

July 13, 2014
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Galatians
Community Baptist Church
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WALKING IN THE SPIRIT IS OBVIOUS Galatians 5:22-26

The claim, “I am a Christian” is about as common as, “I think, therefore, I am.” We cannot dispute that a person exists, but sometimes we might wonder if a person actually thinks very much. Likewise, we cannot automatically disagree with a person’s claim to be a Christian, but there are times that we wonder what they think about such a claim.

The thing that causes people to wonder about the legitimacy of the claim to be “Christian” (like Christ) is the simple fact that the claimants’ lifestyles seem to indicate that they are not like Christ. The problem with the typical assessment of legitimacy is that we tend to confuse “Christ-likeness” with our version of western religion. If a person who lives in Europe, for example, claims to be a follower of Christ, but does not practice his or her Christianity exactly like we do, we tend to discount his or her testimony. So what is the standard by which we can measure the claim of “Christian”?

That is the very thing Paul spelled out to the Galatians. They were in a spiritual warfare with false teachers who taught that a person is born again by keeping the details of the old Mosaic Law. Paul argued that it is impossible to force God to declare us just by keeping laws. Primarily that is impossible because no one can keep laws consistently enough to merit righteousness. But if a person isn’t keeping the rules, how can you tell if he is really a Christian? Or more important, “Do I need to keep rules to prove that I am a Christian?”

Before us is one of the most important principles of Christian living. We are all plagued by the desires and passions of the flesh. Paul argued previously that people who are characterized by those

things are not Christians. So what do Christians look like, or how do they live? They live in a way that reflects God’s character. Really? Indeed, real Christians walk in fellowship with God the Holy Spirit and, therefore, cannot help but manifest His own characteristics. What do they look like? Let’s read and learn.

The is no Law Against Living Like God (vv.22-23).

Granted, most people will agree that there is no law against living like God, but what God is like might generate some discussion. Here the Scripture gives a brief description of God’s character by outlining the fruit of the Spirit. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

That statement is easy enough to understand on the surface. But what does it say under the surface? We can answer that question first by considering what fruit is. Here fruit is the multi-faceted characteristics of the Holy Spirit’s work through an individual. The fruit of the Spirit is contrasted to the many and varied works of the sinful nature. This makes perfect sense when we admit that literal fruit on a tree or vine demonstrates the nature of the tree. Jesus taught that principle by saying, *“You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit” (Matthew 7:16-18).*

Therefore, a “tree” that has the Holy Spirit as its source of nourishment produces stuff that is characteristic of the Holy Spirit. It (he, she, or we) can’t do otherwise. Paul gave us a thumbnail sketch of what that might look like. First, he said that Holy Spirit fruit is love. As expected this is the Greek work *agape*. This kind of love is the intentional decision to help the object of your love achieve what is best, even if it requires sacrifice on your part. Probably this characteristic appears first in the list because of its importance and its foundational relationship to the other traits.

From love flows joy. Joy is the settled confidence in God’s love for us. It is equally present in times of blessing and times of trial. Joy should not be confused with happiness that depends on external

circumstances. That is why God commands us not to try to manufacture this attitude but to embrace it by focusing on the source of real joy who is the Lord. Paul commanded the Philippian Christians, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice (Philippians 4:4)*. Notice that the command is not to rejoice only when things go well.

Third is peace. Everyone knows what peace is, right? This is the illusive comfort people seek throughout life. Actually, peace that is Holy Spirit fruit is a deep confidence and tranquility of mind that comes from a right relationship with God. It does not depend on outward circumstances. Therefore, the Christian is equally at peace in the good times and bad times. This kind of peace causes its owner to look confident and secure regardless of circumstances. Therefore, this trait is one of the greatest “works for God’s glory” to generate a discussion about the gospel.

Fourth is patience. This is the same as longsuffering in the face of unkindness, slander, or intentional injuries that others inflict. It is the trait God shows toward sinners who transgress His law continually. If God were not patient, no one would be alive.

The fifth characteristic of Holy Spirit fruit is kindness. This is God’s gracious response to the rebellious creation. Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians that for the ages to come (for all eternity) Christians will be like trophies that demonstrate God’s kindness to save us (Ephesians 2:7). Kindness is the desire and effort to be useful and beneficial to others.

Sixth is goodness. Originally this trait refers to that which is excellent, achieving a high standard. It came to refer to God’s standard of excellence. Therefore, goodness for us is found when we are striving to do that which God calls good.

Faithfulness is sometimes translated “faith” or sometimes “faithfulness.” In this case it seems best to translate the word to describe faithfulness. That is best manifested in loyalty and trustworthiness toward God’s righteousness. But if we are loyal and faithful toward God, we will at the same time be loyal and trustworthy in our relationship with others. Maybe this trait is observed most commonly in our loyalty and trustworthiness regarding our word.

The seventh trait is gentleness. This word generally speaks of meekness and humility in its Bible use. At the same time, it comes across as a teachable spirit.

Finally Paul described the fruit of the Spirit with the word self-control. Self-control is the desire and ability to restrain the passions of the flesh. It is inner strength or fortitude to do the right thing and keep from doing the wrong thing.

Let’s be honest at this point. The person who manifests these traits is rare indeed. In fact, when we give serious thought to striving for these traits in our own lives, we might hesitate a bit. It does seem like this kind of person would be a pushover, someone who stands for nothing but is always ready to concede. But wait! Is that really what God is like?

Consider the example of others who, according to the Bible’s testimony, manifested the fruit of the Spirit. Who would have better manifested the fruit of the Spirit than Jesus who was co-equal with God the Spirit? His example should cause us to wonder. Why did the religious people hate Him so much that they delivered Him to be killed, if He lived like God? How was it that Jesus demonstrated perfect love, joy, peace, and the rest, but the governor delivered Him to be tortured and the Roman soldiers killed Him? Why did masses of people turn away from the one man who expressed Holy Spirit control perfectly? Why did His own brothers not embrace Him from the beginning, but sometimes chided Him? There is no doubt that Jesus revealed God to the world. There is also no doubt that He was no wimp or pushover.

There are reasons why the world reacts negatively to people who live like God. When a person truly manifests the fruit of the Spirit, it makes people who produce works of the flesh look bad. In response, people of the flesh do works of the flesh like enmity, strife, jealousy, envy and anger. Also, all the kind characteristics listed in this text are coupled with honesty, justice, and faithfulness to the truth. Finally, the applying of principles of justice, truth, and fidelity is perceived as unfairness, unkindness, and being uncaring.

Jesus is not the only example of living out the fruit of the Spirit only to be criticized and condemned. The man who wrote these words in this letter to the Galatians surely walked in the Spirit, but even modern critics point to supposed inconsistencies in his testimony.

Notice in 1:6 that he wrote, *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--”* (Ga 1:6). Was that a fair accusation? In response to religious authorities Paul confessed, *“To them we did not yield in submission even for a moment”* (Gal. 2:5). Isn’t that stubbornness? Oh, and *“when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned”* (Gal. 2:11). How unkind can you get? That is Spirit living! Paul chided the people, *“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?”* (Gal. 3:1) Did Paul say they acted like fools? Worse, he wrote, *“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse”* (Gal. 3:10a). How would you like to be told you are cursed? *“I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you”* (Gal. 4:20). Oh, so Paul admits he is not being nice. He really seemed to lose it when he wrote, *“I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!”* (Gal. 5:12). That was not kind at all!

This is the same man who chided the high priest. *And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?”* (Acts 23:2-3). To the sailors who insisted on sailing and wrecked the ship in a storm Paul essentially said, *“I told you so.”* *Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss”* (Acts 27:21). To the Jews in Rome, Paul said, *“God was right to say through Isaiah that you are hopeless”* (Acts 28:25).

Evidence in the Corinthian letters shows the same attitudes. He told them that he had to teach them like they were babies. *“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ”* (1 Cor. 3:1). He sarcastically told them that they didn’t need his teaching because they had already achieved spiritual success! *“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!”* (1 Cor. 4:8). So he asked them, *“Shall I come to you with a rod?”* (1 Cor. 4:21). He instructed them, *“Turn the man over to Satan who will destroy his*

flesh!” (1 Cor. 5:4). He said that when he showed up some heads are going to roll. *“I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them--”* (2 Cor. 13:2). To the Thessalonian Christians Paul wrote, *If you don’t work you don’t eat* (2 Thes. 3:10).

All of that sounds horribly unkind, unloving, and un-Holy Spirit like. We have just seen evidence that genuine love requires the application of truth and justice. Truth and justice applied to sin is like iodine applied to a cut – it’s healing but it’s painful. Walking in the Spirit is not the same as being a pushover.

And we should live that way because no law prohibits it. Paul wrote, *against such things there is no law* (v.23b). But, it is true that the law of sin and flesh prohibits such a lifestyle. *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members* (Romans 7:22-23). It is also true that seldom do unbelievers make laws against such a pleasant lifestyle (though occasionally it happens). Certainly God has no law against such living.

But every aspect of the law of sin that is part and parcel with our flesh rises up to condemn and prevent the fruit of the Spirit. Consider how thoroughly the sin nature opposes Spirit-filled living. To the Romans Paul wrote, *as it is written: “None is **righteous**, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become **worthless**; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to **deceive**. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of **curses and bitterness**. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the **way of peace** they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes”* (Romans 3:10-18). There are several words in that text that stand in stark contrast to the fruit of the Spirit. This is the normal condition for all of us. This law is in us and rises up to rule.

In contrast, walking in the Spirit fulfills God’s law. Paul has argued vigorously in this letter that it is not at all possible to receive salvation by keeping any law (Gal. 2:16,19,21; 3:2,10-13, 17-24). Notice that there are over fifteen statements to that effect! But at the

same time, because God saves us, justifies us, we seek to live out His moral law. That is what Paul established in 5:14, *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:14)*. That is in perfect alignment with what Jesus taught, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15)*. Therefore, walking in fellowship with the indwelling God the Holy Spirit, we will carry out the moral law of God which is the expression of His character. We discover that the more we yield to the Holy Spirit's control, the more we demonstrate these traits, which are His character.

It is Spirit Versus Flesh (vv.24-25).

Because the fruit of the Spirit is in conflict with the works of the flesh, we must crucify the flesh. *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (v.24)*. This is the only appropriate response for people who belong to Christ. His people are concerned to evidence fruit of the Spirit. And we are His people because Jesus Christ purchased each believer at great price. The whole purpose of the incarnation, perfect life, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection was to purchase eternal life for those who believe.

The cost of this redemption price exceeds our wildest imaginations. Compare the multiplied millions of lambs, goats, and bulls that were sacrificed. All of them pointed to Christ's sacrifice, but not all of them together could wash away one sin. So the writer to the Hebrews argued, *But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:3-4)*. That means that the blood Christ shed to cover sins is of infinite value. Peter stated as much reminding us: *knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1Peter 1:18-19)*.

Therefore, since Christ purchased us at infinite cost, how can we think that we do not belong to Him? *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So*

glorify God in your body (1Cor. 6:19-20). From this text we learn that Christ bought us and because Christ owns us, He indwells us as a temple (in the Holy Spirit). The result of all that must be that we seek to **glorify God in our bodies**. The individual is not free to decide how to carry out that responsibility. Walking in the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit. And that is the only way to glorify God in our bodies. That will never come to pass if we keep pandering the passions of our flesh.

Spirit fruit requires crucified flesh. If we belong to Christ we have crucified the flesh. That cannot refer to a literal killing of the body. However it does require a literal conclusion that the desires of the flesh are dead to us. We must consider ourselves dead to sin as Paul put it: *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11)*. The word *consider* means to gather all the numbers together and calculate that the only logical conclusion is that you are dead. It is a present tense command requiring that we do this all the time. It means that when the desires of the flesh rise up (and they will continually), we must respond by playing dead—which is failure to respond.

"Okay," someone finally retorts. "Get real." How can part of me tell the other part of me that it is not going to respond? The term flesh refers to the part of our makeup that is still subject to the sin nature. It is that "law" of sin Paul talked about being in him. However, at the same time in my spirit, the real being, I decide whether to respond or not. This might be called the "heart" of a person. Solomon gave us important instruction about the heart when he concluded, *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life (Proverbs 4:23)*. The heart is the seat of the intellect, the will, and the emotions. Therefore, considering the flesh crucified means that we do not think on the passions and desires of the flesh for a moment. We do not let the passions determine our will. We do not let the passions determine our emotions. Crucifying the flesh is exactly that practical.

In particular that means death toward passions and desires. We cannot kill the passions and desires of the flesh. But we must not respond to them because we are dead toward them. That is the negative expectation. Now the positive expectation, which we must submit to or we will be like the person who threw out the demon, cleaned his "house," but never allowed God to move in.

We are to consider the desires of the flesh as having no power over us; and at the same time, we are to live by the Spirit (vv.25-26). Living is walking. *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit (v.25)*. The term “if” makes this conditional. In this case, the word “if” is not the same as “since” because the sentence would not make sense. We have here a question of proof by the way a person lives. The test is, “If we are really living by the Spirit . . .” This kind of test separates the professors from the possessors. Religious people know a lot of Bible language, but they do not live by the power of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, they cannot be characterized by the following trait. We must be keeping in step with the Spirit. The verb means to fall in line. It’s a military term. It is the way Paul used the same term in Philippians 3:16 when he said, *Only keep in step with what we have learned so far (Philippians 3:16 MPV)*.

Living by the Spirit prevents expressions of the flesh. *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (v.26)*. This is a segue connecting the need to be walking in the Spirit with the practical problem of responding the wrong way toward a brother who has fallen into sin. In those cases, we don’t become conceited, which speaks of becoming proud, focused on self, exalting oneself. But the word also includes the idea of exalting self for no good reason. If we really understand our condition as sinners saved by grace, we have no reason to lift ourselves up in comparison to others.

Also, in those cases, we don’t provoke one another. To provoke is to become combative. Practically, it is to arrive at an opinion and then refuse to consider a brother’s view or preference. It is an expression of pride that concludes I am right and I will not give quarter to anyone else’s view.

Finally, we don’t envy one another. To envy is to harbor ill feelings toward a brother based on real or perceived advantages he has. It is to desire that which another has or wish that he didn’t have it (possession, position, talent, etc.). Unchecked it can lead to malice, the desire to say or do things that will hurt another.

The fruit of the Spirit is obviously different than the works of the flesh. The works of the flesh are what we do naturally, without even trying. The fruit of the Spirit is what we manifest when we remember that Christ bought us through His crucifixion, and we

consider our passions and desires to have been crucified at the same time. It is good for us to do a little assessment periodically to determine which of these characteristics most aptly describe us.