

What is in view

It would be unfortunate to have a fruit tree in your yard that produced good fruit but whose fruit was never enjoyed by anyone! Sadly, some Christians can end up like that. They understand that the “fruit of the Spirit” is supposed to be evident in their lives, but no one ever enjoys that fruit. Paul would like that to change—for the Galatians and for us.

What is helpful to note

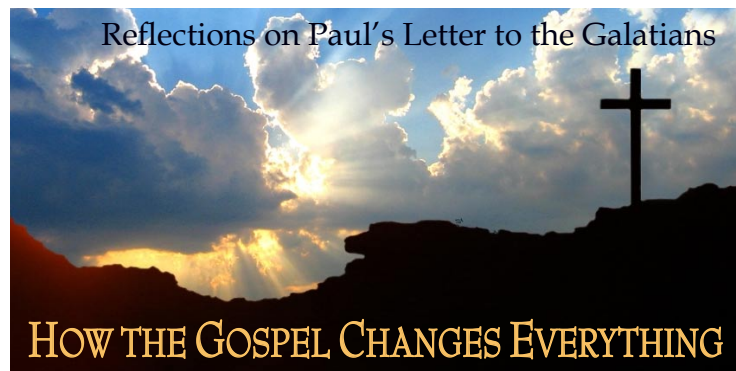
We are looking, again, at Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit. These character qualities are typical of the kinds of things the Spirit can and does produce in the lives of those who will yield to Him and “keep in step” with Him. As we saw last time, this list is not intended to be exhaustive; it is illustrative of the kind of life that Spirit-inhabited people (which is every Christian!) can live as they walk by and are led by the Spirit (which could be every Christian!).

Some of these characteristics could be “enjoyed” by the one in whom the fruit is being manifest (like joy or peace). But many of these qualities seem to define the relational dimension of the Christian life. Clearly things like patience, kindness, and love are experienced and “tasted” in relationship.

When you see this and then take note of how Paul tucks his language about the fruit of the Spirit in a section that is bookended by how Christians are to treat one another (5:15 and 5:26), it comes into focus: The fruit of the Spirit is not for “personal consumption” only.

Paul goes on to picture how this fruit can spill out into life, into relationships. In the first part of chapter six he touches on an all too common problem: Christians who sin (that would include all of us!).¹ So, what’s to be done about sin in the lives of others? It needs to be “addressed,” but who should address

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it? Paul says that the “spiritual” people should.

We must understand what Paul is saying. Unfortunately, we all have all kinds of less-than-Biblical ideas about what it means to be “spiritual.” Paul does *not* mean what we find in “most contemporary uses of this word, where ‘spiritual’ tends to mean either ‘religious,’ ‘nonmaterial,’ or, even worse, ‘the interior life of the believer.’ For Paul it is a word that primarily refers to the Spirit of God.”² Thus, a “spiritual person,” is really *a person who is living in ongoing intimacy with the Holy Spirit*. It’s not that some are (always) “spiritual” and the rest of us are not; any follower of Jesus could lean into the Spirit’s leading and presence and end up fitting Paul’s perspective of what makes someone spiritual.

And notice how spiritual people minister to those who sin: the goal is not punishment or shunning or condemnation but restoration. Seeing as we all do struggle with sin, how wonderful it would be to live in a community of brothers and sisters who not only realized the reality of the struggle but who were so in step with the Spirit that when we did sin their first and overarching concern would be to see us restored!

Those who are “spiritual,” in their dependence on the Spirit realize that if sin is to be dealt with, it must be dealt with in humility and gentleness. And they are willing to “get under the load” to help another.

Paul isn’t contradicting himself in verses 6:2 and 6:5. He uses two different words for “burden.” In verse two he speaks of an oppressive weight; something unmanageable (by one!). In verse five, the word would have been used for what a soldier carried on his back; a knapsack or backpack.

Talking to your group

The goal this week is to help your group understand that they are really a bunch of “spiritual” people! (At least potentially so.) That’s not as much a matter of “book learning” or skills or even experience. For Paul, the spiritual person is simply the one in step with the Spirit. And, as you walk through the passage, help them see that everyone could, in fact, be that person in the life of another.

¹ESV; “caught in any trespass,” NASB; “overtaken in any trespass,” NKJV; “caught in a sin,” NIV. Paul has both any one in mind as well as any kind of sin or offense. Any believer might sin; any sin might be possible. Notice the contrast in this verse with 5:21 where Paul speaks of those who habitually and consistently give themselves to the “works of the flesh.”

²From *God’s Empowering Presence* by Gordon Fee.

³The word Paul uses is often used to speak of medical care; it was used for setting a broken bone or dislocated joint. It was also used to speak of mending nets that were damaged to return them to useful life.

“Being harsh or judgmental is a sign of spiritual immaturity. Some Christians think that angry words are necessary to defend God’s righteous cause. But the only way to restore a believer who has fallen into sin is with gentle sensitivity.”
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Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

Thinking . . .

What do you think the average person thinks of when asked what makes someone “spiritual”?

Do you think of yourself as a “spiritual” person? Why or why not?

Reflecting . . .

Paul continues to picture for us what the life of those free from the law looks like. Look at how he describes this kind of life in Galatians 5:22-6:5.

Who do you think Paul has in mind as a “candidate” for experiencing the “fruit of the Spirit”? Why?

Who do you think Paul is addressing when he writes about the need to keep “walking in the Spirit” (5:25)? Why?

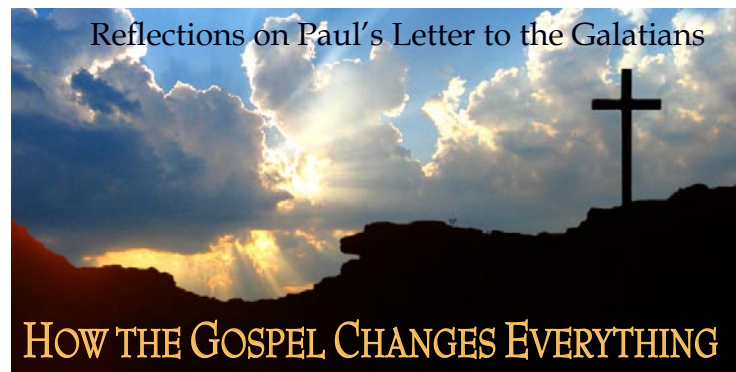
Who do you think Paul has in mind when he refers to “you who are spiritual” (6:1)? Why?

Responding . . .

If you were yielding to the Spirit so that His fruit was manifest in your life and you were keeping in step with Him as He led you, what impact might you be able to have on those around you?

What might be the Spirit’s desire for you in relationship with others?

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