

Fruit of the Spirit

Every Christian should want to enjoy the fruit of the Spirit, but what exactly is this “fruit” the Scriptures speak of? A key passage in understanding this is found in the book of Galatians. God speaks through the Apostle Paul (Apostle: one sent with authority), when Paul is writing a letter to the churches of Galatia. The Church is being instructed on how to have victory over sin, and how this victory comes through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. As a Christian, I must accept that I am incapable of battling sin on my own; by my strength, will, and self-discipline. When I attempt to function apart from the Holy Spirit, the Bible describes these efforts as the works of the flesh: human efforts apart from divine influence and therefore prone to sin. The passage below magnifies the contrast between the operation of the Spirit and the flesh.

Galatians 5:16-23, ***“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”***

Unpacking Galatians 5:16-23

“Walk by the Spirit” – Here, “walk” means to make one’s way, or to regulate one’s life. To walk by the Spirit is to allow the Spirit to govern your life, to direct your steps, to lead you. This is accomplished when you submit your will to His, to deny yourself, to accept that you are limited and incapable of having victory apart from Him. This instruction is repeated; “walk by the Spirit” and “led by the Spirit”.

By contrast, a self-led life produces “deeds of the flesh”: the product that our sin nature accomplishes. The passage provides a list of deeds that the flesh produces, and all are anti-social behaviors, or self-centered; ***“immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing.”*** While the fruit of the Spirit produces social-behaviors, or others-centered behavior; ***“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”*** The passage highlights the opposing nature of the flesh and the Spirit; ***“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another.”*** Fruit is the outgrowth of a healthy connection. When a branch is grafted into a vine, if the connection is healthy, and the branch is wholly sustained by the vine, then the result is fruit. Spiritual fruit is the evidence that another source is at work. In this case, the ***“Fruit of the Spirit”*** is the evidence, or manifestation, of the Spirit leading a person’s life. When the Spirit is governing, then the byproduct of that will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Many of these might sound like synonyms for the same behavior (kindness, goodness, gentleness), but they are quite unique and specific.

Defining the Fruits of the Spirit

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

Love – Giving of yourself to the benefit of others, not based on emotion. This is the Greek word that in English translates as “agape” (ag-ah'-pay) and means unconditional. This type of love considers your needs last, and puts others first, even your enemies. This is the type of love that Jesus displayed for us, that while we were His enemies, He died for us.

Joy – Not giving way to despair; remaining calm. The word joy is often wrongly substituted for happiness. These two words however are opposites. Happiness is an emotional reaction to something that produces pleasure; like being surprised by a visit from a long-lost best friend, or finding \$100 on the ground. Joy, however, is not an emotional reaction, but a state of mind that focuses on the eternal perspective, that doesn’t allow the emotions of the moment to control us or cause us to become downcast or mentally defeated. When problems arise, the Spirit working in us allows us to respond, not react, with calm focus and commitment.

Peace – Tranquility administered to believers to sustain them in life. In another word, rest. Everyone enjoys rest when there is an absence of conflict, which is one type of peace. But, for the Christian, the Holy Spirit administers a special type of peace amidst times of conflict. This is a huge advantage in daily living for the Christian, but this is only enjoyed when one's life is submitted to the Lord.

Patience – Embracing steadfastness and staying power; having an enduring temperament. A Christian enjoying this reality is able to see things through, where he would have quit or failed under his fleshly temperament. Additionally, this produces the ability to respond to tough people and circumstances, instead of react to them.

Kindness – Showing grace toward sin; excellence in character and demeanor. When someone is rude, or cusses at you, instead of repaying evil for evil, you give grace: giving something that isn't deserved. Kindness is how the Lord wins us, and how a Christian can win others to faith. Romans 2:4 says that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.

Goodness – Having a moral character; happy to do more than what is required by the standard of the day. It seems every top 40 song, T.V. show, or movie, is laced with immoral language and themes, and the culture online interaction is often rude and demeaning. This is the tolerated standard of the day. Additionally, Christians are getting divorces left and right, as though it's normal. Abortion on demand is rampant, and many call it a "right." By the Spirit's leading, we know a better way, and we're capable of rising above this immoral world and aligning with God's moral goodness.

Faithfulness – Being reliable and trustworthy because God is so; having conviction. By our flesh, we are passive and casual where we ought to be consistent and diligent. By the Spirit, we recognize what matters and what does not, and we can live with a type of purpose and intentionality that the world downplays.

Gentleness – Strength under control. You might wrongly think that a butterfly landing on your hand is an example of gentleness, "*It's so gentle I can't even feel it touching me!*" This however isn't gentleness, because the butterfly doesn't have the ability to harm you. As it taps its legs up and down onto your skin, it might be trying to beat you up for all you know, but it has no power to harm you. To contrast, the Bible provides an image of a lion that lays down with the lamb. The lion has the ability to crush and destroy the lamb. A father has the ability to exasperate his young child with crushing words and a swift strike across the mouth. These acts of aggression are the result of a flesh governed life. But when the Spirit leads, the strength of the tongue and the strength of the hand are subdued and brought under subjection.

Self-Control – Moderation; self-government in all things. If I rely on myself, this is called self-discipline, which is not the same as self-control. Self-discipline means, "*I can do it...I need to try harder...I can be the best version of me...I can dream it so I can be it...I know what I need to do...*" Self-discipline has some value in some situations, but with regards to sin, self-discipline fails and self-control is needed. Jesus didn't shout from heaven, "*Try harder, you can do it!*" Self-control is when the Spirit empowers us to live with restraint and balance; enabling us to say yes, or no, whenever the appropriate response is needed. Under our own will-power we are prone to relapse. Under the self-control of the Spirit, we find victory!

"Against such things there is no law" – Christians living by these virtues are condemned by the law, as these aren't the behaviors that the law denounces. On the contrary, the deeds of the flesh are such that come under the notice and penalty of the law.