

The Spiritual Fruit of Freedom

Printed Text • Galatians 5:16-26

Devotional Reading • Isaiah 32:1-8

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the freedoms gained when “walking by the Spirit,” DESIRE the personal and relational qualities of a Spirit-led life, and SUPPORT one another in living a life centered on Jesus Christ.

In Focus

Since the day they met in high school, Cassandra and Lisa had been best friends. At proms, birthdays, and college, they were inseparable. As adults, they started going to church together and became Christians at the same time. Lisa, who had always been more outgoing, immediately started serving in church auxiliaries while Cassandra shied away from getting to know their new church family. Although Lisa was making new friends, she and Cassandra had become even closer because they now shared a deep love for Christ.

When Lisa got married and moved away, Cassandra felt so alone and started to isolate herself. She began to feel like God had abandoned her. Lisa could hear the sadness in Cassandra’s voice whenever they’d talk on the phone.

Cassandra said, “I wish I could be more extroverted like you. It’s not that I don’t like people. I just wish I knew where my talents could fit.”

“You’ve already shown a lot of patience, Cassandra,” Lisa said. “God always knows how to use His people. I’ve got an idea to help, if you don’t mind.”

She called her friend Betty at the church and asked her to pray for Cassandra.

Betty and a few other women from the church prayed. Then she and the others stopped by Cassandra’s home to let her know they’d been thinking about her. To this day, Cassandra, Betty, and the other women still meet weekly for prayer and support. Cassandra’s Christian walk is stronger than ever because her fellow believers reached out to her in love.

How can you discern the fruit of the Spirit in your own life?

Keep In Mind

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Drunkenness (Galatians 5:21) *methe* (Gk.) – Intoxication

B. Revellings (v. 21) *komos* (Gk.) – Drunken behavior

Say It Correctly

Lasciviousness. lah-SI-vee-us-nes

Variance. VA-ree-ens

Emulations. em-yoo-LAY-shuns

KJV

Galatians 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NLT

Galatians 5:16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

18 But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,

21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.

25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

26 Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

The People, Places, and Times

Fruit. Most of the time, we cannot recognize a fruit from only its seed. Only after seeds are planted in the ground and start sprouting do we know what type of fruit has been planted. Fruit is used metaphorically in Scripture to illustrate this fact. We do not know the power at work in people's lives until we see the fruit that power produces. In Scripture, fruit (works or deeds) is the sign of God's power moving within a person. Sin produces fruit (works) of the flesh, but the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of believers.

Early Church Identity. The Roman government viewed first-century Christianity as merely a sect of Judaism because the church was still searching for its identity, and many in the first-century churches identified as Jews (according to their ancestry). Many Christians in fact still worshiped in the Jewish synagogues. The first believers did not even call themselves Christians, but "followers of the Way." Antioch was where the term "Christian" was first used (Acts 11:26). As increasing numbers of Gentiles became believers, due largely to Paul's endeavors, the necessity of observing the Mosaic Law came into question.

Paul reflected that our righteousness being based on Christ's righteousness and received as a gift was the foundation of the Christian faith. This marked the separation of Christianity from Judaism. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he consistently emphasizes the difference between being enslaved by the Law and being free in the Holy Spirit as a means to teach the true Gospel and solidify the church's identity.

Background

The apostle Paul challenged the believers of his day to learn what every believer today would do well to remember: the key to making progress in the realm of Christian freedom is to keep walking in the Spirit.

Paul is very much aware of the Galatians' need for a power that the law could not give. He realized from personal experience (see Romans 7), that there are some things the law cannot do (8:3). Rules and regulations can command, but they cannot empower one to do what is commanded. Rules and regulations serve as a guide or a road map, but they cannot motivate and enable one to follow the direction and guidance given.

If the Galatians were to live free from sin's power to control their lives, if they were to fulfill the law, it would be because they surrendered themselves to the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Only those who have surrendered and who keep on surrendering themselves to the complete control of the Spirit are empowered to walk according to the Spirit's orders.

Paul was convinced of the Spirit's sufficiency to guide and strengthen believers to live righteously. Moreover, he was convinced that the Spirit is always present to guide and strengthen believers in their warfare against the desires of the flesh. Paul's message to Galatians called them to be careful to follow the marching orders of the Spirit. Those who march by the Spirit's orders will not—and indeed cannot—fulfill the desires of the flesh. "This I say then," wrote Paul, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

At-A-Glance

1. Works of the Flesh (Galatians 5:16–21)
2. The Fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22–26)

In Depth

1. Works of the Flesh (Galatians 5:16–21)

Today's lesson begins in the midst of Paul's attempt to convince the Galatians to not become enslaved by the Law, which—unlike the Holy Spirit—was not intended to save, but rather to shed light on sin (Romans 3:20). Paul informs the Galatians that those led by the Spirit (i.e., those under the continual guidance of and in abiding relationship with the Spirit) are no longer subject to the Law, nor can be condemned by it (Romans 8:1).

The question would follow then, "How does one go about following the Spirit, but not the Law and not the world?" Those listening to Paul had been used to thinking of the world in two groups: those who sinned and those who followed the Law. Now that Paul has told them not to follow the Law, he must explain that they aren't supposed to follow the world either. Instead, the Spirit is unique from both the world and the Law (vv. 17–18).

It turns out, Paul tells the Galatians, that following the Spirit will end up looking a lot like following the Law. The things God already told His people not to do, they still should not do. Paul uses a vice list (a convention of Greco-Roman moral rhetoric) to emphasize that those who continually practice these sins will not inherit the kingdom of God. On this list we see items that we might consider "big sins" like idolatry, heresy, and murder. But we also see sins that you and I might commit on a regular basis: hatred, strife, or drunkenness. All sins are equal before God, for any sin means that we have decided to set ourselves against God's protective Law, thinking we know better.

What are some other sins that we might not think to put on a list alongside murder and idolatry?

2. The Fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22–26)

The works of the flesh contrast the fruit of the Spirit. The word "fruit" denotes an organic growth that stems from the believer's relationship with Christ. The first fruit listed is love. It is also the virtue upon which all the other fruit are based (1 Corinthians 13:1–3). In essence, the operation of the Holy Spirit is love manifested in believers' lives; there is no law against love.

Followers of Christ still struggle with sinful human desires, but strive to do good. Instead of following the Law and covering their sin with an animal sacrifice, Paul uses the image of believers nailing their sins to Christ's Cross. Instead of trusting the Law to cover up their faults, they trust in the Cross to pay them off once and for all.

Paul adds that if believers live by the Spirit, they should walk in the Spirit. In other words, believers should be in one accord in following the Spirit instead of giving in to competition or jealousy. So much trouble comes when we compare our Christian lives to that of others. Our insecurities lead us to think it's not fair for someone to be higher than we are, so we envy them or we try to bring them down. We might also lord our seeming height over another, provoking them to jealousy or spiteful action. Such things are also of the world just as much as witchcraft, heresy, and murder are.

How do you remind yourself that your sinfulness was nailed to the Cross?

Search the Scriptures

1. Works of the Flesh (Galatians 5:16–21)
2. The Fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22–26)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Works of the Flesh (Galatians 5:16–21)
2. The Fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22–26)

Liberating Lesson

From the moment we're born, laws govern our lives. Babies must have birth certificates. Children must go to school. Drive on green. Stop on red. Most people try to follow the law to the letter. It's easy for us to look at the fruit of the Spirit as more laws to follow. The Lord desires that our lives reflect the fruit, but not in legalistic ways. Our lives should be an outpouring of our love for Christ and our desire to serve one another.

Application for Activation

We have many opportunities to do good in this world. The question is, what should we do? Create a plan to exhibit at least one fruit of the Spirit each day of the week. Come back and report to the class the challenges and rewards.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Galatians 5:16–26

This passage provides a frank and insightful look at how virtue and vice lists function within the New Testament broadly. The chapter began by signaling the types of moral behaviors that inform Christian freedom. Paul purports that the acts of circumcision and law keeping could potentially distance the believer from actually experiencing Christian freedom and consequentially alienate themselves from Christ. The paradox of enjoying freedom from the law was potentially causing friction within the community by encouraging adherents to untangle themselves from the law while being entangled to

the welfare of their fellow citizens. As our discourse opens, the stark polemics of the works of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit are on full display.

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

A significant break here signals that the author has now shifted into his normal didactic rhetorical mode by instructing the recipients to walk in the Spirit. To do so will enable one to not carry out the lusts of the flesh. The stark polarity between the Spirit and the flesh is unavoidable and a common tactic by Paul to juxtapose contradictory lifestyles for emphasis. In choosing to walk by the Spirit, the Galatians are given both a sufficient guide for orienting their moral lives and the power to avoid the pitfalls of the flesh. The two options that are laid bare demand a choice upon believers, it is necessary to choose wisely.

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

The verse begins with a conjunction to further develop the way that this Pauline juxtaposition (flesh versus spirit) unfolds. Paul says, “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit.” In other words the two are diametrically opposed to one another. This ongoing contest occurs internally (cf. Romans 7:15–20) and has the potential to lead one into wholesale abdication of the leading of the Spirit. Of course to do so would signal disaster for the believer, which is precisely what the apostle will articulate in the next few verses, yet could also render their ability to respond to the Spirit null and void (cf. Romans 4:14; 7:23).

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

While yielding to the flesh is dangerous, a Spirit-inspired life emancipates the believer from the law’s requirements. This statement does not mean that laws are to be disobeyed and overlooked—a notion likewise unsupported in the rest of the New Testament—however it does contend that the law has lost its parental role in the life of the Christ follower. Paul connects life in the spirit with the theological concept of adoption, suggesting, “all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). The polarities stated in vv. 16–18 prepare the framework for the upcoming vice list within vv. 19–21 and help to distinguish them from the fruit of the Spirit.

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

This list is composed of vices that are anchored to self-centeredness and destroy life within community. Sixteen behaviors in total are named, each of them grouped according to the semantic domains they emerge from. Within the first clause, Paul argues that these manifestations of the flesh are its “works” (Gk. erga, AIR-gah), suggesting that they are actively producing outcomes. The first subset are sexual sins that were to some extent acceptable within pagan circles, but completely disparaged by Christ followers. The first subset of terms—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness—share the sense of lustful actions carried out with one’s body. While “uncleanness” (Gk. akatharsia, ah-kah-thar- SEE-ah) can mean any ritual impurity, Paul usually uses the word in the context of other sexual sins (Romans 1:24; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Colossians 3:5). Lasciviousness (Gk. aselgeia, ah-SEL-gay-ah) is also translated wantonness (Romans 13:13) and filthy (2 Peter 2:7). Today one might think that these actions are excusable, since they take place between consenting adults or only in one person’s thoughts. Make no mistake about it: these actions work much harm into the life of those who participate in them. Breaking promises also breaks hearts. Images and

thoughts that we think are just in our own minds effect how we interact with people. These are indeed sins of the flesh.

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

A second subset of vices related to social structures emerges. Idolatry (Gk. eidololatreia, eye-dow-low-la-TRAY-ah, the worship of false gods), witchcraft (Gk. pharmakeia, far-mah-KAY-ah, sorcery, magical arts), hatred (Gk. echtra, EKH-trah, holding someone as your personal enemy), exclusion (KJV: variance; Gk. eris, AIR-iss, strife or contention), rivalry (KJV: emulations; Gk. zelos, ZEH-loce, zeal), and wrath (Gk. thumoi, THOO-moy, passion) are sins committed by individuals in a community. In a fierce way, they exacerbate division in societies. Identifying these vices represents Paul's way of attempting to call them out and lessen their hold upon the community.

The third subset—strife (Gk. eritheia, eh-ree-THAY-ah, partisan infighting), seditions (Gk. dichostasia, die-kho-STAH-see-ah, division) and heresies (Gk. haireisis, hi-REH-seese, dissensions)—relates to the structural fabric of the community. The apostle Paul uses this space to name the individual vices that are at work in his community to heighten the community's social injustices, which is something no church wants to see.

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

The final subset of vices emerges from individual greed and covetousness. The New Testament contains a bevy of texts that assert how lust for unattainable items has the potential to "devour." Envyings (Gk. phthonos, FTHO-noce, envy, jealousy) appears next to murders to communicate the impulse that has perhaps motivated a host of evil behaviors up to and including murder. Drunkenness (Gk. methe, MEE-thee, intoxication) and revellings (Gk. komos, KOH-moce, drunken behavior) portend a possible connection to the Dionysian cult of the first century in which Bacchus or a similar deity was worshiped by throwing drinking parties. Paul concludes this verse with an editorial statement. He wants to be crystal clear that a firm cease and desist must be applied to all former pagan practices for those who now identify as Christians. Those who commit actions like these are following after the flesh, and not the Spirit, which guides all Christians.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Contrasting the vices, Paul now shares the virtues that promote holiness and wholeness within the community of faith. The nine virtues listed here can be explained in triads in the order that they appear. Love, joy, and peace all function as virtues that are displayed within the individual. They grow internally like roots, below the surface, deeply rooted in the life of the believer. These are inner-oriented virtues that foster a type of wholeness by showing concrete expression in the face of adversity. The second triad, longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness, represent fruit of an outward-orientation, or how we interact with others. These virtues allow the Christian to hold up under cruel pressure, to act with calm respect toward others, and generally display the wholesomeness acquired by the first triad of virtues.

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

This final triad—faith, meekness, and temperance—represents the fruit of self-mastery. Each one demonstrates the loyal responsibility of the Christian to act in accordance to the Spirit of God. What benefit do these virtues add to the believer's life? To begin, faith represents the act or attitude of believing, and underscores an idea of God's trustworthiness. God has proven His trustworthy

character to believers throughout all time, so it should not surprise readers to find this virtue affirmed here. Meekness, or gentleness, produces great benefits for the believer in Christ Jesus (cf. 1 Timothy 6:11) particularly in the realm of undeserved criticism (i.e., Moses, cf. Numbers 12:3) and also demonstrates itself in the realm of anger as one who possesses meekness tends to rein in their anger even in situations when it would be an appropriate response. Self-control (KJV: temperance) is a characteristic of those guided by the Spirit rather than the impulsiveness of the flesh. Even though Paul does not often explicitly use this word, he places it here among the highest virtues, because when all the theology and guidelines Paul explains at length in his letters are enacted, they often look like simple self-control.

The possessor of these virtues cannot be indicted. These nine virtues will not impugn the law. In other words, we can't be at fault for having joy, though many may seek to rob us of joy. We can't be arrested for having peace, though sometimes being peaceable may cost us. No laws exist against forbearance, kindness, being gentle, faithful, or austere. This is precisely the point Paul makes in the final clause. He's saying "if you have these fruit, there are no laws against living them out."

Paul assures his audience that following the Spirit will look a lot like obeying the Law of Moses. The freedom that Christ offers from the heavy weight of the Law does not mean Christians will go around breaking those Jewish laws. Christ is the same God who gave those rules on Mt. Sinai, so those being guided by His indwelling Spirit will end up adhering to the moral guidelines of Judaism. However, the Christian will know that it is not their own efforts or animal sacrifices that make them follow these rules, but the power of the Spirit within them.

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

Paul had admitted to the Galatians that he had been "crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (2:19–20). Here, this confession corresponds to the now corporate mode of existence for the believers and enables them to live liberated lives. No longer are they captive to their worst impulses and craven urges. Paul says that the flesh has been nailed to the cross with Christ. This process is necessary for the cultivation of the fruit of the Spirit to ensure the new life that Christianity entails.

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

The conditional statement "if we live in the Spirit" is contingent upon our constant yielding to His leading. The spirit-filled life is not a complicated formula measured by legalistic to-do lists. It is a lifestyle informed by Scripture and empowered by a willing submission to the Holy Spirit's leading. The ability to pursue a life pleasing to God is contingent upon a complete abandoning of our lives prior to conversion. If one is skilled in yielding their life to the leading of the Spirit, that person will also live a lifestyle that reflects this reality.

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

The entreaty of this final verse makes an appeal for the audience to avoid vain glory (Gk. kenodoxos, keh-no-DOXE-occe, glory without reason), provocation (Gk. prokaleomai, pro- kah-LEH-oh-my, irritating), and envy (Gk. phthoneo, fthow-NEH-oh, bearing ill will or jealousy) so that neighborly love could continue unabated. To combat the way the fleshly vices take root, Paul sought to head them off before they became problematic within the community. It is easier to focus upon these vices when they're small and remove them as one would remove an invasive species of weed, to ensure that the fruit of the Spirit have the chance to thrive in the life of the individual and expand into the community as a whole. We know that in our Christian lives the invisible battle between good and evil is also

waged at the level of the individual. This text can steal our souls to live lives in the victory that Jesus' atonement has secured. We are informed by the Scriptures and empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk in lockstep with Him. This invitation will help us live the life Paul promises us in these verses and enable us to be fruitful in our efforts.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Righteous Yield Their Fruit
(Psalm 1)

TUESDAY

Abide in Christ and Bear Fruit
(John 15:1-8)

WEDNESDAY

Wisdom's Harvest of Righteousness
(James 3:13-18)

THURSDAY

The Spirit Produces a Fruitful Field
(Isaiah 32:9-20)

FRIDAY

Known by Their Fruits
(Matthew 7:15-20)

SATURDAY

God's Presence Brings Forth Healing Fruit
(Ezekiel 47:1-7, 12)

SUNDAY

Live by the Spirit
(Galatians 5:16-26)