

*What is in view*

Unfortunately, some Christians approach Paul's list of "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23 as if it were a list of "things to do." But *fruit of the Spirit* is decidedly different than *works of our effort*. We want to think well about the "natural" development of this fruit in the life of someone who is keeping in step with the Spirit.

*What is helpful to note*

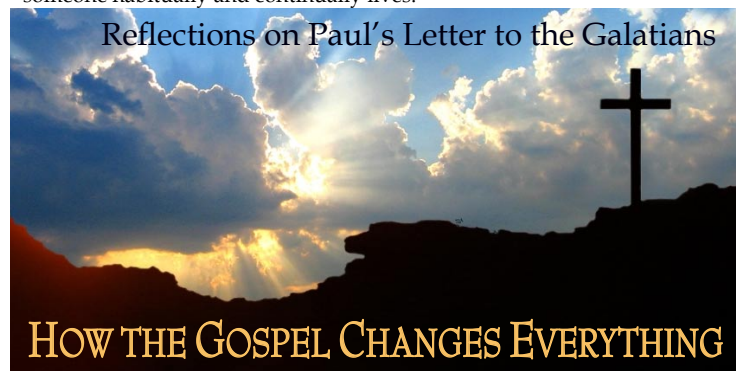
As we return to this section, we want to make sure that we are reflecting appropriately on what Paul has to say about the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit." Having already made such a strong case that neither the entrance into life with God nor the maintenance of life with God is procured through our efforts, these two lists cannot simply be lists of "things to not do" and "things to do." That would end up simply creating a new set of rules and drive Christians back into a rules-based approach to living.

How are we to think of these two lists? Notice, first, what Paul says about the "works of the flesh." When he tells us that they are "obvious"<sup>1</sup> it is important to note that he does not tell us that they are "against the law" or "contrary to the teaching of Jesus" or anything like that. What he means is that "it is clear to the one who is alive to God when he or she is living 'naturally.'" When a believer lives like someone who is not spiritually alive<sup>2</sup> Paul is telling us that it is clear . . . if we will but notice!

<sup>1</sup> ESV, NASB, NKJV; "obvious," NIV. The idea is that they are clearly manifest and recognizable for what they are.

<sup>2</sup> To speak of those "who will not inherit the kingdom" is to refer to those who are not believers, who don't have life with God through Jesus. Paul doesn't say that those who "do" such things won't inherit eternal life; he specifically says that those who "practice" (ESV, NASB, NKJV; "live like this," NIV) such things won't inherit life. The word he uses speaks of how someone habitually and continually lives.

*"The gift of the Holy Spirit is received by the same faith that lays hold of Christ. The works, gifts, and fruit of the Holy Spirit belong to the very beginning of the Christian life. Thus the whole Christian life is lived in the Spirit."*  
Philip Graham Ryken



  
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Paul is *not* telling believers that they either have lost their salvation or were never really saved in the first place if they do what is on this list of "work of the flesh."<sup>3</sup> He is saying that if these things are seen in a believer's life, then he or she is "out of character!" Such "stuff" is like an indicator light on the dashboard of your car; if this stuff lights up, it means something is out of whack. And, for Paul, what it means is that the person in whom such stuff is seen is out of step with the Spirit. So, the antidote is not primarily to "stop doing this stuff" but to *get in step with the Spirit*. That is where Paul is going as is evidenced by his culminating encouragement in 15:25: *Those who are alive because of the Spirit shouldn't live like those who aren't!*

The fruit of the Spirit is, therefore, not primarily a list of things to "make sure you do these things" but more like a diagnostic tool to assess whether you are relating personally and appropriately to the Spirit (whose responsibility is to reproduce the character of Jesus in our lives). If we are yielding to the Spirit, sensitive to His leading, keeping in step with Him, cultivating relationship with the living God who inhabits our souls, then the fruit *will* grow.

This is much like the plants in your garden. Fruit trees produce fruit when the conditions are right. If there is not fruit on a fruit-bearing plant, you don't paste fruit onto the branches! You try and discover where the "disconnect" is with what is life-producing. When there is no fruit (or the wrong kind of "works") in our lives, the real question is "Where am I disconnected from the Spirit?"

This idea (that fruit follows living connected) is not new with Paul. Jesus Himself makes this same point in John 15:1-8. Jesus explains that *abiding* (living in intimate relationship with Him) *will result in fruit* (the kind of life He has designed us to live). The call—both in Paul and by Jesus—is not primarily to "do fruit" but to *live intentionally in relationship*.

*Talking to your group*

For many, the idea of "simply living in relationship" with the Spirit may be challenging. We, often, want "something to do" and the call to *actively keep in step* may appear to be too passive. But as we have seen, the Christian life from start to finish is a work of grace that God Himself works in us as we trust in Jesus and rest in the Spirit. This is how we *get into life* and it is how we will *live out this life*.

<sup>3</sup> Life with God is secured by grace through faith in Jesus, it is not contingent on avoiding "the works of the flesh." See, for example, 3:1-9 and 4:3-7.

*"The presence of God's Spirit within us will produce good fruit . . . The sample of fruit [Paul] lists provides a good sense of the kind of life the Spirit produces. His presence and influence in our lives is evident when we begin to act toward each other as he acts toward us."*  
Craig Keener

## Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

## Thinking . . .

Think about the trees or shrubs in your yard. How do you know if they are healthy?

What picture does that offer you as to how you could assess your own spiritual "health"?

## Reflecting . . .

At this point in Paul's letter to the Galatians, he is not exploring *how to enter into life* but *how we experience fully this life we have entered into*. Keep that firmly in mind as you read and reflect on Galatians 5:16-25.

What does the picture of spiritual "fruit" underscore about how we are to experience this life that is ours in Jesus?

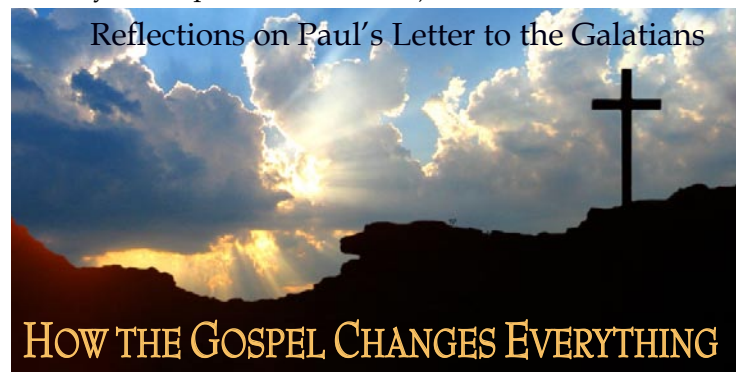
Every "growing thing" naturally produces fruit consistent with what it is; Paul seems to be picking up on this idea. How does he drive home this idea of Christians producing "what they are"?

Sometimes, Christians take the fruit of the Spirit described here as if it were a list of "things to do." What do you think Paul would say about adopting such an approach? Why?

## Responding . . .

If the life characteristics offered in Galatians 5:22-23 are indeed *fruit of the Spirit*, then we can't *make them* show up in our lives (after all, they are not "fruit of our works/effort"). So, that would mean that Paul is encouraging me to . . . (How would you complete that sentence?)

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