

5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 5:23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:16-26 is generally addressed to Christians. It recognizes the fact that they are imperfectly sanctified; that in them the renewed principle, the Spirit as the source of spiritual life, is in conflict with the flesh, the remains of their corrupt nature. It exhorts them to mortify the flesh (not the body, but their corrupt nature), and to strive constantly to walk under the controlling influence of the Spirit. The characteristic difference between the unrenewed and the renewed is not that the former are entirely sinful, and the latter perfectly holy; but that the former are wholly under the control of their fallen nature, while the latter have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, which leads them to crucify the flesh, and to strive after complete conformity to the image of God. (Hodge, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, 225)

"God never urges himself to be good," said Edward Carnell in Christian Commitment. God's nature always moves irresistibly toward righteousness. God is never torn by evil motives. No one needs to say, 'Now today, God, mind your manners, do what's right, avoid evil, remember the ten commandments.' When a person is good from root to branch, he does not need to be told to be good. His goodness grows like fruit on a tree" (Piper).

Although God never needs reminding to be righteous, He never ceases telling us to be good. Galatians 5, and the whole Bible, is a perpetual reminder of our sinfulness, and Galatians 5:19–23 gives us a list of evil and good deeds. "But there is a great danger in giving morally depraved people like us a list of right things and wrong things. It is the danger of the law that we have seen all through Galatians. The danger is that instead of seeking transformation from God in our hearts to rid ourselves of our depravity, we may take the list of virtues and find a way to use them to express our depravity" (Piper).

However, believers are not asked to summon all the strength they have to live the Christian life; they are asked to rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5:16 Paul said, "Walk *by the Spirit*, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh;" and then in Galatians 5:18, "if you are *led by the Spirit*, you are not under the Law." That which is born of the Spirit is permeated by the Spirit's character and empowered by His strength.

The fruit of the Spirit is not *our* work; it is *His* fruit. He is the source of the fruit that is produced by the Christian life. When we walk by the Spirit we simply fulfill the desires produced by the Spirit. Some emphasize that the "fruit" is singular and that the characteristics listed are therefore to be seen as a singular fruit, but to draw such conclusions is far from certain. "Fruit" is a collective noun (i.e. it can itself be plural) and is what Paul normally uses (fruits [pl] only appears once – 2 Tim. 2:6). Just as the deeds of the flesh focus on those things that disrupt the goal of loving our neighbor as ourselves, so the fruit of the Spirit focuses on those things that causes love to be displayed. The fruit paints a picture of the moral glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Those who have the Spirit are strengthened to live lives of moral beauty, and their decency shines forth in a world blighted by evil" (Schreiner, 350). If we do not have these graces in our lives, we do not have the Holy Spirit, and if we do not have the Holy Spirit, we are not His.

- **Love:** It is not surprising that love is a characteristic of the Spirit. God is love (I Jn. 4:7-8), and love is the mark of a true disciple of Jesus (Jn. 13:34-35). According to Paul, it is the mark of new life (I Cor. 13). “Love” is the first fruit mentioned because of its centrality in New Covenant ethics (Moo, 364).
- **Joy:** Joy is a word closely related to pleasure (Moo, 364). However, Christian joy is a settled state of mind produced by the Christians’ hope in their destiny. It comes from trusting that God is working in their life and in life’s circumstances to make them complete in Christ and accomplish His purposes. Because God’s purposes are the believer’s desires, they are able to rejoice always (I Thess. 5:16), even under the most adverse circumstances.
- **Peace:** Peace among believers is also characteristic of the Christian community (Col. 3:15). This peace was created by the work of Christ who brought Jew and Gentile together (Eph. 2:14, 15, 17), but it is manifested as a work of the Spirit. Peace is the opposite of biting and devouring one another (Gal. 5:15), of enmities, strife, disputes, dissensions, and factions (Gal. 5:20). It includes restoring others in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1) and bearing one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). Peace produced by the Holy Spirit is not just the absence of hostility; it is the unity of heart-felt affection. In the external universe there is ceaseless turmoil, change, and unrest, but in its midst God has placed His church to demonstrate the glorious transformation of those who have placed their faith in Christ through the peace they exude.
- **Patience:** Patience is an attitude of God toward His people (Exo. 34:6-7a) and of the Father and Christ toward the sinner (Ro. 2:4; 9:22; I Pet. 3:20; I Tim. 1:16; 2 Pet. 3:15). It has the idea of longsuffering or enduring for a long period of time. Patience allows the believer to refrain from responding in an unloving manner toward people whose character and conduct provoke us to anger, or annoyance, or discouragement. It is the spirit that has the ability to take revenge if it desired to, but refuses to do so.
- **Kindness:** Kindness is spoken of in many places in the Bible, but it is particularly used of God’s kindness shown to us in both the incarnation of Christ and in the cross (Ro. 2:4; 11:22; Eph. 2:7; Tit. 3:4). What we learn from observing the kindness of God is that kindness is displayed by not treating one another as their sins deserve, just as God did not treat us according to what we deserved.
- **Goodness:** Goodness is very similar to kindness. Stated simply, kindness is the inward disposition that is evidenced in goodness.
- **Faithfulness:** Faithfulness is the only word in the list that is questionable in meaning. The same word (*pistis* - πίστις) has already been translated as “faith” twenty times in the Book of Galatians and it is possible that it should be translated this way here as well. If that is Paul’s intent, he would be saying that faith in Christ is a gift that is given by the Spirit. This is possible, but the context seems to be listing attitudes or responses the believer has toward others. In keeping with this, it seems more likely that “faithfulness” is what is intended. Those led by the Spirit are loyal and dependable and can be counted on to do what they say they will do (cf. I Cor. 10:13). The faithfulness created in the believer by the Holy Spirit exhibits itself in at least three spheres: there is an unyielding loyalty (1) to Christ (Rev. 2:10 “Be faithful unto death”), (2) to God’s truth (II Tim. 2:2), (3) and to the body of Christ (this is the primary emphasis in this passage; Heb. 10:24-25).
- **Gentleness:** Gentleness characterized Christ (2 Cor. 10:1); it is the only quality that He drew attention to in His own life (Matt. 11:29). Gentleness is the fruit of one being transformed into the image of the Son. In classical Greek the word was used of a wild animal that was tamed. This makes a marvelous analogy to the nature of gentleness. The gentle person is the person whose life has been tamed by God; he is now under the bit and bridle of Christ (Matt. 11:29; Ro. 8:5-9). An example of how gentleness is played out in the Christian life is found in Galatians 6:1.
- **Self-control:** Self-control allows the believer to refrain from indulging in the desires of the flesh.

The law doesn't condemn these Spirit-generated virtues; it approves of them. There is no law against such things (5:23b). Those who have these characteristics in their life have no need to be under the law, for their lives fulfill the Law's intent; the person who loves his neighbor in these ways fulfills the law (5:14). To state it differently, the life that is dominated by the Spirit is no longer under the law's dominion for it upholds the Law.

Although the graces enumerated in verses 22 and 23 are not an exhaustive list of fruit that the Spirit produces, God was pleased to have these recorded in Scripture to be remembered by all Christians in all generations for these are the graces that most serve the body of Christ to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

5:24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Verse 24 concludes with the thought that Paul began with in Galatians 5:16. He said, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Now he says, "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Believers are not under a religious system of restraints because they have crucified the flesh with its passions. In Galatians 2:20 Paul had said, "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me." The flesh is crucified when people come to faith. In verse 24 the believer (not God) is said to crucify the flesh. This may simply be a way to express the decision of the believer to accept the benefits of the cross (Moo, 367), but it could simply signify that this is something that has happened (Moo, 368).

The death of the flesh signifies the entrance into the new age. This does not mean that the flesh has ceased to have any influence. Paul had just said that the flesh and the Spirit war against each other and if we do not yield to the Spirit the flesh will dominate our lives. However, the flesh is no longer the master of our lives. We need not submit to its desires any longer. Those who truly walk by the Spirit will be able to overcome the flesh's passions.

5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

5:26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

5:25 could be the conclusion of the section that began in verse 16. The language in both verses is similar and could form the end of an *inclusio* (a figure of speech where a passage is bracketed with similar thoughts). On the other hand, verse 25 might also be more tightly connected with verse 26 and be starting a new section. Perhaps it is best to see verse 25 as both summarizing verses 16-24 and launching into a new section.

The Holy Spirit is essential to our Christian life; we begin our new life in Christ by the work of the Spirit (Gal. 3:3; Jn. 3:8), and the Holy Spirit brings our faith to completion (Gal. 5:5; Eph. 1:13). The Holy Spirit

leads believers in Christian living (Gal. 5:18), and believers are to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). “When Paul now says, ‘if we live by the Spirit’ he is summing up in one succinct clause this Spirit-dominated existence that fundamentally characterizes believers who live in the age of fulfillment” (Moo, 371).

“If (not “since” – NIV) we live by the Spirit,” challenges us to ask ourselves if this is really true in our lives. Interestingly, the verb for “walk” (περιπατέω - *peripateo*) in verse 16 is different than the word for walk here (στοιχέω – *stoichew*). The word here was used in military contexts to mean, “to stay in line with.” In Romans 4:12 it is used of following the footsteps of Abraham. Of course, the idea is metaphorical meaning, “by means of the Spirit’s power let us keep in step with the Spirit’s desires” (Moo, 372). The warning implies that it is possible for believers to walk out of sync with the Spirit; staying in line with the Spirit is not automatic.

In verse 26, Paul moves to behavior that is not in step with the Spirit. Believers are not to be boastful; that is, they are not to challenge or envy one another. Moo points out that though etymology can rarely be used to guide us in word meaning, in this case, the etymology of the Greek word for “boastful” (κενόδοξος - *kenodoxos*) is helpful. It consists of two words: “empty” (κενός - *kenos*) and “praise” (δόξα - *doxa*). “It connotes the attitude of persons who think they have the right to praise and renown when, in fact, they have no such right: hence ‘conceited’” (Moo, 373). The same word appears in Philippians 2:3-4: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”