerous times in Scripture and was demonstrated on the cross as the ultimate example for us to follow. And yet, we still don't seem to get it. We think of love in terms of what we feel in the initial stages of romance, which is a wonderful thing obviously, but hard to conjure up when considered a "command" from God in Scripture. How could I love everyone in that way? I've only loved one person in my life that way, it would be ludicrous to think I could just produce that emotion with others, and it would be inappropriate to do so.

So what is love? What is this powerful thing that we have to give that can meet everyone's greatest need?

It's important to understand first of all that love is something to be given, not something to wait to receive. Passively waiting for acceptance, care, and consideration would work great if everyone else was busy giving love the way they should, and you were the only one waiting to receive it. However, as I said before, true love is such a rarity these days that God's people have to step up to the

plate to live out His command with actions and not just words.

This is the principle of the cross and the foundational reason why Christians have no excuse when it comes to Jesus's entreaty to "love your neighbor." In the context of that passage in Luke 10, the smart-alecky lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbor?" to try to justify himself in not having to give this type of love. Jesus then tells the story of the Good Samaritan, a man who helped, cared for, and loved a complete stranger who could do nothing to repay him. This is true love—the love of the cross.

God could ask us to do anything, even if He didn't already do it, but in this case, He did, so it's an even more powerful concept. God didn't owe us anything on the cross. Bigger than that, there wasn't anything we could trade with Him in return that could make Him better or more important or anything. We were helpless and unhelpful. And yet, God gave His love (in the form of his Son). Romans 5 lays out the situation completely:

> *For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom 5:6–8).

You and I have no excuse to hold back our love as we wait for someone to love us first. Love is an action and cannot afford to be contained if you are a Christian. This brings us to the second facet of true love—biblical love. Biblical love is love in spite of people, not because of them. It is action, care, concern, doing things for people,

etc. that you may not even like. Let's listen to Jesus's take on it:

> *But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return* (Luke 6:27–38).

APPLICATION

Does God really expect you to love that person sitting on the other side of an auditorium that disagrees with you on every issue from the color of the carpet to the number of songs that you sing in the worship service? Yes. And by love, I don't mean having nice, sweet feelings about them.

I mean really love—get up, do something for them, serve them, ask how they are doing, check on their kids, bake them a cake, loan them some money, and then ask, "Is there anything else I can do for you?" That sounds funny, but go back and read Jesus's imperatives here and in other places in Scripture. It may sound funny because we don't practice it as we should.

You and I, of all people, should know how unlovable we can be. We are painfully aware of our faults and the times when we've fallen short of our potential. And yet, these are the times that you and I have been in the greatest need of love in our lives. Praise God for those who've swooped in with their loving deeds and shown us, Christ, in action. They help us to remember that there's something special about Christ and his love for us.

I believe that this type of love is so beautiful and so rare that it could revolutionize my life and yours and the life of this church if it were to take hold in the depths of our souls. Don't get me wrong—I'm not accusing us of grudges or evil intentions or any of the like. Just remember, apathy (withholding love) and inaction can be just as great a sin as evil intention (Jas 4:17).

How many of us wake up every day and ask, "How can I meet the greatest need in the world?" "What can I do today to care, to be concerned with, to love everyone I come in contact with?" "What kind of things can I do today that will impact someone else's life for good (even if they are my enemy)?" Not enough of us do, and yet these small acts of heroism are the very root of all that God seeks from us in service to his Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, let's remember the scene recorded for us in Matthew 25. It's the Day of Judgment, and Jesus is seated on his glorious throne, separating the sheep from the goats. It is a glorious day, marked by a single theme as the sheep are herded to safety: "How did you love me (by showing love to those around you)?" Some loved by giving food to the hungry. Others loved by providing drinks to the thirsty. Yet others loved by taking in complete strangers and clothing those who were unclothed. Some love by visiting the sick, and others by visiting those who are in prison. And still, all of them loved by doing something for others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When was the last day that you spent that changed the world? What were you doing that day?
2. How is love a fruit of the Spirit? What principles from lessons you've learned so far in this series help you to understand this connection?
3. Read Galatians 5:16–26 again in your favorite Bible translation. What is the relationship between Paul's concept of "flesh" and the biblical concept of "love"?
4. How does Galatians 5:13–15 connect to the concept of "love" and the passages mentioned in this lesson?

5. What are the outcomes for a Christian that doesn't understand the biblical definition of love or the power of it as demonstrated by God's own example?

6

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Joy

Bill Bagents

FOCUS PASSAGE

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ..." (Gal 5:22).

ONE MAIN THING

The joy given by Jesus stands richer and more powerful than anything this world can offer.

INTRODUCTION

Nobody does irony and paradox like God does. The suffering servant "was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). Yet He "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb 12:2). That very servant—while describing His forthcoming death on the cross—promised His apostles, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and

lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (John 16:20).

Leaders among the Lord's first disciples—after being threatened and beaten—"left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). His own brother wrote, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds" (Jas 1:2). Later disciples "joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] property" knowing they already held a "better possession" (Heb 10:34).

Biblical joy isn't fickle, fleeting, or flimsy. It's a rock-solid conviction that God rules, God saves, and God keeps His every promise. It's the life-changing conviction that there is no greater treasure than to be loved and claimed by God.

GOING DEEPER

We're stunned that the devil still finds audience for his lie that God's greatest wish is for humans to feel happy in each moment of each day. But there's no way to overestimate the power of telling people what they want to believe. Scripture teaches that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). That's why He sent Jesus, "who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:6, John 3:16–17). Our souls will always matter more to God than our feelings.

Galatians 5:16–26 powerfully documents this truth. We face a choice of paths. We can walk by the Spirit and grow in the fruit of the Spirit, or we can "gratify the desires of the flesh—we can seek temporary and illusory "joy" on our own selfish terms. The selfish path never works; "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"

(Gal 5:21). False paths may offer some amazing moments, but they never lead to God, peace, or lasting joy.

We love the balance and reality of Galatians 5:16–26. Competing options exist; the devil offers quite a menu. But choosing a worldly option comes at the cost of conceit, provocation, envy, and exclusion from the presence and the power of God. The works of the flesh can offer enormous distraction, but they can never offer the joy of reconciliation to God and an eternal home with Him. They can't offer the spiritual standing in Christ that both transcends and overcomes this world. They can't offer truth, values, a mission, and relationships worth more than life itself.

APPLICATION

What does the joy of Galatians 5:22 look like? What does it include? We love the list below. We love the fact that it touches only the hem of the garment.

Spiritual joy is categorically superior to even the best forms of earthly happiness. Everything temporal is temporary. Sometimes its brevity in the moment is a major component of its powerful emotional impact—think of the purchase of your first house or the once-in-a-lifetime vacation. Spiritual joy reaches its permanent apex in the presence of God in heaven.

Earthly joy is often situation dependent. The sweetest wedding ever is marred by a tragic accident. Far worse, one of the individuals chooses to break the wedding vows. What was once deemed permanent and priceless falls prey to sin. God never forsakes, and even death merely delays the permanent and indescribable joy He gives.

It's hinted at above, but spiritual joy transcends suffer-

ing. We could argue that suffering for the benefit of others and/or the glory of God enhances joy. Though Job never got an explanation for his suffering, his story ends with Job's being wiser, more humble, and more trusting in God than ever.

How can we pursue the joy of Galatians 5:22? First, we must refuse to be ruled by the "desires of the flesh." If those rule us, we're not under God's rule. We're not in a place—spiritually speaking—where God can help us in the ways that we must have His help. Those blessings are found only in Christ (Eph 3:3–10, Phil 2:12–13, Titus 2:11–14).

Equally, we must choose to be led by Scripture in our thinking and action. Within a world red in tooth and claw, the Old Testament soars to stunning heights of joy. Creation comes with good, very good, and "This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). We see joy in Eve's praise as God blesses her with children (Gen 4:1–2). There's palpable joy for all of humanity in Genesis 6:8, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." The same with the covenant of the bow (Gen 9:4–17), and even more joy in God's promise to Abram (Gen 12:1–2). We love the songs of joy as Israel is saved from Egypt (Exod 15). We think of the crowning of David as king and Solomon's dedication of the temple (2 Sam 5:1–3, 1 Kgs 8). There's similar joy in Ezra 6:15–22 and Nehemiah 8:17–18.

In amazing irony, one of the stoutest curses pronounced against ancient Israel came "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart ..." (Deut 28:47). The text demands that we ask, "As much as God has done for us, is there any other way to serve Him?" The Psalms strongly suggest there is not.

- "But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love you may exult in you" (Ps 5:11).
- "May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners" (Ps 20:5).
- "Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Ps 30:4–5).
- "Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad ... " (Ps 35:27).
- "But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy" (Ps 68:3).

Within the darkest of dark books, Jeremiah declares, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him'" (Lam 3:22–24).

Within a world dominated by a cruel empire, the New Testament stands stunningly pro-joy. Jesus burst onto the scene with "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased'" (Luke 2:13–14). The angel who announced His birth to the shepherds had exclaimed, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). The people who heard Jesus and saw His miracles loved both His message and His actions.

Back to the introduction of this chapter, pursuing joy suggests the question "Can spiritual joy be pursued directly, or must its pursuit be indirect?" It could be argued that direct pursuit is self-seeking and self-serving. It's beyond the scope of this chapter and the ability of this writer to address such a philosophical question, but my heart leans to both/and. I want to pursue spiritual joy in every possible biblical way.

We can safely say this much: It's never wrong to do right. It's never wrong to serve and honor God even when we know we'll find joy in that service. Jesus was not wrong to see the ultimate joy in fulfilling His atoning mission (Heb 12:2). The Macedonian Christians were not wrong when "their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty ... overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part" (2 Cor 8:2). May God protect us from ourselves! There's no joy in overthinking the grace and simplicity of Scripture.

CONCLUSION

God offers immeasurable joy to His children. In a major sense, it's a gift as well as a fruit of the Spirit. But God is the master of multitasking. While He offers and gives joy, He also educates us about joy and invites us to participate in our joy. As amazing as we find that truth, there's more! God also both welcomes and empowers us to contribute to the joy of others (Rom 12:15, 1 Cor 16:16–17, Phil 2:1–2, 2 John 4).

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom 15:13)!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Name the three most joyous people you know. What behaviors and characteristics made you choose each of them?
2. Why does Scripture so often discuss joy in the context of sacrifice and suffering?
3. Think of a season of maximum joy in your life. What were the chief contributors to that special joy?
4. Why do so many people pursue temporary happiness over spiritual joy?
5. Some Christians seem fearful of joy. Why would even the prospect of joy scare some believers?

7

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Peace

Nathan Daily

FOCUS PASSAGE

Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil,
but those who promote peace have joy. —Proverbs 12:20

ONE MAIN THING

Peace is not simply a state of being but an activity commensurate with the character of God and available to God's people as force, more powerful than the chaotic power of flesh, for life by the Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's listing of those fruits that may grow in the Christian life continues with mention of the fruit of peace. As each fruit parallels the activity of the Spirit and provides an outward evidencing of the divine emanating from the

Christian, the presence of the Spirit's fruit in human life and in God's creation positively contribute to the opposition, or war (5:17), between Flesh and Spirit attested in Paul's letter to the Galatians.[1] Whether viewed in the political realm as the opposite of war and violence or in the personal realm as the absence of fear and turmoil, the appearance of the fruit of peace is striking as peace is not relegated to an outcome of battle, but is in fact, an action of the Spirit available to humans that contributes to relieving the tension in creation brought about by the impulse of the Flesh. Though "peace" is not explicitly defined in the context of Galatians 5, Paul's placement of the concept within a story of war between Flesh and Spirit and as a human directive from God emerging from the power of and reliance on the Spirit, allows readers of Galatians to consider the broader canonical contribution toward a theology of peace within the Story of God.

GOING DEEPER

The several hundred references to the Hebrew noun *shālôm*, the Greek noun *eirēnē*, their verbal counterparts, and the conceptual usages attest to the theological significance of peace throughout the Bible. Though a complete representation of the biblical witness is impossible here, several key texts from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament may provide an illustrative picture for some of the functions of the concept active throughout the Bible.

In the Hebrew Bible, certain depictions of cause and effect resulting in the consequence of peace for God's people provide examples for exploration of the meaning of peace. Transition from conflict toward peace, that life exuding calm or well-being, often centers around a theo-

logical movement whereby God and the people of God are brought into a new phase of existence exemplified through that new quality of life defined by relationship between humanity and deity.

(1) In Numbers 25, Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron and an ancestor of Zadok, brings an end to a scene of idolatry and the resultant plague by impaling a couple engaging in an unspecified activity who had brought the crisis to a new level in the vicinity of the Tent of Meeting. Relatively unknown before this moment, God offers Phineas "my covenant of peace." This pact is qualified as "eternal" and is centered up the priesthood offered to himself and his priestly descendants, the Zadokites (Ezek 44). Just as Phinehas protects God's people, so will his descendants through an eternal priesthood. God's offer or compensation of peace toward Phinehas and his descendants is a response to Phinehas's action and emphasizes the central role of the ordained priesthood who will protect the sanctuary and, thereby, the presence of God for the benefit of ongoing relationship between God and God's people. The priestly blessing itself ends with a pledge of peace from the priesthood on behalf of and exuding from the blessing of God (Num 6:24–26). The Zadokite priest Ezekiel reinvigorates the relational language of the "covenant of peace" when, amid exile, he points toward God's upcoming cleansing of Israel's homeland so that it will become a place of peace and safety, a place protected by "eternal covenant" and characterized by the presence of God dwelling among a large population of God's people (Ezek 34:25, 37:26).

(2) Isaiah 54:6–10 speaks of God's call to Israel following a period suffering and exile. Included is a promise that God will not abandon Israel forever but will

express kindness toward the people through a renewed sense of God's presence with them. Appealing to the story of Noah for illustration, Isaiah 54:9 confirms that God's anger will end, and God's people will not die in exile. Rather, just like a promise was made with Noah, God will now initiate a covenant of peace and return the people home (also, Jer 31:33–40). Elsewhere, God warns the priest of the importance of their vocation for the purpose of retaining relationship between God and the people of God by acting as messengers of God's commands (Mal 2:1–9). Here, covenant between God and people is defined by explicit purpose. God's covenant exists "to bring life and peace" (2:5). These texts point us toward the larger theology of the mission of God. Peace appears as a central element emerging from God's actions toward creation. Just as following God's commands results in a peaceful relationship (Malachi) as God's covenant itself is quantified by peace (Isaiah and Jeremiah), God acts within creation to subdue evil and bring peace (Job 25:2; Ps 35:27; 1 Kgs 2:33). Indeed, the future king is depicted as a righteous deliverer whose rule is expressly for the initiation of peace (Zech 9:9–10). This peace is not a simple state of being (e.g., "It is such a peaceful day") but is achieved through God's overcoming of evil to bring a new reality, peace (Mic 5:3–4). In fact, the verb we translate as "to be peaceful" is often translated as "repay" or "punish" because it is the violent action of God against Israel's enemies, or even against Israel, that is a precursor to that peace originating from God (Isa 59:18; 66:6; Jer 16:18; 25:14). Where Jeremiah 16:18 states "I will punish them in full for their sins," we could also translate "I will bring peace fully for their sins." God's destruction of evil results in the state of peace that God intends for the proper order of creation.

In the Hebrew Bible, peace is bound within the character of God, the one who is the source of peace, the one who teaches peace through command and covenant, the one who rewards righteousness with peace, the one who ends evil to bring peace, the one who desires presence among humanity as an expression of peace, the one who gifts creation with peace, the one who works toward an end of which peace appears as an ultimate characteristic. More than calmness, peace exemplifies a status of existence and security defined through God accomplishing God's purpose. Both through judgment and salvation, peace is wrapped up in God's mission, God's purpose for all things.

The thorough use of *eirēnē* in the New Testament builds upon the conceptual picture of *shālôm* as a theological concept in the Hebrew Bible. Of particular significance is how the New Testament authors depict the outworking of the mission of God for the purpose of peace to the life and teaching of Jesus.

(1) In the Gospel of Luke, the presence of Jesus in the world creates a state of peace. The angelic announcement of the birth of the Christ child anticipates that God offers peace among the people of God (2:14). Interestingly, Jesus himself speaks of bringing division instead of peace (12:51; cf. Rev 6:4). This saying fits well with the Old Testament emphasis on the role of disorder toward the enemies of God that results in a new reality of peace. The arrival of peace for some will bring violence for others. In a post-resurrection appearance to the disciples, Jesus's opening words are "peace be with you" (24:36). Following his death and resurrection and in contrast to his earlier statement, Jesus unqualifying introduces the peace that exists for his

followers because of the deliverance Jesus brings humanity from evil.

(2) In the Gospel of John, as Jesus speaks of leaving the disciples soon, he says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (14:27). Jesus's offer of peace is not a kind greeting or a desire for the future. It is a gift, a gift of peace of Jesus's own peace for the disciples as they carry on in God's mission after Jesus leaves the earth. Their lives will not be easy as they move forward with this message, but they will have Jesus's own peace within them. Peace came with Jesus and will remain because Jesus has conquered evil, through the defeat of death, a sign that God's victory is complete even as God's people await the ultimate expression of God's victory.

(3) In the Letter to the Romans, Paul defines the posture of the believer as one of peace. The peace within God's people is a result of being made right before God through Jesus Christ who died on behalf of humanity (Rom 5:1–10). This gift from Jesus Christ experienced by the Christian in baptism is an expression of unification with Jesus in death and, thereby, in resurrection (5:11–6:14). The result is the freedom to walk sanctified, to live a new life (6:4). This life, shaped by Spirit, undermines the hostility of death, and lives in freedom with a mindset of life and peace (8:6; cf. Gal 5:22).

APPLICATION

Peace appears as a central theological concept throughout the biblical witness in a variety of forms including as divine imperative, an aspect of God's character, a product of human self-definition by relationship to Jesus, and a key

component that defines the outcome of the mission of God. The Christian stands as an actor within a larger story. The story is not "my life" but is the "mission of God," what God is doing and will do to the entire cosmos to bring all things under God's sovereignty and all humans to an awareness of the God of the universe. For whatever we may not understand about the unveiling of God's purposes, we can expect this new reality to be defined as a state of peace with God as king. To the extent that Jesus brought peace to this world, particularly through the defeat of evil visualized with his resurrection (Rom 8:6; Rev 17:14), the Christian life is defined as one of peace. Though we often do not personally feel or experience this peace for a variety of reasons, our baptism places us in unification with Jesus's death and resurrection and, thereby, the peace brought to the world through Jesus's being a part of God's physical created order. As we are unified with the peace of Jesus, as we live by the Spirit and experience the fruit of the Spirit, we become those capable of exhibiting and offering God's peace to the world as we await the end of God's story so that we can experience the ultimate exhibit of peace in the outworking of the culmination of the mission of God.

DISCUSSION

1. How do you define peace? Do biblical texts cause you to think about peace in a new or different way?
2. List some of the Old Testament contributions to your understanding of the concept of peace. What Old Testament texts do you tend to think about when you think of peace?

3. List some of the New Testament contributions to your understanding of the concept of peace. What New Testament texts do you tend to think about when you think of peace?
4. According to the Bible, what would you suggest is the key ingredient to peace? How can God's people contribute to God's mission as harbingers of peace?
5. What problems exist at global, communal, and personal levels when we lack peace or are not attentive to the power of peace?

ENDNOTES

[1] On Galatians see, J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (AYB 33A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993); idem., The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians (NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); David A. DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018). On peace see, G. Gerleman, "שלם *šlm* to have enough," *TLOT* 3:1337–48; Richard E. Averbeck, "שָׁלֵם (*šālēm* I), pay, recompense," *NIDOTTE* 5:135–43; Ceslas Spicq, "εἰρηνεύω, *eireneuo,* to be at peace," *TLNT* 1:424–39.

8

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Patience

Thomas Tidwell

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such there is no law*.

Patience is not something we gain easily. It is something that many of us must work on and strive for in our lives, as we try to become like God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is the "capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset."[1]

We joke about patience—as I was researching this idea of patience online, I asked this question, "What is patience?" One wrote—"a person with great patience is called a HUSBAND." Others wrote that the person was called A WIFE, A PARENT, A BOSS OR EMPLOYER, an EMPLOYEE . . . . In these definitions we find them all pertaining to people, and the relationships they have with others.

We think it is sometimes easier to be patient when we are dealing with things because we have more "control" over the things we use. Yet we try to get these tools or

instruments to do something they were not intended to do. Further, we realize that cars break down; we must replace washing machines, dryers, microwaves, ovens, computers, phones . . . because they grow older and wear out due to constant use. We could also consider how our bodies are wearing out daily because of use and misuse.

Our patience is tried and tested because things and events are out of our control. We humans feel that we should be able to control our lives. We try to control our feelings, emotions, and circumstances, yet often it is to no avail. I cannot, by myself, make a change in politics that favors how I think or how I feel. I trust people to do the right thing, but in a culture where "the right thing to do" is constantly shifting because we are drifting (maybe even running) from the standard of right and wrong—GOD'S WORD—we have changed the definition of right and wrong so we are like the people of Isaiah's day as recorded in Isaiah 5:18–23,

> *Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, who say: "Let him be quick, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!"* (Their unbelief in God dared God to judge them—and He did). "*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!*

They changed the meaning of words to justify sin (and we see the same in our country today)!

So, what is a Christian to do?

William Barclay wrote this about patience in his commentary in Galatians 5:22,

> *Makrothumia*; this is a great word. The writer of First Maccabees (8:4) says it was by *makrothumia* that the Romans became masters of the world, and by that he means the Romans' persistence which would never make peace with an enemy even in defeat, a kind of conquering patience. Generally speaking, the word is not used for patience in regard to things or events, but in regard to people. Chrysostom said that it is the grace of the man who could revenge himself and does not, the man who is slow to wrath. The most illuminating thing about it is that it is commonly used in the New Testament as the attitude of God towards men (Rom 2:4; 9:22; 1 Tim 1:16; 1 Pet 3:20). If God had been a man, He would have wiped out this world long ago, but He has that patience which bears with all our sinning and will not cast us off. In our dealings with our fellow men, we must reproduce this loving, forbearing, forgiving, patient attitude of God toward ourselves.[2]

So, we see that we struggle with patience sometimes with things and events that are out of our control, and we are frustrated because these events did not go the way we wished and hoped. We need to be reminded that God is still in charge and that He has a plan that will bring all things to fruition that He has designed since the beginning of the world.

We must consider as well that the biggest struggle we have, sometimes, is with other people. As I write this, I think of a lady that has been patient with me for forty-two years of my life. She has had to be very patient with me,

but she does so because she believes in commitment and love. I love my wife and her commitment—I am what I am due to her love and P A T I E N C E. She deserves the greatest reward of any woman on earth!

I think of another lady who asked me to write this chapter, and I sent her something totally different. They both must put up with . . . me.

Consider family problems that many times are out of our control. Someone we love makes decisions that are harming themselves and their family. We warn, we plead, we get angry, but they don't change. Our family can and often does hurt us the most. Are we patient with them? How much will we put up with?

Think about the church family. Sometimes we have squabbles in the church because we are family, and we don't treat one another as if we are family (Or, sadly, maybe we do). Sometimes we treat people outside the church better than those inside the church. Satan loves this!

Then we come to God. What patience He has clearly shown to humanity! We know that Scripture tells us of nation after nation that rose and fell because of sin; even God's own people, the Jews, had to be punished and were taken into captivity. As we read through these events in Scripture, we stand amazed at how much God put up with them; how He warned them through the prophets; how He punished them to cause them to realize what they were doing to themselves. Did they get it? Perhaps during the trials and sufferings, they had to face they realized what they did to God and to themselves. Yet God patiently waited on them to come back to him.

Did they get it? Has mankind truly sought God at any time in our history?

Our biggest struggle is with other people, and we must realize that I can and should control my attitude. God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have exemplified patience with all of us. We are still here! We still have opportunities to do better and to be like Him.

So, *forbear* when someone gets on your last nerve. You may have to walk away for a bit and "let off some steam," but as God has been patient with us, may we learn to be patient with others.

Be *tolerant* of someone who is testing you, because we don't know what they have been through. Be tolerant of the person who is learning. We all are much more patient with babies as they begin to walk and talk. In the church we need to be patient with the "new babe in Christ," and we must help them grow and encourage them to be what God knows they can be for Him. We all have been reared in different homes and taught things should be a certain way. It is not necessarily wrong (though it is if it is against God's word), but patient, steadfast love will help the new babe grow and be useful to God and His church if we help them to learn and know their responsibilities.

Exercise *restraint* before you speak in anger or frustration. Some have suggested counting to one hundred before you say anything, giving yourself a chance to cool off. As we consider God's patience with the human race, we must try to be patient with those who test us and watch our words. We need to think about them and their growth in the Lord.

And when things do not go our way, when we can't change what is going on in our lives, resign yourself to what you must deal with, BUT ALWAYS REMEMBER, as a Christian God will help us through it. Consider His

patience with each of us, and try to help someone become a better, more useful servant to the Master.

For further study consider the following passages. Look at the context, and ask God to help you as have to deal with these things that test your spirit and heart.

- Romans 12:12
- 2 Peter 3:9
- Romans 8:25
- Proverbs 15:18
- Ephesians 4:2
- Psalms 37:7–9
- Colossians 3:12–13
- 1 Timothy 1:16
- Galatians 6:9
- 1 Corinthians 13:4
- Romans 2:4
- Hebrews 10:36
- Philippians 4:6
- Isaiah 40:31
- Proverbs 14:29
- Exodus 34:6
- Ecclesiastes 7:8–9
- Psalms 40:1
- Psalms 103:8
- 2 Peter 3:15
- James 1:19
- Proverbs 16:32

Galatians 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is practicing patience easier for some people? If so, why?
2. What makes practicing patience worth our effort?
3. Does showing patience get easier with practice?
4. From the Bible, list your top three examples of patience.
5. From the Bible, list your top three examples of people or groups who were hurt by a failure to practice patience.

ENDNOTES

1. https://www.google.com/search?q=patience&rlz=1C5MACD_enUS1021US1021&oq=&aqs=chrome.1.35i39i362l8.2842256j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8.

2. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians,* Daily Bible Study Series, (Philadelphia, PA, The Westminister Press, 1976): 50–51.

9

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Patience

Ismael Berlanga

FOCUS TOPIC

Patience

ONE MAIN THING

Is God-honoring patience possible even in the midst of pain and suffering? If it is, then patience must involve a connection to far more than the ups and downs of life. Jesus's life and teachings show us that it indeed is!

INTRODUCTION

Being led by God's Spirit means that we view each of the fruits of the Spirit as spiritual seeds that, when planted, bring new spiritual growth into the world instead of recycling what is already there! The seed of patience, in particular, is critical to new spiritual growth because it has the power to thrive even in the harshest conditions. Patience is the space that is found between a trying situation and

our response. The more space that exists, the more room there will be for a Christian's spiritual nature to chart a course that not just honors God, but even advances His will! To fully understand this powerful concept, one needs to look no further than Jesus.

GOING DEEPER

Peter, in his message to Christians who were suffering, said,

> *For this is a gracious thing, when,* ***mindful of God****, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but* ***continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly****. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,* ***that we might die to sin and live to righteousness****. By his wounds you have been healed* (1 Pet 2:19–24).

Notice the specifics of patience that Peter gives from Jesus's example. Peter begins first in verse 19, with the mind. Before one can endure, before one can react to suffering, and before restraint can be exercised, one must be "mindful of God." This is what empowers Christians to exercise a type of patience that is unique to this world. The connection to God and more specifically, to His will and promises, infuses a special strength that empowers

His followers to create space between the response and the situation. Being mindful of God also means that Christians are aware that their response will tell a story about God and His sovereignty.

Peter goes on to say that Jesus's mindset included two powerful truths. First, Jesus was focused on "entrusting himself to him who judges justly" and second, Jesus knew that His wounds would mean salvation to all who were willing to "die to sin and live to righteousness." Jesus's heart, mind, soul, and body were aligned with God's will so as Jesus suffered in the flesh, He did not sin, revile, deceive, or threaten.

A mentality that is mindful of God is the beginning of patience and is critical to increasing space between a situation and the response. Pain, suffering, and offenses are going to demand a quick response, but being led by the Spirit means that Christians "set the mind on the Spirit" which is "life and peace" (Rom 8:6). Christians must exercise patience in all aspects of life, not just in heavy trials of life. Jesus demonstrated and even taught that there is always a better path that shows the world a special type of love that comes with being connected to God (Matt 5:38–48). Patience brings honor to God, strengthens our daily spiritual walk, and maximizes our opportunities to show the world a better way of life!

APPLICATION

There are two points of application that can be gleaned from these teachings on patience. First, the divine space between a trying situation and our response grows when our mentality is right. Setting our mind on the Spirit puts us in control of our emotions and infuses our identity in

Christ into our responses. Space is important because situations like arguments or disagreements can trigger fear responses within our bodies. When a full *fight or flight* response is activated, we might say and do things that we may regret because of those changes. Space gives us enough time to de-escalate and respond from a position of control. Said another way, patience is the tool that God has given to us to safely navigate the tension between the rapid response of the flesh and the God-honoring actions from the Spirit. There will always be tension between the flesh and the Spirit, but the fact that we are led by the Spirit means that our actions boldly proclaim that we are children of God (Rom 8:5–14)!

Second, patience grows every time it is exercised in difficult situations. Patience is like a muscle that grows in strength, but for that muscle to grow it must be allowed to work (Jas 1:2–4). Each time we respond to our trials with patience is a small moment of spiritual growth that is adding necessary components to our faith. For example, as we are creating space between the trial and our response, we may turn our attention to the blessings that may arise from the situation. Perhaps our minds will then turn toward ways that the Lord was faithful in previous times of difficulty. Expanding our perspective in this way will add a type of divine spiritual discernment that will break the tunnel vision that comes with hardship and help us to see our lives and the trials of life through the eyes of God.

CONCLUSION

Our lives tell a story about the God we serve! Spiritual seeds of patience produce actions that tell an accurate and God-glorifying story of our faith and connection to Him.

Patience is nurtured by love, joy, and peace which is why it must work in close connection with the other fruit of the Spirit. Allow patience to have its full work on you by aligning your mind with the love and will of God. Choose to infuse God's heart into every difficult and trying situation and you will bring the type of new spiritual growth that causes the world to take notice and turn their hearts toward God!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can asking the question: "Is the response that I am about to give aligned with God's love and will?" help with choosing our responses?
2. If our words and deeds are meant to bring new spiritual growth into the world, what is unique about patience when compared to the other fruit of the Spirit?
3. As we learned, patience begins with a mind focused on God, how important is it for the "peace of Christ" to rule in our hearts (Col 3:15)? What role does the peace of Christ play in ensuring that we are patient with others?

10

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Kindness

Caleb Sampson

FOCUS PASSAGES

Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:32

ONE MAIN THING

Kindness is something that is commanded of a faithful Christian. In order to be found faithful, we must do our very best to be growing in this fruit of the Spirit and to be abounding more and more in kindness.

INTRODUCTION

Kindness is a term that is often desired, but not given much in our society. First, it would help if we defined kindness. Of course, it is literally the act of being kind or showing what it is to be kind to others. It is shown through action. So, let's break it down further than just using the base word to define itself. What does the word kind mean? Merriam-Webster's Dictionary cites it to be:

of a sympathetic or helpful nature, of a forbearing nature (ie: gentle), arising from or characterized by sympathy or forbearance, or to give pleasure or relief.

GOING DEEPER

In Ephesians 4:32 the NKJV states, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." This is a command and, as such, it should not be taken lightly! Whenever we see commands given in scripture, we must remind ourselves that they are given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16–17). Often, when we think of the commands given to the Christian in terms of living righteously and with faithfulness to God, we focus on proper worship, not committing "egregious" sins, and living in repentance. However, God sees sin the same and anything short of His plan is to miss the mark. So, as we live out our Christian faith we absolutely must exhibit kindness and also grow in it as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). In fulfilling the golden rule, we are to love our neighbor as ourself (Mark 12:31) and treat them as such. How do I exhibit the golden rule? How do I show love to my neighbor? It is by treating them with the kindness I would want to receive.

Growing up I had a wonderful example of what kindness looked like. My mother, Liz Sampson, is one of the best examples of kindness I have ever known. Proverbs 31:26 says, "in her tongue is the law of kindness" and if there ever was a living example of the woman of Proverbs 31 it would be my mother. For as long as I can remember, she has been helpful and gentle with nothing more than a desire to benefit others. She would go out of her way to do for others with no thought to herself, her time, or means.

As I grew up, I saw the acts of service she would do and the reaction of those she did them for. She would bake food for the sick, make crafts and things to give to others, send cards, make phone calls, and all sorts of things because she was a Christian. It softened and helped them to see her in a different light because of the degree of her thoughtfulness and sympathetic nature.

Jesus was our perfect example in that He was God and, despite that, took on the form of man in order to do the greatest act of sacrifice and kindness the world has ever seen (Heb 2:9, John 1:14). Countless verses mention that He was moved with compassion for those He saw begging for help. That love motivated Him to operate with kindness and fix their maladies and afflictions. The final act of Jesus in His life was to willingly go to a Roman torture device to die for those who despised Him. He was able to pray in Luke 22:42 "nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" because He was operating out of obedience to God and love for mankind. It is the same love that came from His own mouth as He hung in excruciating pain in His last moments on the cross and could exclaim "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" in Luke 23:34. To be hanging there while being mocked and ridiculed would be horrible. To have your family and friends witness it would be terrible. To be sent there for doing nothing wrong and yet to continue to care about them and ask for forgiveness for them was true kindness and love. He heaped kindness on His enemies and because of my sins, I too, became His enemy. Thank God for kindness and love!

APPLICATION

The opposite of the kindness mentioned in Ephesians 4:32 is found in verses 29 and 31. Paul tells us to "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" and to "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice." He is giving us the things to put off and do away with followed by replacing it with kindness and forgiveness. The world teaches that kindness is a form of weakness. We must be hardnosed and get ahead at all costs. The world says to say whatever we want about anyone or anything and do whatever makes me feel good. It takes no consideration for others and how to show the golden rule. But God tells us to put off those things and put on kindness.

Christians are to grow, to mature in their faith. In 1 Peter 2:2 it states, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." In Hebrews 5 it speaks in the negative form about those that have not matured in their faith. So, as we grow into these things what does it look like? Sometimes we must train ourselves in certain behaviors to receive the desired outcome. We must look for ways to show kindness during our everyday lives. We can think about ways to show loving kindness to our spouses, our families, our friends, and our church. These trained behaviors will help make it more of a second nature then when we are called upon to show kindness to even our enemies. In Romans 12:20 Paul states, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." This passage shows us the imperative to enact kindness on those that are against us. It says to address their needs and

give despite being our enemy. The end result will be that we may change them and their thinking into becoming our friends. In life, we will have many opportunities to show kindness because people are imperfect and will fail us. Our attitude toward them should be one of kindness even though they may not be deserving in our minds. This process causes happiness to grow in our own lives and makes us more like our heavenly father as we read in Luke 6:35 to "love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is *kind to the unthankful and evil*." What a great and merciful God we serve! Giving kindness to the unthankful and evil. To love us all enough to show ultimate kindness in sending His Son to the earth to die for all (John 3:16).

CONCLUSION

Kindness seems to be a basic requirement of the life of a Christian. So why, then, do we see it in such short supply? It may be overlooked in our society as a good quality but, as we have seen in this study, it is commanded of us. As we begin to grow up into looking more like Jesus, we must begin to develop a kind spirit about us. We must begin to show others that we will think of their needs before our own and the value of each soul. In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14–30) if we bury our abilities to show care for others then we will be found lacking. Similarly, the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt 18:21–35) illustrates just how much we have been forgiven of and the need in our own lives to exemplify forgiveness to others. In the end, we will not be found faithful in the sight of God on the day of judgment if we have not shown kindness in our

Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 13:4 Paul tells us that "love is kind" and to be the Christian that God has called each of us to be, we must be abounding in kindness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do we show kindness to self and to others?
2. Can you think of a time when someone showed you or others a great example of kindness?
3. What are some temptations or causes that hinder others from being kind?
4. What are some things the local church can do to promote kindness among its members?
5. What happens when kindness is shown to someone who is undeserving or is behaving in the opposite manner?
6. How can kindness be used to evangelize and lead others to Christ?

11

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Goodness

Tim Martin

FOCUS PASSAGES

Galatians 5:22 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11

ONE MAIN THING

Goodness is a characteristic which originates from God, was exemplified in the work of Jesus Christ, and remains an attribute indicative of Christians which must be actively demonstrated.

INTRODUCTION

This study of Paul's teaching in Galatians 5:22–23 now moves to the concept of "goodness." Wedged in between kindness and faithfulness in Paul's list of virtues, the Greek word *agathōsunē* (ἀγαθωσύνη) makes one out of its only four appearances in the New Testament.[i] According to Merriam-Webster, the modern definition of goodness most applicable to Paul's usage is "the quality or state of

being good."[ii] Synonyms of goodness include character, decency, integrity, morality, virtue, and honesty. This lesson will explore the meaning of this term in the Greek literature, the Septuagint, and the New Testament. This will establish a solid understanding of how Paul's audiences heard and understood this term. From there, the lesson will focus on how Jesus exhibited and practiced goodness during His earthly ministry. Jesus showed the standard of goodness to His twelve disciples first-hand and, through the record of the four Gospels, His prime example endures for today's Christians to follow. Just as Paul listed goodness as an indicator of the presence of God's Spirit in the Jesus-followers of first-century Galatia, this quality must be exhibited in those who claim to be part of Christ's body today.

GOING DEEPER

The lexical definition of *agathōsunē* is a "positive moral quality characterized especially by interest in the welfare of others."[iii] Most English translations render *agathōsunē* as "goodness," but a few translate it as "generosity."[iv] Paul's Galatian audience, as well as the recipients of his letters in Rome, Ephesus, and Thessalonica, had been immersed in Hellenistic Greek literature and philosophy for nearly four centuries. In this environment, the concept of goodness was "the all-embracing, highest, and indeed dominant idea or form" in Platonic thought.[v] Those who had been converted to Christianity from Judaism, especially in these Diaspora locations, were likely familiar with the use and meaning of *agathōsunē* in the Greek translation of the Old Testament referred to today as the Septuagint, or LXX. In LXX usage, *agathōsunē* is defined as a "good,

kindly disposition; deeds and behavior indicative of kindly disposition" and a "materially agreeable state of affairs."[vi] In the LXX, the concept of "good" is tightly linked with personal faith in God.[vii] Richard N. Longenecker notes *agathōsunē* "appears in the LXX as a synonym for χρηστότης, 'kindness,' with its semantic range of meanings including 'goodness' and/or 'righteousness'" as well as "prosperity."[viii]

In the New Testament, the goodness of God was declared by Jesus (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; cf. Matt 19:17) and designates doing good as a habit of those who will receive eternal life (John 5:29). The cognate Greek adjective *agathos* (ἀγαθός, often translated as "good") means "pertaining to meeting a relatively high standard of quality" or "a high state of worth and merit."[ix] In Galatians 5:22, goodness was placed by Paul in a virtue list contained in what Thabiti Anybwile describes as "the practical pastoral section of the letter."[x] Because of the freedom from sin and slavery to the deeds of the flesh, Christians are to live "the life the Holy Spirit produces in us—a life of integrated virtue" which is the "antidote to the conceit, provocation, and envy of verse 26."[xi] David deSilva comments "'goodness' carries overtones of 'generosity,' as in the contrast between the 'good' ('generous') landowner and the envious workers in the Parable of the Laborers (Matt 20:1–16)."[xii] For the bulk of the Galatian correspondence up to this point, Paul had been dealing with divisive teachers among the Galatian Christians. Scholars do not universally agree, nor is the text entirely clear, on the exact details of these false teachers, but it seems they were certainly teaching a "different gospel" (1:6–7, ESV)[xiii] and it likely related to forcing Christians to become adherents to the regulations of the Torah. Paul pointed out the

Jewish converts in Galatia were no longer under the guidance of this figurative *paidagōgos* (3:24–25) and the Gentile converts were also liberated from slavery to false deities and *stoicheia* of this world (4:8–9). Because of God's grace and goodness made manifest in Jesus's sacrifice for their sins, the Galatians were told to exhibit goodness towards one another and avoid division and strife. Examining Galatians 5:22, Scot McKnight observes "Paul knew that when a person was controlled by the Spirit, that person was holy" and Paul "knew that a person who lived in the Spirit lived in a loving way."[xiv]

While none of the authors of the four canonical Gospels used *agathōsunē*, the actions and attitude of Jesus described within these pages demonstrate goodness of the highest quality. Jesus demonstrated *agathōsunē* by His numerous acts of compassion, healing, selfless interest in the welfare of others, and His love of the marginalized. When one considers the meaning of this term as being "generosity," Jesus, a man who had little to no material possessions to give anyone, fulfilled this aspect to the ultimate degree in sacrificing His life as a payment for humankind's sins. He remained obedient to God, even when tempted by Satan himself, and obedience to God is counted as righteous and good behavior throughout the Scriptures. Jesus was a teacher, conveying and explaining the gospel from God to both the inner circle of His disciples and the greater populace of Palestine who had "ears to hear." What greater quality of goodness is there than to share the good news of God's grace?

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul employed *agathōsunē* to describe behavior among Christians which brought the apostle great satisfaction and confidence (Rom 15:14).[xv] In Ephesians 5:7–14, Paul used this term as

part of another exhortation to Christians to practice goodness and juxtaposed the produce of God's true children against the "unfruitful works of darkness" (5:11) just as he did in Galatians 5:17–26.

Although the entirety of lessons in this series are primarily concerned with Galatians 5:22–23, it is worthwhile to consider another passage where Paul uses the term in another early correspondence to Christians, 2 Thessalonians 1:11.[xvi] Within the context of discussing the ultimate Judgment Day of the Lord, Paul told the Thessalonians he was earnestly praying for them to be worthy of God's calling and for the power of God to "fulfill every resolve for good" (1:11) on which these Christians set their mind. Most importantly, Paul provided the ultimate impetus for goodness: "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified" (1:12). Practicing goodness would grant the Thessalonians the privilege of being "considered worthy of the kingdom of God" (1:5).

APPLICATION

Considering the above definitions, concepts, and uses of *agathōsunē* in Scripture, one could describe goodness as "God-ness." Comparing Paul's teaching about the fruit of the Spirit to the work of Christ, deSilva rightly states "the disciple's experience of God's goodness and generosity overflows into the lives of others" and when a Christian perceives a need "we must respond to it with the compassion of Christ."[xvii] As today's Christians consider how to exhibit each of the fruits of the Spirit, they must always remember the source of all good is God and His attributes and actions provide the very definition of goodness. Awareness of God's goodness can only come from the

study of His Word. A broad and extensive knowledge of the Bible serves the Christian in many ways, but especially when it comes to recognizing righteousness as established and enacted by God. Following the pattern of Jesus, His modern-day disciples must also show goodness by feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, granting equality to the marginalized and ostracized, loving the widow and orphan, and showing generosity to the poor and needy.

CONCLUSIONS

Goodness is an attribute of those who have been saved by the grace of God and been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Showing goodness does not require the miraculous abilities of Christ or the inspiration and apostleship of Paul. Paul expected the general membership of the Lord's Church to exhibit goodness because they were shown grace and forgiveness by God the very author of goodness. Because of human fallibility, Christians may, from time to time, fail to continually exhibit the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23. However, believers should not be discouraged when they fall short of God's perfection. As long as their consistent habits are focused on "walking in the light," God can forgive mistakes (1 John 1:7–9).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some specific examples from the Old Testament where God's goodness was demonstrated?
2. Brainstorm habits Christians can instill in their lives which promote and exemplify goodness.

3. In what ways does Satan attempt to derail efforts to show goodness to others? Are God's standards of "goodness" becoming eroded, diluted, and perverted in society today? If so, give some examples.

ENDNOTES

[i] All four appearances are in the writings of Paul (Rom 15:14; Gal 5:22; Eph 5:9; 2 Thess 1:11).

[ii] www.merriam-webster.com, accessed September 19, 2022.

[iii] "ἀγαθωσύνη, ης, ἡ," BDAG, 4.

[iv] NRSV, NAB. Of interest, BDAG specifically refers to this term having the concept of generosity in Galatians 5:22.

[v] "ἀγαθός," *NIDNTTE* 1:93.

[vi] "ἀγαθωσύνη," *GELS*, 2. This word appears fifteen times in the LXX OT (Judges 8:35; 9:16 [Judg^{b}], 2 Chr 24:16, 2 Esd 19:25, 35; 23:3; Ps 51:5; Odes 12:14; Eccl 4:8; 5:10, 17; 6:3, 6; 7:14; 9:18).

[vii] "ἀγαθός," *NIDNTTE* 1:93.

[viii] Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians,* WBC 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 262.

[ix] "ἀγαθός, ή, όν," BDAG, 3–4. Muraoka defines ἀγαθός as something "flowing from kind and generous character" and things which are "good and acceptable," *GELS,* 1.

[x] Thabiti Anybwile, "Galatians 5: Gospel Freedom, Gospel Fruit," in *Christ Has Set Us Free: Preaching and Teaching Galatians,* D. A. Carson and Jeff Robinson, Sr., eds. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 109.

[xi] Anybwile, "Galatians 5," 122.

[xii] David A. deSilva, *Galatians: A Handbook on the Greek Text,* BHGNT (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 126.

[xiii] Unless specified otherwise, all biblical quotations in the lesson will be from the ESV.

[xiv] Scot McKnight, *Galatians,* NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 273.

[xv] Many English translations render ἀγαθωσύνη as "good" in the occurrences of the term in Paul's writings outside of Galatians.

[xvi] There is debate about which one of Paul's canonical epistles were written first, but most scholars have narrowed the field to either Galatians or the letters to Thessalonica.

[xvii] David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 467.

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12

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Faithfulness

Robert Mann

FOCUS PASSAGE

Galatians 5:16–26

ONE MAIN THING

The acts of sinful nature are prevented when Christians live by the Spirit and avoid the desires of the flesh.

INTRODUCTION

In Galatians 5:16–26, Paul introduces moral teaching to the Galatian church and uses analogies to teach about the constraints on freedom among the followers of Christ. He addresses the church about the conflict between the Spirit of God and the sinful nature of the flesh. He explains how the dangers associated with the flesh and the negative impacts of selfish desires are outpowered by the Spirit of God with love.

Paul teaches that strife conflict opposes solidarity

between the elect. He shares the conditional promise that all fleshly evil is prevented if we walk by the Spirit. He helps us understand that spiritual living prevents Christians from living sinful, reckless lifestyles. The text teaches that a life that entertains the evil nature of the flesh will jeopardize our souls, lead our lives to destruction, and jeopardize us from inheriting the kingdom of God.

Paul warns the Galatians with a list of immoral human behavior that vastly differs and is wholly opposed to one another. He also provides a manner for Christians to conduct their daily walk in the Lord. We learn that only the Spirit of God is powerful enough to defeat the desire of the flesh. The war between flesh and Spirit are always opposed to one another, but the power to defeat sin every time comes by walking with the Spirit.

GOING DEEPER

The Scriptures say,

> and without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb 11:6, NIV).

Faithfulness is required for the Christian to obtain and maintain an allegiance with God. Such a relationship strengthens believers' awareness to maintain unwavering reliance on the Lord. Our faithfulness in God displays our trust and love toward Him through life's circumstances.

It is impossible for God to lie (Heb 6:18). Christians that consistently maintain their faith in the Lord will increase their trust, confidence, and commitment toward

His promises. There is no faith without having belief and confidence in the Lord. The prophet Isaiah states,

> So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isa 41:10).

God's word stands firm and relates to faithfulness, which comes from a place of trust and loyalty. The Hebrew writer says, "Now faith is a confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Heb 11:1). Christians must not only believe in Him but must remain faithful to His word throughout their Christian journey. Faith helps us stay dutifully firm and unwavering during difficult times. Being faithful requires us to never give up on the Lord's promises.

Endurance and perseverance are identifiable characteristics of the Christian; therefore, we must not grow weary in remaining faithful to the Lord. The apostle Paul encourages and teaches the believer. "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Gal 6:9).

When Christians face difficult times, we are comforted by the words of James,

> Blessed is the one that perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those that love him. When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed (Jas 1:12–14).

As we exercise faith in the Lord, it proves our genuineness towards Him as we endure self-testing and temptations enticed by our desires.

The firmness of our faith shows how much we are committed to God's word. Faithfulness becomes a lifestyle as we mature with God's truth. Even when we stumble, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and purify us from all righteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The believer's devotion and allegiance to God will help to solidify one's faithfulness in serving and depending on God to sustain His people. Faithfulness requires acknowledgment of the Lord and trust in Him.

The wise words of Solomon instruct the believer to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov 3:5–6). The Proverbial writer also teaches us about character traits that the believer's outward life must reflect. Solomon states the metaphor, "let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart" (Prov 3:3). He also teaches that "a faithful person will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished" (Prov 28:20).

We learn that commitment to truth is not momentary but is lifelong once we become added to His fold. As Christians, we must strive to hear the Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt 25:21).

Our demonstrated faith encourages weaker believers to become stronger in their Christian walk with the Lord. Even when our faith is lacking, God's faith remains reliable, His promises continue to stand true, and His stead-

fast love is ever present with His people. Jesus showed Himself faithful to his Father, and we are called to rely on God for everything. Without faith, there is no Christianity, and "For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (Rom 1:17).

APPLICATION

"Faith comes by hearing, and by hearing the word of God" (Rom 10:17). By hearing the preaching of the message concerning Christ, faith is obtained by the listener. Faithfulness begins with believing in God with all our minds, body, and soul. Intense prayer is essential to our faith developing correctly. We are instructed in the Scriptures to pray and ask for wisdom when we lack understanding.

We are also instructed to pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit. We must walk with Him as Adam and Eve walked with Him in the Garden of Eden in the beginning. This walk today is being faithful to God by allowing Him to lead every aspect of our lives. Christians must learn the Word of God to become living testimonies of His truth. As we read God's word and study His teachings, we develop an ear to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are to model our lives after His words and let our light shine so that others who live in darkness may see Christ inside us through our faithful testimonies of His existence.

The application of Scripture to everyday life is needed when interacting with friends, family, and strangers. Our faith is displayed when those around us see how we react to situations, temptations, and hardship. To increase our faithfulness, we must always seek to learn more of God's

word at worship services, Bible Studies, and individual Bible reading. Immersing ourselves in the Scripture will help to build and grow our faithfulness in the Lord. We are to be faithful in all things and seek the will of God throughout our Christian journey.

CONCLUSION

The Spirit of God outpowers the spirit of the flesh. God is our refuge, and there our sanctuary is found. As we strengthen our faithfulness by trusting the Lord, our devout studies reveal that God is faithful. He created us in love and desires a genuine relationship with His people. Our Christian walk does not yield immunity to life's troubles, illnesses, or unfortunate experiences. God's word pricks even hardened hearts. A sermon of God's word has the power to help us to remain faithful while suffering difficulties. A deep faithfulness in the Lord prompts the importance of displaying our loyalty towards God during our most challenging times.

Christians are not to doubt the promises of the Almighty God, nor are we to say His words without trusting His words. A Christian's trust comes only from the Lord. Trust builds faithfulness, and faithfulness in the Lord is the glue that bonds the relationship together. Faithfulness in the Lord makes a relationship stronger and worth having for a lifetime. God is proven in all things, and our obedience to serve Him is built upon a faithfulness that inspires others to become Christlike through our life testimonies.

God is faithful and has made a covenant for us to live by that requires faithfulness toward Him at all costs. It is by faith that we believe in God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

It is by faith that those who are obedient to the Scriptures will receive a crown of life (Rom. 2:10) and an eternal home in heaven. Remaining faithful, steadfast, and unmovable in the Lord is a worthwhile sacrifice and our reasonable service.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how a Christian becomes genuine with his/her faith.
2. Ultimately, why should a Christian strive to remain faithful, and what is the worth of the effort?
3. Why is it important to believe in the Lord's promises?
4. Why is it essential to study the Bible and hear the word of God?

13

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Gentleness

Justin Guin

MAIN THING

Gentleness is learning the proper use of authority and power. It is strength harnessed and directed by the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus stood on the mount and listed the characteristics of his disciples (Matt 5:3–12). First, a citizen of Christ's kingdom recognizes his spiritually destitute state and total dependence on God. This attitude produces the right disposition towards sin (i.e., mourning) and humbles you before God. In Matthew 5:3, Jesus states, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:5, ESV). There is no room for arrogance and pride. A gentle/meek person does not seek to "inherit the earth" through power and force. Instead, a gentle person wins influence and favor with others by serving them.

Gentleness contrasts selfish ambition and characterizes

people who the Holy Spirit does not lead. In Galatians 5:22–23, the New Testament affirms again the importance of gentleness in the moral qualities you know as the "fruit of the Spirit." This quality is an expression of humility that seeks the best for others before one's personal goals.[1] It is the key to applying Galatians 5:26, "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." Strife and envy are works of the flesh (vv. 19–21) that oppose the Spirit's influence. As you explore the depth of this concept in the New Testament, you see it is necessary to produce harmony with God and your fellow man. Let's dig deeper to have a greater understanding of this biblical concept.

DIGGING DEEPER

The word "gentleness" (*prauts)* is found eleven times in the New Testament. In the English Standard Version, the Greek word *prats* is translated as gentleness six times.[2] It is also rendered "meekness" four times[3] and "courtesy" once in Titus 3:2. In these circumstances, *pauts* expresses the importance of humility and generosity. Mounce defines *prauts* an approach to others, including one's enemies, in a humble and caring spirit. You do not use force to get your way.[4] It contrasts arrogance and vengeance even when wronged or abused. A Christian does not throw weight around or pridefully assert oneself. Gentleness is learning the right use of power and authority.[5] It is strength under control. It is an attitude that produces harmony. You must not mistake this quality for weakness.

Consider an illustration from the Old Testament. In Numbers 12:3, the Bible describes Moses as "very meek,

more than all of the people who are on the face of the earth." Would you consider Moses a weak person? Just the opposite proves to be true. Moses demonstrated strength in the courts of Pharoah. He often used restraint when dealing with difficult people in the Israelites. His example of leadership and strength have endured the test of time, with no one surpassing him. Why was Moses such an effective leader? He was gentle and sought the best for others instead of pursuing his own will (cf. Exod 32:7–14).

In the New Testament, the Bible records the best example of gentleness in Jesus Christ. He described Himself as "gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt 11:29). Jesus calls all people to Himself, and because He is gentle and lowly in heart, He accepts everyone. Discipleship is difficult (Matt 7:13–14; Luke 9:23), but taking Jesus's yoke upon you and learning from Him gives you the grace to follow Him.

In Matthew 21:5, Jesus prepared for His triumphal entry. He did not enter Jerusalem in pomp and circumstance. His entrance was on the foal of a donkey, demonstrating His humility. This situation fulfilled Zechariah 9:9. As Lord of lords and King of kings, Jesus did not come as a conquering king. He came in gentleness and humility, seeking the lost and ministering to the downtrodden (cf. Luke 19:10; Matt 11:4–5). His humility was not a weakness but a sign of His strength and power.

Gentleness is a submissive and teachable spirit towards God that demonstrates itself in your relationships. It is a marker of Christ's rule and being led by the Spirit. You have genuine humility and consideration for others.

APPLICATION FOR TODAY

A missionary to Jamaica asked a group of boys, "Who are the meek?" One of the boys answered, "Those who give soft answers to rough questions."[6] Such is a fitting description of gentleness. This quality produces faith-building fruit that helps you grow more Christlike. Gentleness encapsulates many other attributes in the fruit of the Spirit. A meek person is loving, kind, and patient with others. You are an effective, productive servant in Christ's kingdom. In what way does a gentle spirit help you bear fruit as a Christian?

First, a gentle Christian is teachable. A Christian learns from Jesus as he teaches and molds them to be his disciples (Matt 11:29). A teachable spirit is willing to put aside anything that stands between God and them and accept His divine instruction. James wrote,

> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (Jas 1:21).

A prideful person has no interest in accepting and applying biblical instruction. A gentle person willingly submits to whatever God instructs them to do as it produces faith (cf. Rom 10:17). When the Spirit-inspired word is implanted in a meek person, then the Lord can direct their steps. Their conduct demonstrates they are wise and understand their God-given task as disciples of Jesus (Jas 3:13). You are a doer of the word and not a hearer only (Jas 1:22–25).

Second, the gentle person seeks to avoid conflict when teaching and to correct others. Conflict may seem

inevitable in these situations. Thus, the Bible consistently instructs you to offer correction in the spirit of gentleness. Paul wrote to Timothy,

> And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim 2:24–25).

Notice also Gal 6:1,

> Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Both texts remind you a harsh, judgmental spirit never reaches anyone. On the other hand, approaching the situation with gentleness helps the person see you are seeking their best interest, and they may be more willing to listen to you.

Third, a gentle spirit seeks harmony. The Lord desires His people to be unified. In the Old Testament, the Psalmist describes unity among Israel as both "good and pleasant" (Ps 133:1). In the New Testament, Jesus prayed His church would be one as He and the Father are unified in mission and purpose (John 17:21). There are other exhortations in the New Testament that stress the "oneness" of the church. The church must be of the same mind (1 Cor 1:10), mission (Phil 1:27), and mentality (Phil 2:5). To accomplish this, a spirit of gentleness must characterize every Christian. Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

> With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:2–3).

Danker defines "eager" as "to be especially conscientious in discharging an obligation, be zealous/eager."[7] A gentle Christian is zealous to maintain the bond among the church that the Spirit provides. A self-seeking person divides the body, but a meek person goes the second mile to keep unity in the church.

Fourth, a gentle Christian seeks to serve others above all. As noted, meekness seeks the best for others. A gentle spirit seeks the same manner of thinking as Christ. Note Philippians 2:3-5,

> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Gentleness eradicates the inclination to act out of selfishness. The mind of Christ changes your disposition from inward to outward. Numerous episodes in the Gospels record Jesus serving out of humility and love (cf. Matt 9:36; Mark 10:43–45), John 13:1ff; et al.). He modeled a meek and lowly spirit for you to emulate.

CONCLUSION

Gentleness seeks to put Christianity into action because you seek others' interests before your own. With a salary of $350,000, Raymond Burse is paid well for the chal-

lenges he faces as the president of Kentucky State University. In August 2014, Burse took a voluntary pay cut to $260,000. Burse directed that the $90,000 the university didn't pay him should be used to provide $3 per hour raises to all the university's minimum-wage workers. When asked why he was willing to do this, he replied, "You don't give up $90,000 for publicity. I did this for the people. This is something I've been thinking about from the very beginning."[8] Gentleness is a character matter. It keeps you from advocating for others in words only. Instead, when you see your brother in need, you respond with action (1 John 3:18). May God give the church more Christians characterized by gentleness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would a gentle spirit help you become a fruitful Christian?
2. How does a gentle spirit help you become a teachable person? See James 1:21.
3. What challenges do you see to developing meekness?
4. What are some examples of Christ's meekness recorded in the Gospels? What can you learn from each of these?
5. How can a gentle spirit help to become more effective when teaching others?

ENDNOTES

[1] Walter G. Hansen, *Galatians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), n.p.

[2] 1 Cor 4:21; Gal 5:23; 6:1; Eph 4:2; 2 Tim 2:25; 1 Pet 3:15.

[3] 2 Cor 10:1; Col 3:12; Jas 1:21; 3:13.

[4] William Mounce, *Mounce's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 281.

[5] Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 2:720.

[6] https://www.ministry127.com/resources/illustration/the-meaning-of-meekness.

[7] William Danker, William Ardnt, Walter Bauer, F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Greek Literature*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 939.

[8] Jim Wilson, *300 Illustrations for Preachers* (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, 2015), n.p.

14

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Self-Control

Wayne Kilpatrick

FOCUS PASSAGE

Galatians 5:22–23 (KJV)

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

ONE MAIN THING

One must strive for the mastery of self-control so that he may equip himself to serve God eternally.

INTRODUCTION

One may ask—what is self-control? A variety of terms have been used to define self-control. These include discipline, determination, grit, willpower, and fortitude. Typically, self-control is defined by psychologists as the ability to control behaviors, to avoid temptations, and to achieve

goals. Sometimes as the ability to delay gratification and resist unwanted behaviors or urges.

Self-control is seemingly the nearly impossible practice of learning to maintain control of one's own sinful passions. It means remaining master of your own actions when faced with trial or temptation. Self-control may be the epitome of "easier said than done." If most people are like this author, this is the hardest of all masteries. We try very hard to overcome the lack of self-control and it works for a while, then we gradually slip back into the old habit of losing control. We keep repeating the struggle again and again. It becomes cyclical in our day-to-day battle.

While we may slip back for a short time, we can with continuously engaging in situations that require us to exert self-control, improve our control over time. We must exercise self-control as one would over his or her muscles. While hard work may exhaust a muscle in the short term, it will grow stronger over time as you continue to work it. That is how overcoming the lack of self-control works. The more we exercise the use of it, the more mastery we gain in the process. Self-control is bodily and external as well. The apostle Paul said he disciplined his body daily to "keep it under control" (1 Cor 9:25–27).

GOING DEEPER

In Galatians 5:23, biblically speaking, temperance or self-control is a fruit that comes from the Holy Spirit. This means one must have the Holy Spirit to have this "fruit of the Spirit." Self-control comes from the indwelling and transformation by the Holy Spirit. Paul here uses the Greek word— ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) in this verse. It is defined as "restraint of one's emotions, impulses, or

desires, self-control."[1] The KJV translates this word, *enkrateia*, as temperance. It is that, but it is much more. *Alfred's Greek New Testament* defines *enkrateia* as "the holding in of the lusts and desires"[2] It has to do with the mastery of the self. This is the Christian's power to overcome the works of the flesh which Paul has already listed.

Sometimes temperance or self-control is used to refer to an athlete's discipline of his body and to the Christian's refusal to give free reign to impulse and desire (1 Cor 9:24–26). An athlete in training. must adhere to strict discipline using much self-control. The same is true of Christians who are compared to athletes by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:25. "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible."

Paul mentioned multiple scenarios in which one must be temperate to qualify for something. He used "temperance or self-control" in the qualifications of an elder.

> For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate (Titus 1:7–8).

Paul wrote in Titus chapter two: "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience (Titus 2:1–2). So, our elders must have self-control and our aged men who become examples to our younger men must also have self-control. In the context of Gala-

tians 5:23, all Christians must have self-control.

This control must come from within oneself, but not by oneself. As Christians, our temperance or self-control must be under God's control. If self-control is a fruit of the Spirit—then the Spirit must cause this attribute to develop in a Christian. All Christians have the indwelling of the Spirit, according to Peter and the other apostles, "And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32). All Christians have received the Holy Spirit in that they obeyed God. That is why we grow stronger in controlling our temperance as one of the fruits of the Spirit—if we apply ourselves.

Peter in his first epistle gives a list of virtues that contains "temperance" (KJV, RV) or "self-control" (CSB) in 1 Peter 1:5–7. He ties the list to impending judgment and righteousness. The Apostle Paul used the same line of reasoning before Felix: "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled ..." (Acts 24:25). Paul clearly demonstrated that temperance is connected to righteousness and the final judgment. We must get our desires and whelms under the control of God's desires to go to Heaven.

Self-control in the New Testament is not identical with the concept of self-control in Greek philosophical ethics. There is a significant difference between the two veins of thought on self-control. Greek philosophy strove to accomplish its ethical significance from the humanistic understanding of life. This philosophy held up freedom as its goal. Behind that thought stands the ideal of the free and autonomous person who through self-mastery controls all things, such as freedom in face of evil passions and

pleasures. The New Testament, however, refers to self-control as the mastery of the self and the shaping of one's life the way God desires. Paul lifts self-control much higher than Greek thought on the subject.

There is a flip side to self-control. Opposite of self-control there is a sinful state called self-indulgence. Jesus said: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41). Paul wrote: "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" (Gal 5:17). Paul told of his battle with this very thing.

> For I delight in God's law after the inward man, but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord! So then with the mind, I, myself serve God's law, but with the flesh, the sin's law (Rom 7:22–25).

To warn others of the struggle between the spiritual man and the fleshly man he gave a list of the damnable works of the flesh to avoid (Gal 5:19–21). These develop when one is lacking temperance or self-control, when one is not walking in the Spirit. Paul uses a Greek word that is the opposite of ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*). It is ἀκρατεῖς (*akrates*)—the condition of being "without self-control" (2 Tim. 3:3). This is the inability to keep one's passions under control or to resist temptation. Paul teaches that unmarried persons and widows who lack self-control should

marry—"But if they cannot contain (control themselves), let them marry" (1 Cor 7:9). The writer of the Proverbs said of a man without self-control—"He whose spirit is without restraint is like a city that is broken down and without walls" (Prov 25:28).

APPLICATION

Here we point to Paul. He insisted that even when things are lawful and not harmful, they should be subjected to three tests: Is it helpful? Is it constructive? Is it to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:23, 31)? If this principle is true of that which is not harmful and lawful, then how much more should we apply these questions of those drives, desires, and impulses which we know wreak havoc with our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, as well as our relationship with others?

Paul's Three Tests

First: Is it helpful (1 Cor 10:23)? "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient:" Paul teaches us that we should make our lives useful in helping others who are weak (1 Cor 6:12). "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor 6:12). We must consider those who are weak—"But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak" (1 Cor 8:9).

Second: Is it constructive (1 Cor 10:23c)? "all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." When we improve or instruct (someone) morally or intellectually; we are edifying (1 Thess 5:11). "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." We are responsible for edifying one another.

Third: Is it to the glory of God? Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, in his first epistle: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). He also sent a second letter to them in which he wrote: "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (2 Cor 4:15). By controlling our emotions and desires we glorify God.

If we are walking in the Spirit, we shall be helpful to others, after all we are God's servants here on the earth. If we walk in the Spirit, we shall do positive or constructive things. We are to build up and not tear down in God's work. We are to always glorify God— "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph 3:21). "To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Gal 1:5). "Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Heb 13:21). By walking in the Spirit we are striving toward that perfection that comes through God's grace. Paul wrote: "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12). Our goal is to be with God and Christ forever, so, we must "walk worthy" by walking in the Spirit. To accomplish this, we must be temperate. We must have self-control.

DISCUSSION

1. What is "walking in the Spirit?"
2. What is the opposite of walking in the Spirit?

3. Just how difficult is it to demonstrate temperance or self-control in our lives?
4. Can we grow stronger in our mastery of temperance? How?
5. How did Paul struggle with Spirit versus the flesh?
6. Discuss Romans 7:22–25 in connection with temperance.
7. What did Paul say about how he brought his body under control? (See 1 Cor 9:24–27).
8. How are Greek and biblical ideas about temperance different?

ENDNOTES

[1] Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000: 274.

[2] *Alfred's Greek New Testament*, 5th ed., vol. 3, Cambridge, England: Deighton, Bell, n.d.: 60.

15

HAVING CRUCIFIED THE FLESH

Todd Johnston

FOCUS PASSAGE

Galatians 5:24

ONE MAIN THING

Crucifying the flesh is a constant tug of war between the flesh and the Spirit. This is not a one-time action, but a continual, lifelong process that is aided by the fruit produced by and through the Spirit-led Christian.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two years many of us have experienced death at what appears to be an alarming rate. I have performed more funerals than weddings and attended more graveside services than birthday parties. It has felt like a constant reminder of loss and the brevity of life. Most recently, I suddenly lost my own grandfather. Throughout all this the most alarming and sobering real-

ization is that death might happen today, but life goes on tomorrow.

Physically, death is an event. We encounter it today and move on tomorrow. The question is whether, spiritually, death is an event or a process. When Paul discusses crucifying the flesh in Galatians 5:24, we are tempted to call this an event, but what if crucifying the flesh is more of a process? If crucifying the flesh is a process then what does it entail, how long is it, and how do we accomplish this?

GOING DEEPER

Galatians 5:24 is not the first time Paul has used language about crucifixion being related to faithful living for Christ. Paul states that he has died to himself and the life he now lives belongs to Christ (Gal 2:20) meaning that he lives in a fleshly world but not the way. The difference between the two verses is the passive construct of Galatians 2:20 versus the active construct of Galatians 5:24. The meaning of having been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20) is that Christ died in our place; whereas, crucifying the flesh is an action we partake in (Gal 5:24). Simply put, Galatians 2:20 is something that has been done to us (passive), and Galatians 5:24 is something done by us (active).[1]

Paul continues the idea of ongoing action when he presents the war between the flesh and Spirit, saying that if Christians walk by the Spirit they will "not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). Walk is a common word for an ongoing action.[2] A continual walk in the Spirit is a continual walk away from the flesh which produces a continual crucifixion of the flesh. This very language is used in Romans 8:5–11. Paul presents the great contrast

between living in the flesh versus the Spirit. Interestingly, Paul states that fleshly living is death. In Galatians, Paul says we are to put fleshly living to death. In other words, we have a choice between dying in the flesh or living in the Spirit having put the flesh to death. The metaphor Paul uses is the cross. The nature of fleshly living crucified Christ, so to be found in the nature of Christ-like living we must take the same avenue of death and metaphorically hang our flesh to suffocate for its offense. Walking in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ (Eph 4:1) is a walk that is defined by putting to death the very thing that condemns our souls.

This walk that Paul discusses is the same walk that John brings up in 1 John. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Once again, we see a process and not a single event. The blood of Christ was poured out on the cross (a single event), *and* the believer comes into contact with that blood by sharing in his death through baptism (a single event). However, these single events combined create the pathway for the continual process of Christ's blood cleansing the Christian who walks "in the newness of life" (Rom 6:3–4). Walking this life in the Spirit will produce the fruit of the Spirit. The Christian must walk in a way that produces fruit instead of soiling their paths with works of the flesh. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23) are not only the products of walking by the Spirit but are also the tools needed to crucify the flesh.

When we do not walk by the Spirit, we will walk by the flesh and gratify the desires of the flesh. Satan, our adversary, "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone

to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). In the war against flesh and Spirit, Satan is seeking anyone who will give up their blessed place with Christ for condemnation from fleshly living. So, we must always be prepared to take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23) and crucify the flesh while resisting all temptation to turn from Christ. Thank God that He always provides a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13).

APPLICATION

As a kid in south Alabama, I enjoyed riding four-wheelers and traversing the wooded areas behind our house. My buddy and I would spend hours in those woods. Once while riding and exploring we found a patch of bamboo deep into the woods. Our eyes were set on building a fort in the middle of that bamboo patch, but there was one major problem: there was no clear path. So, overnight we became amateur trailblazers. I don't know much about trailblazing, but there were three things I learned about creating paths that summer. First, I learned that any good path begins with removing big obstacles. Then you can move on to the smaller details, defining boundaries. Finally, a path is only useful if you traverse it daily. Otherwise, the overgrowth will reappear, and your path will be overrun. The lessons I learned about "trailblazing" I believe translate to valuable lessons for our lives in Christ and the idea of crucifying the flesh.

We were created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). Over time, though, we have made decisions in the flesh that have separated us from God and conformed us to an image of the world instead of the Father. When we put on Christ in baptism and begin the process of crucifying the flesh, we are no longer being conformed to the world, but we are

being transformed back to the image of God by the renewal of our minds (Rom 12:1–2). Following the message of Romans 12, Paul says the Christian is "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment" (Rom 12:3). This is the *remove big obstacles* step in creating a path to continually crucify the flesh and live in the Spirit. Sometimes the biggest obstacle in the way of living for Christ is ourselves. Ephesians 2:10 says that we are God's workmanship, or masterpiece (NIV), and we were created to do good works to glorify God (Matt 5:16). We are to remove the thoughts of self, whether self-defeating or self-conceited and begin thinking Christ-like.[3] Colossians 3:1–2 says we are to set our minds on things that are above, and in verse 3, Paul says our identity has changed. We have died to our old self and our life is now hidden with Christ in God. This is the only time that death brings life. From this death comes victory when we are "raised with Christ" (Col 3:1), baptized into Christ (Col 2:11–12), pursuing a deeper knowledge of Christ (Phil 3:10), seeking first the kingdom of Christ (Matt 6:33), and living a life worthy of the calling of Christ (Col 1:10; Phil 1:27). To begin crucifying the flesh, we must be able to remove the big obstacles in our life and realize our new identity in Christ.

Romans 12 and Colossians 3 are helpful passages to guide the Christian through the process of crucifying the flesh, renewing the mind, and thinking above where Christ is. The second step to crucifying the flesh and renewing the mind is to *create clear boundaries*. This is done by trusting in the guide and protector we have in God and His Word. In Galatians 5, Paul discussed the battle between the flesh and Spirit. If you are living by the Spirit, you will see the fruit of the Spirit. In Romans 12:9–21, Paul

shows what a fruit-bearing Christian looks like. The Christian shows genuine love, goodness, brotherly affection, honor, joy, service, patience, prayerful living, and hospitality. The true Christian blesses, lives in harmony, gives, is faithful, and kind. You may notice that these characteristics are very similar to the fruit of Galatians 5. To create clear boundaries for the continual crucifixion of the flesh we must rely on God and His Word. This is exactly what Paul does in Colossians 3 in discussing the new self. In fact, Paul uses Scripture as a guide. Colossians 3 and Psalm 27:5–6 show the same secure and protecting language of being hidden in God.

Notice how David responds to the provision and protection God provides in Psalm 27:6:

- His head is lifted up (Ps 27:6a)
- He offers sacrifices and worship (Ps 27:6b)
- He shouts for joy (Ps 27:6c)
- He sings to the LORD (Ps 27:6d)

Paul encourages us to respond in the same way:

- We are lifted up, appearing with Him in glory (Col 3:4)
- We must do all for God as a living sacrifice (Col 3:17; Rom 12:1–2)
- We shout for joy (Col 3:15–16)
- We sing and make melody to the Lord (Col 3:16)

Like Paul, we must rely on God and His Word to establish the clear boundaries of Christian living and work through the fine-tuning of dying to self and living for Christ.

Finally, the last step is *treading the path daily*. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). This is a daily sacrifice (Rom 12:1) where we make sure to replace our will and our way with God's will and way. We must put off the old ways of life and put on the way of Christ. Colossians 3:5 says to put to death the old ways, while verse 12 says to put on the new ways. Do you notice the progression Paul is providing? We cannot introduce the new if we have not first gotten rid of the old. This is a process and can be tough, but the product is so worth it! Crucifying the flesh is the process of getting rid of the old self. Once again, notice the attributes of "God's chosen ones" (Col 3:12). They are holy, loving, compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, long-suffering, forgiving, and more. Notice any similarities between these and the fruit of Galatians 5?

CONCLUSION

Crucifying the flesh is a constant tug of war between the flesh and the Spirit. This is not a one-time action, but a continual, lifelong process that is aided by the fruit produced by and through the Spirit-led Christian. This process begins with the commitment to put on Christ in baptism and live for Him. By removing the big obstacles (living in our new identity), creating clear boundaries (relying on God and His Word), and treading the path daily (walking in the ways of Christ) we can continually produce fruit of the Spirit and crucify the flesh.

I have lost several loved ones during my life. At times we find comfort in visiting the gravesites of those loved ones, leaving flowers, and remembering the life we shared with them. Not much good ever seems to come from

death, but I find comfort in knowing that God can take the worst thing we could face in this life and use it to claim victory, giving us hope for the next life. Death is only good when it comes in the form of crucifying and putting to death our flesh in exchange for a fruit-produced life in the Spirit.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to crucify the flesh, and why do we face a daily battle between flesh and Spirit?
2. What are the similarities between Colossians 3, Romans 12, and Galatians 5?
3. How does the fruit of the Spirit help with the daily battle to crucify the flesh?
4. What are the passions and desires of the flesh?
5. What does it mean to belong to Christ Jesus (ref Col 3:12 and 1 Pet 2:9–10)?

[1] George, Timothy, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994).

[2] Cole, Alan R, *About Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVaristiy Press, 1989).

[3] Philippians 4:8 says to think about things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise.

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SCRIPTURE INDEX

Old Testament

Genesis

1:27 113
2:7 4
2:23 48
4:1–2 48
6:8 48
9:4–17 48
12:1–2 48
17 3
17:10 14
17:11 14
17:12 14
17:12–13 14
17:14 15

Exodus

12:44 15
12:48 15
15 48
32:7–14 96
34:6 65

Leviticus

12:3 15
19:18 15, 20

Numbers

6:24–26 54
12:3 95
25 54

Deuteronomy

6:1–9 10
28:47 48
30:19–20 25

Joshua

5 15

Judges

8:35 84
9:16 84

2 Samuel

5:1–3 48

1 Kings

2:33 55
8 48
2 Chronicles
24:16 84
Ezra
6:15–22 48
Nehemiah
8:17–18 48
Job
25:2 55
Psalms
5:11 49
20:5 49
27:5–6 115
27:6 115
30:4–5 49
35:27 49, 55
37:7–9 65
40:1 65
51:5 84
68:3 49
103:8 65
133:1 98
Proverbs
1:8–9 10
3:3 90
3:5–6 90
12:20 52
14:12 25
14:29 65
15:18 65
16:32 65
22:6 10, 24
25:28 107
28:20 90
31 73
31:26 73
Ecclesiastes
4:8 84
5:10 84
5:17 84
6:3 84
6:6 84
7:8–9 65
7:14 84
9:18 84
Isaiah
5:18–23 61
40:31 65
41:10 89
53:3 45
54:6–10 54
54:9 55
59:18 55
66:6 55
Jeremiah
16:18 55
21:8 26
25:14 55
31:33–40 55
Lamentations
3:22–24 49
Ezekiel
18:20 25
34:25 54
37:26 54

44 54
Micah
5:3–4 55
Zechariah
9:9 96
9:9–10 55
Malachi
2:1–9 55
2:5 55

New Testament
Matthew
5:3 94
5:3–12 94
5:5 94
5:16 114
5:38–48 69
6:33 114
7:13–14 26, 96
9:36 99
11:4–5 96
11:29 96–97
18:21–35 76
19:14 25
19:17 80
20:1–16 80
21:5 96
22:34–40 20
25 43
25:14–30 76
25:21 90
26:41 106
Mark
10:18 80
10:43–45 99
12:28–31 37–38
12:30–31 25
12:31 73
Luke
2:10 49
2:13–14 49
2:14 56
6:27–38 41
6:35 76
7:30 13
9:23 96, 113
10:25–28 38
12:51 56
18:19 80
19:10 96
22:42 74
23:34 74
24:36 56
John
1:14 26, 74
3:16 38, 76
3:16–17 46
5:29 80
7:19 18
10:34 16
13:1ff 99
13:34–35 38–39
14:15 39
14:27 57
16:20 46
17:20 30

17:21 98
17:23 30
Acts
5:32 11, 13, 105
5:41 46
6:10 13
7:51 13
9:31b 11
24:25 105
Romans
1:17 91
1:24 28
1:25 28
2:4 62, 65
2:10 93
2:13 16
2:14–15 22
2:25–29 15, 22
3:10–20 18
3:23 25
5:1–10 57
5:11–6:14 57
5:6–8 40
6:3–4 112
6:4 57
6:14 20
6:14–15 17
6:15 21
7:5 26
7:9 25
7:12 18
7:14 26
7:18–8:5 31
7:21 22
7:22–25 106, 109
8 8, 21
8:1–14 8
8:2 8
8:4 19
8:5–11 111
8:5–14 70
8:6 8, 57–58, 69
8:7 8
8:9 8
8:11 8
8:14 8
8:25 65
9:22 62
10:17 91, 97
12 114, 117
12:1 116
12:1–2 114–115
12:3 114
12:9–21 114
12:12 65
12:15 50
12:20 75
13:8–10 19–20
14:5–6 18
14:14 18
15:4 18
15:13 50
15:14 18, 81, 84
1 Corinthians
1:10 30–31, 98

4:21 101
5:1–13 18
6:12 107
6:12–20 18
7:9 107
7:19 15
8:9 107
9:9 18
9:20 17
9:24–26 104
9:24–27 109
9:25 104
9:25–27 103
10:1–14 18
10:13 113
10:14–22 18
10:23 107
10:31 107–108
12 3
11:1 10
13:4 65, 77
13:13 37
14:21 16
14:34 18
15:33 25
16:15–16 10
16:16–17 50

2 Corinthians

4:2 29
4:15 108
8:2 50
10:1 101
12:21 28

Galatians

1:4 23, 31
1:5 108
1:6–7 80
2:16 16
2:20 111
2:21 17
3:3 15
3:10 16
3:11 17
3:19 17
3:23 17
3:24–25 17, 81
3:26–27 7
3:29 15
4:1 17
4:4–5 17
4:6 15
4:8–9 81
4:21 17
4:21–31 17
4:23 15
4:29 15
5 3, 6, 21, 23, 26, 31, 53, 114–117
5:1 17
5:1–3 3
5:2 15
5:4 15, 17
5:6 15
5:13–15 43
5:13–26 18

5:14 15, 20
5:16 7, 10, 12, 111
5:16–17 15, 26
5:16–26 1–2, 7–9, 32, 43, 46–47, 87
5:17 9, 53, 106
5:17–26 82
5:18 7, 10, 14–15, 17–18
5:19a 26
5:19–21 23, 26, 95, 106
5:21 9, 46–47
5:22 45, 47–48, 57, 62, 65, 72–73, 78, 80–81, 84
5:22–23 20, 34, 78, 82–83, 95, 102, 112
5:23 101, 103–105
5:24 9, 12, 110–111
5:25 7–8, 116
5:26 7, 10, 80, 95
6:1 98, 101
6:2 30
6:7 2
6:9 65, 89
6:13 15–16
6:15 15

Ephesians
1:1 9
1:7 9
2:1–10 7
2:10 114
2:13 9
3:3–10 48
3:21 108
4 9
4:1 10, 112
4:2 65, 101
4:2–3 99
4:17 9
4:17–24 7
4:19 28
4:22 9, 26
4:24 9
4:29 75
4:31 75
4:32 72–73, 75
5:1 32
5:7–14 81
5:9 84
5:11 81
6:1–3 18
6:1–4 10, 25

Philippians
1:27 98, 114
2:1–2 50
2:3–5 99
2:5 98
2:12 12
2:12–13 48

3:10 114
3:17 10
4:6 65
4:8 117
Colossians
1:5 10
1:10 114
2:11–12 114
3 114–115, 117
3:1 114
3:1–2 114
3:1–4 8
3:1–17 7, 9
3:3 114
3:4 115
3:5 28, 116
3:12 101, 116–117
3:12–13 65
3:15 71
3:15–16 115
3:16 115
3:17 115
4:14 28
1 Thessalonians
2:12 108
4:3–8 18
5:11 107
5:19 13
2 Thessalonians
1:5 82
1:11 78, 82, 84
1:12 82
1 Timothy
1:16 62, 65
2:4 46
2:6 46
5:18 18
5:23 28
2 Timothy
1:5 10
1:13 10
2:15 18
2:24–25 98
2:25 101
3:3 106
3:10 10
3:14–17 10
3:16–17 4, 18–19, 73
Titus
1:7–8 104
2:1–2 104
2:11–12 10
2:11–14 48
3:2 95
Hebrews
2:9 74
4:15 26
5 75
6:18 88
10:34 46
10:36 46, 65
11:1 89
11:6 88
12:2 45, 50
13:7 10

13:21 108
James
1:2 46
1:2–4 70
1:12–14 89
1:19 65
1:21 97, 100–101
1:22–25 97
3:13 97, 101
4:17 42
1 Peter
1:5–7 105
2:2 75
2:9–10 117
2:19 68
2:19–24 68
3:15 101
3:20 62
5:8 112–113
2 Peter
1:4 26
1:10 10
3:9 65
3:15 65
1 John
1:7 112
1:7–9 83
1:9 90
2:15–17 10
3:18 100
4:1 11
2 John
4 50
Revelation
2:7 11
2:11 11
2:17 11
2:29 11
3:8 11
3:13 11
3:27 11
6:4 56
17:14 58

Apocryphal Literature
Esdras
19:25 84
19:35 84
23:3 84
Odes to Solomon
12:14 84
First Maccabees
8:4 62

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