

## Life in the Spirit: The Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:13–26, Part Three

I've always wanted to preach a **7 Essential Steps, 5 Secrets of BlahBlah, 8 Keys to Prosperous Whatever**, but those steps, secrets, and keys are almost always based on human effort and cleverness, rather than the finished redemptive work of Christ. Rarely do they include calls to die to self, to crucify the flesh, and walk with the Spirit, in his resurrection power. The Gospel — the Good News — tells us steps and keys are unable to fix what is broken at the root of us. For that, we need a Savior. And we receive him, when we believe on him, put our faith in him, He not only saves us from the penalty of our sin, but begins to produce his holy character in our lives. This is better than steps, and secrets, and keys. As we look at the beautiful fruit of the Spirit, the temptation will be to see a list of items we need to work on. That will be a mistake. Rather than seeing moral improvements we need to make, let's see the beauty of Christ, his perfections, his righteousness. Let's worship Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, and embrace the work of his Spirit, the help of his Spirit, the power of his Spirit to conform us to the image of Jesus. So today's sermon title, in contrast to 7 steps, is **Nine Impossible Beauties You Can't Produce** — on your own, through your work, by your grit.

**Galatians 5:13–26** <sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

**PRAY**

## 2

The Galatians had fallen under the influence of false brothers driven by pride. They wanted people to think more of them, so they were adding works of the law to increase standing and merit with God. It was an assault on the atonement bought by Christ. It was rooted in confidence in self -- in the flesh -- rather than in Christ. They rejected the sufficiency of Christ, which was apart from them, and believed they could make some self-repair or improvement. Their false confidence in the flesh didn't stop at justification; it infected their understanding of sanctification, too. But if we must look away from ourselves to the Christ and his beauty for salvation, we must continue to look away from ourselves to Christ and his beauty to have his beautiful character formed in us. Paul sets up this stunning passage on Christ's beautiful character and the necessity of supernatural power to produce it with this rhetorical question back in chapter 3: Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Galatians 3:3) Today we continue to look away from ourselves to Christ, and rely on the resurrection power of the Spirit to form Christ in us. This is sanctification. This is having our heart and character changed to look like Jesus. This is the fruit the Spirit bears in the life of the believer.

Thinking about the big issue for the Galatians — legalism versus being justified by faith alone — the fruit of the Spirit is not a negative rebuke to the false teachers, and more a positive teachable moment that moves beyond *don'ts* and *dos*. Paul, the master discipler, doesn't just stop with a harsh correction, but in a sense says, "Now here's what real freedom from the law looks like. It is freedom from sinful condemnation to be like Christ in the Spirit's life-giving power. The fruit of the spirit is nothing less than the image of the risen Lord expressing himself in the new heart of the believer. Take heart, Christian! There is no room for pessimism or defeat. Christ, who began a good work in you by faith will finish his work, and you will be conformed to his image, bearing his fruit.

Now, the Fruit of the Spirit is not a list of good manners for good citizens that should be taught to good children in good homes, as though someone could behave themselves to Christlikeness. This is supernatural work of the Spirit producing the beauty of Christ shining through Christians. As John Piper says, "Becoming a Christian is a miracle — sometimes called new birth. It involves putting our trust in the death of Jesus to cover our sins, and relying on the Holy Spirit to help us walk in Christlike love, and bending all our behavior to the glory of God." Apart from this work we are in the flesh, and the flesh is bent to bite and devour one another, to consume one another — not serve one another in love of Christ. Serving others in love cannot be accomplished by those in Adam. One must be in Christ to love in this sacrificial way. Loving each other, loving your neighbor, and serving each other — this is the fulfillment of all those laws you are trying to add back in, Galatians (Gal. 5:13–15). But it

### 3

is freedom in Christ that makes it possible. There *are* things we do — we submit to the Spirit, we walk in the Spirit as we saw last week. But if we focus on the list itself in an effort to work something up, we've focused on the wrong thing. This fruit is Christ's character. Then let's focus on the Lord Jesus, who is altogether lovely, altogether worthy. Let's worship him as we see him in these nine beauties.

**Love** — *Praise him, praise him, all ye little children, God is love, God is love.* God never has to be urged to love. He never has to be told to beat down anything that is unloving. Love is who God is. **1 John 4:8**. If we are to look like our Lord, we must resemble him in love. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35) Love crowns the Spirit's multi-faceted fruit. In a sense, everything else flows from love, and are expressions of love.

The loftiest language describing the Lord's love is found in **1 Corinthians 13**. There the Apostle says, "[No matter what I say, or think, or do, no matter how smart I am, or what I give, or sacrifice — if it is not motivated by love, done in love, said in love, thought or imagined in love, given in love, saturated in love — it's worth zero.] In fact each of those things is like a zero. What I say, or *speaking rightly*=zero. Thinking rightly=zero. Giving rightly=zero. Zero, zero, zero. But if I add a 1 in front of all the zeros, now there's value! Love is the "1" that makes all the zeros of words, and thoughts, and deeds, and sacrifice add up to something with eternal value. No wonder Paul begins with the most important aspect of the Spirit's fruit that makes all of it lovely.

Beginning in **1 Corinthians 13:4** he walks around the masterpiece of God's *agape* love and, with words, paints it from different perspectives. Picture the Lord living this way, motivated by redemptive love, love flowing out of his heart in these expressions of love, living every day in the realities of love:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude.

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

<sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

<sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never ends. As Christ is eternal, so his redeeming love is eternal. Focus on Christ and his love! We first love him vertically, if you will, and cultivate a grateful appreciation for his love for us. Then we are able to love others horizontally with the same love we have received from him, and studied in him, knowing that whatever they have done to us as a sinner is far less offensive than what I have done against the Savior. The Spirit teaches and instructs in his love, reminds of his love, and produces his love in us.

## 4

**Joy** — Joy is “good cheer from the Gospel,” as Philip Ryken describes in his commentary. It’s not happiness in the sense of a bubbly mood because of some temporary pleasure. Joy is a deep, fixed confidence and rejoicing in the hope of our eternal destiny and life in Christ. This confidence is rooted in the great hope described in **Romans 8:35 ff** — Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is joy! Even if someone were to separate my head from my shoulders, there is a deep river of joy running through me because in Christ I am a super-conqueror. What can you do to me? This is not all there is! My eternal home is with Christ! The Spirit produces this kind of joyful faith in Christ.

**Peace** — As with love, there is first a vertical aspect of peace. God has undertaken to end the treasonous war we declared against him in our sin. How was this done? **Colossians 1:19–20**, from our memory passage from last year: For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. We were hostile toward God. We were enemies of God. But Jesus has made peace vertically. Then, seeing and savoring the peace we have because of Christ, we look horizontally and see and savor and live in the reality of his peace with all peoples in the universal church. **Colossians 3:11** — Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. And we see and savor peace in the local body of Christ: **Colossians 3:15** — And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. Walk in step with the Spirit and experience the fruit of peace.

**Patience** — Long suffering in the face of hardship. Has Christ not suffered long by our offenses and rebellions, and faithless acts against him? So we embrace his character in our lives. Suffering is a distinctly unpopular word in our culture. Suffering long in the face of anything is not something our flesh or our culture embraces. But it is what the Spirit is producing as he conforms us to the long-suffering Savior’s image. Patience is trusting God and his sovereignty to accomplish in others, or in me, what he is purposing on his schedule. Patience rests in the goodness, kindness, wisdom, and power of God. He holds all things together by the counsel of his will. He is working all things together

## 5

for good. As Jesus trusted the Father and simply lived on his agenda, I can wait on God, knowing that he has not lost track of what is happening, and I don't need to correct God's schedule.

**Kindness** — The bible often uses the word kindness to refer specifically to God's kindness in saving rebellious sinners from the sin and restoring them to communion and life with him. It is a breathtakingly generous act. Kindness does not merely withhold a sharp word or retribution from someone when they have been unkind or rude or mean; it is being generously benevolent and loving to those who have deserve anything but kindness. As the guards spat and mocked and tortured the Prince of Life, nailed to a cross, what did they deserve? Yet what did they receive? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is supernatural. In us it is supernatural, Spirit-borne kindness — not the milk of human kindness that is stopping to help someone who has a flat tire, as right as that may be. The kindness of the Savior is magnified over against the sinful cruelty he endured. We must have Jesus's character produced in us or we will never be kind like him.

**Goodness** — This is a moral goodness, a moral beauty set against the filth and darkness of all the works of the flesh. Rather than the old nature's lust and covetousness, the new heart produces desire for moral beauty and selflessness.

**Faithfulness** — Those led by the Spirit are trustworthy; they are dependable. They fulfill their duties and responsibilities because Jesus was faithful in fulfilling what he was assigned. In **John 6:38** Jesus said, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." That involved a cross for the redemption of the world. After making it plain where he was headed, what the cost would be for him and those who follow him, he set his face to go to Jerusalem to die as the sacrificial lamb for the sin of the world. As he was faithful to all the father assigned, so the Spirit gives supernatural power to believers to be faithful to all the Father has given.

**Gentleness** — There are many places we could be reminded of the holy gentleness of the Lord, as he submitted to the sovereign will of the Father. When the soldiers came to take him in Garden he did not fight them. He did not call 10,000 angels to destroy them. He went with them. Peter struck out, but the Lord said, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" *That* is submission to God's sovereign plan that produces gentleness. He healed the ear of the one who was ushering him on the path to crucifixion. Believers are to submit and embrace this humble, meek, gentle mind of Christ, according to **Philippians 2** — Have this mind among

## 6

yourself, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, **he humbled himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” As I look away from myself to Christ, as I submit to the Spirit’s leadership and walk with the Spirit, the holiness of Christ will sand down the roughness and entitlements of my flesh and leave the easy smoothness of holy gentleness in its place. Do you chafe under the sanding away of your personality? Do not resist it. The maintaining of your personality is not the goal of the Holy Spirit. His goal is to make you look like Christ. That will take some rubbing, some sanding, some mashing, some digging, some cutting... how do those words sound in your ear? Pride nurtures roughness and dissensions. It demands its own way. Gentleness is produced as the deepest root of sin, our pride, suffers the sanding of the Spirit.

**Self control** — In contrast to the works of the flesh where self is not controlled, but self is in control. The works of the flesh sweep one away in the categories of sexual sin, whether performed with the body or the mind. The Spirit uses the word of God correct those things before they started. Thus in **Job 31:1** — “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” In other words, with the Spirit’s power in my life, with a mind renewed by the word of God, with the Spirit’s prompting to what is wise, I will not look at a woman in way that will take me into sin. I will not undress someone with my eyes because the self-control the spirit is producing is bearing the fruit of self control. I don’t give myself to anger, I put it to death, because as **James 1:19 ff** puts it, Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, <sup>20</sup> for man’s anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness. Therefore I receive the implanted, transformative word of God and am formed.

### **Against such things there is no law.**

The law sought to maintain morality by restraining sinful behavior. The Galatians endeavored to improve their moral standing by returning to aspects of the Law. The law couldn’t produce righteousness, but only expose the lack thereof. The fruit of the Spirit is the essence of holy character found in Christ. Of course there is no law regarding the Spirit’s fruit. None is needed because the Spirit empowers and accomplishes the positive holiness of Christ.

**v.24** — Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. When we enter into Christ through faith, we crucify the old nature and are given the new nature of Christ. As the Apostle wrote in **Gal. 2:20** — I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ

## 7

who lives in me. I have crucified the flesh. And I must continue to crucify the flesh daily. Hence, the Lord's words in **Luke 9:23** — "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me."

At this point that's no surprise, is it. After looking at the damning list of the works of the flesh and feeling our own heart's pull to sinfulness, and then looking at the beauties of the character of Christ and seeing how incapable we are of producing that kind of fruit, we know that the only way the Spirit's fruit will be born in us is if we live in a continual state of denying the self, the old nature and walking in the Spirit. It is a daily battle. No, that's not true, is it? It is a minute by minute choosing against self, denying self, taking up the cross, living a cruciform life that always dispatches me and my desires to the cross. This is the normal Christian life. Don't be discouraged and think you are failing if you have to fight to kill your old nature every day. This is the reality of spiritual battle and life on this side of glorification. Don't grow weary in the fight! Be strengthened in the awareness that God is working in you both to will and act according to his good pleasure. He will finish his work in you, but the old man dies hard. You are not abnormal. We all need to be reminded of this: Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh.

Have you heard and felt the massive loss of status, the loss of your will, the death of your desires that Jesus said must occur if you are to go with him? You must die. There is no getting around it and remaining confident that you belong to Christ. But have you heard and felt the power of the grave-conquering, resurrecting, life-giving Spirit who is in you, and with you to produce the fruit of the ever-living Lord? This is the reality of every one in Christ. The battle may be slow and hard, but the outcome is certain.

The Christian life is not marked by perfection, but by war. Do not be discouraged. Do not give up. Embrace repentance from death-producing sin and turn to life in Christ by faith. That is the entry point. Then every day we obey the command to walk in the Spirit. This is New Testament Christianity. This is normal. This is life in the Spirit. Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved. And the Holy Spirit will make you a Christian... a little Christ, a chip off the old block. Oh, what hope and help there is here!

Pray for help. Pray for sensitivity to the Spirit. Starve the flesh and feed your soul. Entertain and game less. Read and meditate on God's word more. Pray and fight for the power-producing filling of the Spirit. Your increasingly fruitful life will change you and nourish everyone around you.