

The Abundant Life

Galatians 5:22-26

(Discussion Guide on last page)

When it comes to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it seems there's a greater fascination with *the gifts of the Spirit* than with *the fruit of the Spirit*. As we learned in a previous message, a spiritual gift is a special grace or ability from the Spirit, like teaching, given to a believer to serve the body of Christ. There not only seems to be a greater fascination with spiritual gifts, but also much controversy about the more sensational gifts, like the gifts of healing and speaking in tongues.

In this message, I'm not going to get into the controversy related to the practice of these gifts. What I do want to emphasize is that whatever one may believe about certain gifts, the purpose for their function is clearly given in scripture. The biblical practice of the gifts "is about a commitment to mutual ministry where many parts of the body contribute to the glory of Christ by allowing the Spirit to use them in building up one another." Daniel Henderson

When I say that there seems to be a fascination with spiritual gifts, I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing. We should earnestly desire spiritual gifts so that we might serve others in a Christ's honoring way. But the problem is much of the fascination with spiritual gifts tends to be self-focused.

This is why after exhorting the Corinthians to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul added, "*And I will show you a still more excellent way*" (1 Corinthians 12:32). And the more excellent way, as 1 Corinthians 13 clearly demonstrates, is the way of **love**. And Love happens to be the first quality mentioned in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit.

Regarding the practice of *the gifts of the Spirit*, Sinclair B. Ferguson noted that the fruit of the Spirit "should be distinguished from the gifts of the Spirit, but ought never to be absent in their exercise. For without

love, and humility which accompanies it...the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is thwarted.”

Another notable error in some churches is that the practice of spiritual gifts, especially the more sensational kind, have become the measure for spiritual maturity. But, again, the greater evidence of the Spirit-filled life is not gifts, like speaking in unknown tongue, or with an eloquent tongue. The greater evidence is whether you're speaking truth in love in your native tongue.

Main idea: Christian virtues flow out of devotion to Christ, and they demonstrate the authenticity of that devotion in practical ways.

In this message, we are going to examine the nine qualities Paul called *the fruit of the Spirit*. These qualities are the real marks of maturity in Christ, of what it truly means to live a Spirit-filled life. As we examine these Christian virtues, we will also learn how they are produced in our lives so that we might live an abundant Christian life.

1. Spiritually mature believers bear Christ-like fruit

To start with, spiritually mature believers who live an abundant Christian life, bear Christ-like fruit. That is to say, their lives take on the character or likeness of Christ. In contrast to a person whose life exhibits the works of the flesh—a life dominated by sinful and self-centered desires, Paul writes: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*” Galatians 5:22-23

Before giving you a brief breakdown of each of these qualities of *the fruit of the Spirit*, it's important that we understand what they represent. These qualities Paul outlines are not a to do list. Rather, they are the fruit of the Spirit. In other words, they are qualities or virtues of the Spirit that manifest the character of Christ. Remember, the primary ministry of the Spirit is to glorify Christ in and through our lives. John 16:14

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the apostle Paul wrote the following about the unveiling ministry of the Holy Spirit: *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* 2 Corinthian 3:18

Christ, through the Spirit, removes the veil over our hearts so that we can behold Him and be transformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ. Beloved, the fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ shining through our lives.

Let me reiterate, these qualities listed in Galatians 5:22 are not a *to do list*. They are qualities that describe who Jesus is. Jesus doesn't just demonstrate love, joy and peace, He is love, joy and peace.

Likewise, these qualities are not just a to do list of things we should do. Rather, these qualities should embody our character through the inside out work of the Spirit. We are not just called to **do** these things but to **be** these things. That is, these qualities ought to make up who we are.

What is your character like? How would others inside and outside your home describe your character? Concerning one's character, someone wisely said, “Your true character is not your occasional or exceptional behavior.” Your true character is your typical behavior.”

Growing up, my father had a violent temper in and outside our home. My mom, my siblings and I lived in fear of my father. Minor infractions and things that should have been considered unintentional, could set him off.

But occasionally he would recognize he went too far and attempt to make up for it. Once, in a fit of rage, he was physically striking my mom, and my oldest sister stepped in to defend her and she got it too. A week later my dad bought my sister a brand-new bedroom set.

Can I tell you, my sister would have gladly exchanged that bedroom set and much more to have a father who demonstrated his love by

exercising patience and self-control whenever he had a reason to be angry.

“Your true character is not your occasional or exceptional behavior.”
Your true character is your typical behavior.”

As we briefly examine the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit, keep in mind also that they are set in contrast to the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19-21. The works of the flesh, like fits of rage, sexual immorality, and jealousy, describe the pattern of behavior that characterized our lives before Jesus came into our hearts. But as new creations in Christ, those works should no longer define us as believers. Instead, our lives, as Spirit-filled Christians, should be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit.

With this in mind, let’s examine those qualities of the fruit of the Spirit that should increasingly characterize I typical behavior. Because of time, I’m not going to give you a long treatise of each of the Christ-like qualities that should be apparent in our lives. What I’m going to do is give you a brief description of each in contrast to the works of the flesh.

The first quality of the fruit of the Spirit Paul highlights is **love**. When love is being produced in you by the Spirit, you will not be a self-centered person prone to jealousy and envy. Instead, you will be an increasingly self-giving person who looks to be a blessing to others and who is also blessed whenever others are blessed. Most commentators agree that Paul starts with love because it’s the foundation of the Christian life and because all the other qualities of Spiritual fruit flow from love.

The second quality Paul refers to is **joy**. When you know the joy of the Spirit, you won’t need to turn to drugs or alcohol to drown your sorrows. When you know the joy of the Spirit, you will possess in inner contentment and satisfaction that will give you the strength, for example, to wait on the Lord for a godly husband or a wife, and to wait until your married before engaging in sexual intimacy. You won’t practice idolatry, or look to a man or a woman to give you what only

God can. The joy of the Lord is your strength, which allows you to be content in all circumstances.

The third quality that Paul highlights is **peace**. When you have the peace of the Spirit, you're not full of inner strife or conflict. You're not full of fear and worry about things you can't control. This peace is not the absence of trouble, it's the presence of Jesus in you, who you know is in control and who will never leave you nor forsake you.

The fourth quality is **patience**. When you're patient, when the world doesn't revolve around you, rather than being easily agitated by the shortcomings of others, you can be a support, a help and a source of encouragement. When you're patient, you're quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.

The fifth quality the Spirit produces in our lives is **kindness**. When you're kind you're not given to enmity, hostility or strife. You don't see others you work with as rivals you need to defeat. You don't respond rudely when someone interrupts you. A kind person is a thoughtful, generous, and considerate person who looks out for the interests of others and not just their own.

The sixth quality of the fruit of the Spirit Paul lists is **goodness**. When goodness characterizes your life, you're not envious of what others have. When you evaluate people in your life, you don't want more from them, you want more for them and you will sacrifice to do them good. You don't return evil for evil, rather you overcome evil with good.

The seventh quality Paul lists is **faithfulness**. When you're not driven by lust, when you're not controlled by an insatiable appetite, when you have faith in the faithfulness of God, you will be faithful. You will be a loyal friend, a faithful husband and someone who others know they can depend on.

The eighth quality is **gentleness**. Some translations have meekness. Gentleness or meekness is not weakness. It's strength under control. You don't use your power or authority to hurt but to help and to heal.

The ninth and final quality of the fruit of the Spirit is **self-control**. This is a person that knows when to put the brakes on. As one commentator puts it, “In contrast to the works of the flesh, like drunkenness, and orgies, those who walk by the Spirit live restrained lives. The Spirit enables believers to have mastery over their passions. In our flesh we are out of control, but by the Spirit we live self-controlled lives.” Tony Merida

Now after examining these qualities that ought to characterize our lives as Christians, what should our response be? Should our response be, “man I can never measure up?” We should certainly acknowledge where we might feel we are falling short and desire for these qualities to be more evident in our lives.

But it’s important to note that the main reason Paul listed these qualities was because believers in Galatia were being influenced by Jewish religious people to keep the law of Moses in order to be righteous before God. They were teaching, for example, that one must be circumcised to be saved. Galatians 3

So, Paul wrote this letter to counter that false teaching. He wrote to remind believers that salvation and sanctification comes through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross and through the Holy Spirit who reside in all who believe. Galatians 3:2

This is why after listing the nine qualities of the Spirit, Paul continues in verse 23: *“against such things there is no law.”* “In other words, you cannot legislate these qualities. The law can never produce this kind of fruitfulness.” David Platt

This brings us to our second point:

2. Spiritually mature believers have Crucified the flesh

How do we as believers take on these qualities of the Spirit in our lives? As I mentioned earlier, after examining these nine qualities, we shouldn’t be feeling defeated or thinking, I can never measure up. Notice that Paul continues in verse 24: *“And those who belong to*

Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”
Galatians 5:24

When examining the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit in contrast to the works of the flesh, we should not feel defeated. Rather, if you're saved and the Spirit of God resides in you, which is true of every believer, you should already have a sense that you are not the same person you use to be.

As it's been said, "You may recognize that you are not all you ought to be, but you know you are not who you use to be." You belong to Christ and He's given you the power through His Spirit not just *to do good and kind things* but *to be good and kind*. We do not need the law to overcome sinful desires because those who belong to Christ "*have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*"

When we are saved through faith in Christ's substitutionary death on the cross for our sin and resurrection, we are united with Christ through the Spirit. Knowing these implications of our union with Christ Paul writes in Galatians 2:20: "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*"

Because we belong to Christ and have been united with Him, we are new creations and have been delivered from the power of sin. This victory we have in Christ doesn't mean we won't struggle with sin and temptation this side of heaven. But through the indwelling Spirit, our sinful flesh and desires no longer have to dominate us.

"Bible teacher Tony Merida elaborates: "While we must daily 'mortify the flesh by acts of fasting, [by yielding to the control of the Spirit], by prayer, [by renewing the mind] and by repentance (George), our ultimate hope is that we belong to Jesus. So, the question is, Do you? Are you Christ's? Have you become a new creation? If so, then you have power to slay the desires of the flesh, though it will be a daily and sometimes painful battle."

Do you know this battle? There's an old Cherokee legend that illustrates well this battle between our old life and our new life in Christ.

"Once, an old man and his grandson were walking through the woods when the grandfather turned to the young man and said, "Young one, inside all of us there is a battle raging between two wolves. You have felt it even in your young years, and I have felt it all my life. One of the wolves is evil – he is anger, envy, greed, regret, arrogance, resentment, lies, hatred, and ego. The other is good – he is love, joy peace, hope, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity, compassion, truth and faith. Everyone has this battle going on inside them."

They walked a little further in silence, until the young boy stopped and asked, "Grandfather, which wolf will win?" The wise, old man simply replied, "The one you feed."

Again, you don't have to live a defeated Christian life. Christ already won the victory and through His indwelling Spirit we can live out that victory—we can strengthen our inner being—we can be in practice all that we are in our position with Christ.

This brings us to our final point:

3. Spiritually mature Believers have Constant fellowship

Notice that we can live the abundant life not only because we are united with Christ but also through moment by moment communion with the indwelling Spirit. Paul continues: "*If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*" Galatians 5:25

Brothers and sisters, although there are clear commands in the word of God that we are to follow as Christians, we don't live the Christian life by commands or by the law. We live by the Spirit who has made us alive unto God and makes the great promises of our salvation real in us.

Remember, the fruit of the Spirit is not a to do list we check off. They are qualities that should mark our lives because we are in Christ and Christ is in us. The Spirit produces the fruit in us. But this doesn't mean that we have nothing to do. Again, Paul says, "*If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*" Galatians 5:25

Beloved, the Spirit produces His fruit in us as we keep in step with the Spirit or as we walk in the Spirit. This means we must be in constant fellowship with the Spirit and live in continual dependence upon the Spirit. The Christian life is not living by a set of rules, it's a relationship with Christ through the Spirit who leads, guides and provides all the grace we need through prayer and the word.

The Spirit works in us to produce fruit that is in keeping with Christ's likeness, as we behold Christ's glory, remain fully dependent upon the Spirit's leading, and seek to worship Jesus in all of life. To keep in step with the Spirit is to live under the leadership of the Spirit, is to be in alignment with the Spirit or in **tune** with the Spirit.

Now it's important to see also that the fruit of the Spirit is produced in us as we **pursue fellowship with Christ** through the Spirit and **fellowship with the body of Christ**. As we learned last week from Ephesians 5:18-21, the Spirit-filled life it's not only a commitment to Christ, it's a commitment to His church. We need each other to grow.

In fact, it's clear in our text that the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit have a strong relational element to them by which we build each other up in love. Knowing this, Paul concludes in verse 26: "*Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*"

As we already noted, being conceited, or provoking one another or envying one another are works of the flesh or the characteristics of life apart from Christ. But when we belong to Christ and are keeping in step with the Spirit, we will love what God loves—we will love the people of God, we will love the church. We will not provoke one another—we will not be a constant source of strife, we will not envy

one another, instead we will provoke one another unto love and good works. Hebrews 10:25

But again, for this to be increasingly true of us, we must be in **tune** with the Spirit whose primary ministry is to glorify Jesus. If Christ is going to be glorified in and through our lives, it's not enough to be part of a church or even to serve in a ministry.

A piano, for example, has 88 keys and notes. But, like the guitar string illustration I shared last week, in order for each piano key to play the note its designed to play, they must be in tune. When each key is in tune, together they can play harmonious music. How are piano keys tuned? In order to tune the keys, an old school piano tuner uses a tuning fork to get a fixed pitch.

Likewise, if we are going to show the world we truly belong to Jesus, each of us individually must keep in step with the Spirit, each of us must be in tune with Jesus so that together we can display the fruit of the Spirit and become His witnesses in the world.

Jesus becomes the draw when His resurrection life, His presence and power is seen in and through our lives. Jesus becomes the draw not through the quality of the Christian music that we play on Sunday, but because of the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit on display in our everyday lives.

In his book, *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer wrote: "Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So, one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship."

Conclusion

Jesus is the conductor, each of us individually are parts of His grand symphony orchestra, and the world is the audience. Let us each fix our eyes on Him and stay in tune to Him by obedience to His word through the Spirit. As we daily endeavor to be devoted to Christ, to be in tune with His Spirit, and to commune with Him in prayer, and the word, we will be transformed into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another.

One hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other. Let us together prayerfully seek to be led by the Spirit, to provoke one another unto love and good works so that our symphony orchestra, the church, can display the character of Christ in the world today to the praise of His glorious grace.

Discussion Questions

Why is there more of a fascination in some churches with spiritual gifts than with the fruit of the Spirit? Why do other churches seem to have little interest in the gifts of the Spirit?

Are spiritual gifts the best measure of spiritual maturity? Why or why not?

What does the fruit of the Spirit represent?

How do we put to death the works of the flesh?

What's the key to achieving practical unity and harmony in our churches and marriages?

Of all the qualities of the Spirit, which one do you need to grow in the most? What steps do you need to take to take on this quality?