

**The Spirit's Fruit**  
**Galatians 5:19–23**  
**July 6, 2025**



In Isaiah 5, the prophet describes a vineyard on a fertile hill. On that hill, the stones had been cleared, the soil tilled, and the choicest of vines planted (Is. 5:2).

And yet, Isaiah goes on to write that the vineyard on that hill—though cared for and cultivated—ended up producing wild grapes.

So, the hedges were removed. The protective wall was torn down, torn down *so that* the vineyard might be trampled. It was all made a waste (Is. 5:6). Weeds, thorns, and thistles grew. Then there was a drought. You can visualize it, I hope.

When reading that, one would be right to wonder, “What is it that Isaiah’s picturing?” In the next verse, he answers, **for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel** (Is. 5:7).

Of course, that’s just Isaiah 5; it’s early; the prophet has a good bit more to say. In fact, in the chapters ahead, Isaiah details God’s mercy to His people. Keep the fruitless vineyard in mind as you hear the promise declared in Isaiah 11:1: **There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from its roots shall bear fruit.**

Maybe you’re *starting* to see why a sermon on Galatians 5 would start with Isaiah. In that book, God promised to send His servant to, in effect, rebuild the vineyard.<sup>1</sup> A shoot would come from a stump. Roots would bear fruit.

But that’s not the *only* connection to our passage today. Hear what Isaiah 11 says *next* about this shoot from the stump of Jesse. The next verse is this: **And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him** (Is. 11:2).

Some of my hope in starting with Isaiah that we see today’s familiar passage as a part of God’s unfolding plan. In other words, the “fullness of time” in Galatians 4 and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 are not unrelated. And I hope as well that rewinding to Isaiah will also help us see where the emphasis in this passage should land.

When I was with the teenagers a week and a half ago, I polled a number of them with this question: “Do you hear any difference in emphasis between the phrase “The Fruit of the Spirit,” and the phrase “The Spirit’s Fruit.” We’re familiar with the former. But does the latter carry with it any particular emphasis? Almost to a person, those young men and women said that “The Fruit of the

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<sup>1</sup> See J. V. Fesko, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, 40.

Spirit” *seems* to emphasize the *fruit* while “The Spirit’s Fruit” seemed to emphasize—even if only marginally—the Spirit Himself.

That’s why I titled the sermon what I did. Because in the context of the letter, that’s the emphasis. This fruit is something *He* produces.

Speaking of, there was another answer to that question I want to point out. One astute person said that “The Fruit of the Spirit” *can* sound like something that’s potential. That is, *maybe* it will happen, but *maybe* not. It’s on our to-do list. We’ll see. But on the other hand, “The Spirit’s Fruit” sounds a good bit more certain, as in, this *is* what proceeds from the Third Person of the Trinity. That’s why it’s produced.

And, for clarity’s sake, keep in mind that this Person is the One that indwells His people. But before we get there, we need to see the context God sent His Spirit into.

## 1. The Works of the Flesh

Verse 19: **Now the deeds of the flesh are evident.** The word could be “deeds”; it could be “works.” Either way, it’s referring to particular activities.<sup>2</sup> And it’s referring to deeds, works, or activities that belong to, or proceed from, the flesh.<sup>3</sup> Now, by “flesh,” we certainly *do not* mean to point the finger at the physical aspects of our existence, as if our bodies are to blame.<sup>4</sup> Instead, by “flesh,” Paul’s referring to all the sinful desires of our fallen nature.<sup>5</sup>

With that in mind, a question or two: can we see—with our eyes—*desire*? Can we *see* the old man/nature? No, we can’t lay our eyes on that which is within. But Paul says there’s something we *can* see. The deeds of the flesh are *not* invisible. In contrast to unseen desires, the *works* of the flesh are evident/visible/seen.<sup>6</sup>

And if we’re wondering what visible deeds he’s referring to, Paul makes a list of fifteen. Before we look at each one, I’ve put them into four categories: (1) With the body; (2) Against God Himself; (3) Against the body of Christ; (4) Against the body.

The first category are the deeds of the flesh done *with the body*. Verse 19: **Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior.** As you likely know, the term for sexual immorality is a general term which includes all kinds of unholy behavior we might commit *with our body* outside of marriage. Though that first term is already broad, the second term, “impurity,” is even a little broader, pointing to *any* kind of moral defilement.<sup>7</sup> The third term in this category, “indecent behavior,” adds a certain shamelessness to the aforementioned immorality. It’s to live without regard for public decency.<sup>8</sup> When *this* is present, there is little to no restraint.<sup>9</sup>

There’s a lot we might say about this category, but I’ll first mention a sentence I read that struck me. When speaking of this category of sin, Leon Morris wrote that it, “was so widespread that it was apparently accepted as a normal part of life.”<sup>10</sup> Now, why would I read *that* sentence, and quote it to you? Because it’s a sentence about the Galatian region over 2000 years ago. And it might

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<sup>2</sup> Curtis Vaughan, *Galatians*, Founders Study Guide Commentary, 104.

<sup>3</sup> David DeSilva, *Galatians*, Baylor Handbook, 124.

<sup>4</sup> We’re not Gnostics.

<sup>5</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, BST, 147.

<sup>6</sup> Vaughan, 104.

<sup>7</sup> Vaughan, 104.

<sup>8</sup> DeSilva, 121.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Morris, *Galatians*, 170.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, 170.

as well be a sentence written last month. Yet, in *that* context—where these things were not only practiced, but flagrantly celebrated, Paul says, “None of it is ok. In fact, they’re works of the flesh.”

So, I remind us all of what we said a couple weeks back. Freedom is not freedom from any and all restraint. That’s not liberty; it’s bondage. True freedom is to live as your Maker created you to live. And in *this* area, we do not budge—no matter how widespread it is, nor to what degree it’s accepted as normal. Who cares?! God’s design is good.

So, that’s the first category, those works of the flesh done *with the body*. Note, a second category—deeds of the flesh done *against God Himself*. Of course, *all* sin is against God, but I think you’ll see what I mean in verse 20. The first activity in this category is **idolatry**.<sup>11</sup>

Keep in mind that temples for idol worship in this era were *not* necessarily places where creatures went to *submit* to a creator. More often than not, people tried to manipulate the gods for their own benefit. Which is, of course, utter folly. To go back to Isaiah, *that* prophet captures the absurdity in Isaiah 44—speaking of a man who plants a tree, cuts it down, and then takes *some* of the wood to make a fire so that he might warm himself and bake a little bread. And then, with the *same* wood, from the *same* tree he planted, fashions a god and worships it, calling out, **Deliver me, for you are my god** (Is. 44:14–17).

We read that and scoff—as if we’ve *never* honored the created thing over the Creator.

The Word of God is clear: Idolatry is as much a work of the flesh as immorality is.<sup>12</sup>

In their idolatry, they sought to control the gods rather than submit to them. And, in a sense, it was self-worship. Sometimes that idolatry took darker forms, which is the next item in Paul’s list: **sorcery**. It’s the word *pharmakeia*, where we get our word pharmacy. As you know from reading the book of Acts, or even the book of Exodus, there were all kinds of connections between idolatry and this dark magic. It’s probably the case that those practicing sorcery would’ve often concocted some sort of hallucinogen. And it’s almost *certainly* the case that sorcery—like idolatry—was an attempt to control the powers that be. And Paul’s clear: both are works of the flesh *against God Himself*.

The third category we’ll consider are works of the flesh *against the body*. By that, I mean the body of Christ—and by *that*, I mean His people. I’m not going to belabor this, because we spent a lot of time talking about this two weeks ago. But, again, let’s be reminded that in this somewhat scandalous list of sins, the *majority* of those activities listed are relational sins.

Here are *eight* of the fifteen works of the flesh. Verse 20: **enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying**. Now, this isn’t to say we ought to be *less* incensed by the works of the flesh mentioned above—immorality and idolatry. But with the emphasis that Paul places here, I do think it’s quite possible we’re not as grieved as we *should* be by slander, sides, and splits. Division among God’s people tells a lie about God Himself. He’s one. His people are to be one. And further, it’s not *only* that, it’s the gospel itself that dissensions and factions contradict. He’s one. His people are to be one. Because He died to make them one.

The works of the flesh include deeds *with the body*, works *against God Himself*, deeds *against the body* of Christ, and works *against the body*. By that last semi-redundant phrase, I do mean your *own* physical body. The list ends with these two activities: **drunkenness** and **carousing**. Both terms speak to harmful excess. In a moment, we’ll read a different list, and on that list will be self-control. These two final deeds of the flesh are what comes about when that’s absent.

So, that’s a fly-over of the 15 deeds of the flesh. Are those the *only* activities that proceed from our fallen nature? Of course not. That’s why Paul ends the list in verse 21 with this phrase,

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<sup>11</sup> In a few moments we’ll get to the fruits, and when we do, we’ll read a phrase that goes like this: **against such things there is no law**. That phrase *cannot* be said concerning idolatry. The commandments themselves *begin* here.

<sup>12</sup> Stott, 147.

**and things like these.** Paul says this, in part, to make sure we know this list is representative, not exhaustive.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, these are the kind of works the flesh produces. This is *some* of what it means to be “in Adam” —to live according to the old nature. These are the things those conceived in sin *do*. We do them naturally. No one has to teach us how, taking us under their wing as an apprentice. We’re born with a propensity to do every single thing on that list.

And—if we chose to—we might call these 15 things “wild grapes.” You’ve seen a bad grape, I imagine. They’re not hidden. They’re evident.

As Paul goes on, we see that this wasn’t the first time Paul had mentioned something about these deeds to the Galatians. Verse 21 goes on: **of which I forewarn, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

So, first, one of the functions of this list is to warn. But part of hearing this warning rightly is to note the word “practice.” If we’re honest, there are quite a few things on that list we’re guilty of doing. Yet, both the word and tense of “practice” speak to something that’s habitual, works and deeds that are *repeatedly* practiced, an ongoing sowing to the flesh.<sup>14</sup> It’s *those* men and women that Paul warns. And for those men and women, there is no dodging the force of this phrase, **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** It’s already clear that God is not their King. It’s clear they’re not in His kingdom *now*. That won’t change in the future.

But before we move on, note the word “inherit.” And note the word that’s *not* there: “earn.”

## 2. The Spirit’s Fruit

When Julie and I were dating, her family had a few peach trees in the front yard. It wasn’t a substantial part of their operation. There weren’t more than ten. But at the right time of the year, you could walk down the driveway, grab one off the tree, and eat it. But that was—probably—twenty years ago. In the years since, most of those trees stopped bearing fruit.<sup>15</sup> Others became diseased and were eventually cut down.

I just talked about excess in the last point, so I’m not going to tell you how much I love peaches. But let’s just say it’s a lot. I only know a few people that love them as much as me. But, thankfully, *one* of those people is Julie’s father. In fact, back in 2020, right outside Julie’s old bedroom window, on a beautiful hill that sits in front of their dairy barn and silo, he planted 100 peach trees.<sup>16</sup> It’s not a million of them, but it’s lots of peaches—for me, for free.

If you aren’t aware, peach trees don’t *immediately* produce fruit. So, since 2020, we’ve waited. Until last year—around this time—when there was quite the harvest. They picked over 5000 pounds in 2024. This year they anticipate as much or more. Max told me last week he’ll pick *every* day *all* day long for the next month. So, Jared Farms *didn’t* produce peaches. Now it does, in abundance.

So, now that we’re all thinking about fruit, we can move forward. But not before re-iterating what was noted in the introduction, and what the title of the sermon emphasizes. This fruit is something the Spirit produces. He Himself is the source.

Secondly, note that it’s not the “fruits” of the Spirit. It was the “deeds” of the flesh in the plural. But now it’s “fruit” in the singular. Is that significant? Yes, in one sense it communicates that everything below is integrated. The list is not to be understood in such a way that one believer has this fruit, and another believer has a different one. “Fruit” speaks to the unity of—the harmony

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<sup>13</sup> DeSilva, 123.

<sup>14</sup> Stott, 148; DeSilva, 124.

<sup>15</sup> But not all of them. And these days those that remained are bearing fruit again. But that’s for another sermon.

<sup>16</sup> Let me put this plainly: Matt married WAY up.

between—the character qualities on this list. One man wrote that it's *not* to be seen as nine separate jewels, but nine facets of the singular diamond.<sup>17</sup>

So, for the first facet, the first aspect of this singular fruit that proceeds from the Spirit is **love**. And of course, there's a sense in which all the other virtues in this list flow from this one.<sup>18</sup> I won't belabor it, in part because I spent an entire sermon talking about it two weeks ago. But, again, we should be reminded of what Paul's said. Back in Galatians 5:6 he wrote: **In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love**. Which he then elaborated on in the command of verse 13, **through love serve one another**. In that passage Paul made the case that loving others through service is actually what it means to be free. It's what God made them to do. These believers no longer have to be slaves to enmity, strife, jealousy, envying, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, or factions. The Spirit's fruit is, instead, love.

The Spirit's fruit is, secondly, **joy**. As I read about this facet of the Spirit's fruit, I kept being pointed to three particular passages. And they happen to be from the last three New Testament books we've preached through. You recall the first chapter of Peter's first epistle: **Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible** (1 Pet. 1:8). Because we've studied that letter, you know they experienced this joy inexpressible in adverse conditions.

We observed the same reality in the New Testament book we studied *prior* to 1 Peter, when the author of Hebrews described the people of God's response to a great conflict of sufferings (Heb. 10:32). He wrote that they **accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one** (Heb. 10:34). Facing reproach, public shame, the threat of prison, the reality of stolen stuff, they were still joyful. That's also the response we read about in another book we studied recently, the book of James. That letter starts like this: **Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials** (James 1:2). So, whatever joy is, it's *not* a temperament that difficulty destroys. It's a gladness that's resilient.

The Spirit's fruit is, third, **peace**. I wrote this section of this sermon sitting on a bench early in the morning on Southern Seminary's campus. The buildings there are beautifully aged. The lawn is masterfully manicured. And little sparrows 'wing by so they might sing all around you. It's a place I've sat with a hot cup of coffee and read my Bible one week a year for a decade now. It's a peaceful spot. There's a certain order. There's beauty. In that spot, there's little to no strife.

The Old Testament spoke much of peace, or in their terms, *shalom*. And, of course, "peace" *does* mean the absence of strife. But it also means more than that, including the presence of God's blessing.<sup>19</sup> When Paul speaks of peace, that's what he means. The Scriptures say it's a peace that surpasses all understanding—a peace that guards our hearts and minds (Phil. 4:7).

The Spirit's fruit is, fourth, **patience**. We all know what *that* is—it's the virtue we haven't acquired *fast* enough. I doubt many of us would describe ourselves as having a lot of patience. But I think it's worth meditating on how much you'd have if you'd never believed the gospel—if the Spirit Himself didn't indwell you. Patience is a certain slowness to take offense,<sup>20</sup> a long-suffering with others. It's what God's people have been doing in local churches for millennia.

If we might move a little faster, we'll take a few aspects of this fruit together. The next three are goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. These aren't foreign concepts. There's a generosity to goodness. There's a reliability and loyalty to faithfulness.<sup>21</sup> And there's a gentleness—a meekness—

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<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Cruse, *The Character of Christ*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Morris, 173.

<sup>19</sup> Morris, 173.

<sup>20</sup> DeSilva, 126.

<sup>21</sup> DeSilva, 126.

that characterizes those whom God's delivered. Just like patience, this doesn't mean we're *always* good, always faithful, nor always gentle. But to the degree that we are, it's *not* because we worked it up ourselves. It's not further evidence of our sterling heroic virtue.<sup>22</sup> The Spirit did it.

Speaking of, gentleness or meekness isn't mousiness; it's strength that's been tamed. Which is connected to the final facet of this diamond, that of **self-control**.

Having considered both lists, it's not hard to see the contrast. The deeds of the flesh are immorality, impurity, drunkenness, and carousing. But that's *not* the Spirit's fruit. Instead of *that*, the Spirit's fruit is self-control. A deed of the flesh would be an outburst of anger. Instead of *that*, the Spirit's fruit is gentleness. The deeds of the flesh would include enmities and strife. The Spirit's fruit is peace. The deeds of the flesh would include disputes, dissensions, factions. The Spirit's fruit is love.

In short, these lists are in contrast because they reflect different kingdoms. They're manifestations of those governed by different rulers. One list is made up of what the flesh produces. The other is made up of what the Spirit brings about.

But there's another contrast, and it's in the phrase that concludes the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul writes in verse 23: **against such things there is no law**.

### 3. The Works of the Flesh, Christ's Work, and the Spirit's Fruit<sup>23</sup>

And of course there's no law against *these* things. Because *these* are the kinds of things every lawmaker in every century has attempted to bring about.<sup>24</sup> A good law intends to curb the *first* list, not the second. And in the mind of the One who built the universe, there ought to be no restraint at all, zero deterrents, when it comes to love or joy or peace. "Against such things there is no law" is a massive understatement.<sup>25</sup>

And if there *were*, of course, Christ wouldn't have done each one of these things. So, as we seek to understand each item, we do so most rightly by fixing our eyes on Him. He said, for example, that **Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends** (Jn. 15:13). That's a sentence He said in John 15. And then in John 19 He did it.

But He didn't pick and choose. It wasn't merely that He loved, His life was also marked by joy. Jesus of Nazareth is not the glum bore that some make Him out to be. In fact, He was so joyful, so unshakably buoyant in His life, that men and women accused Him of being a glutton and a drunkard (Luke 7:34). That *wasn't* because He was out of control in His emotions or desires. It's actually because He was the only One that perfectly harnessed them. It's fascinating to me that in his first sermon—on the Day of Pentecost—Peter quoted Psalm 16.<sup>26</sup> Which includes these words: **You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of gladness with Your presence** (Acts 2:28). In that sermon, Peter says *those* words are about Jesus. And he says that after spending *years* with Him. We should reject the joyless Jesus. He doesn't exist.

And it's not *just* that He loved or had joy, Ephesians two makes plain that He Himself is our **peace** (Eph. 2:14).<sup>27</sup> He *is* peace. And He gives it—to those whom He's shown **patience**, having repeatedly (even eternally) been slow to anger (Ex. 34).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Morris, 174.

<sup>23</sup> This section was influenced by Jonathan Cruse's, *The Character of Christ*.

<sup>24</sup> Morris, 175.

<sup>25</sup> Vaughan, 176.

<sup>26</sup> Primarily, he's making the case at Pentecost that Jesus is alive, but that's not all he quotes.

<sup>27</sup> We have peace with God *through* Him (Rom. 5:1).

<sup>28</sup> Paul would write elsewhere that Jesus demonstrated His perfect patience with him (1 Tim. 1:16).

Love, joy, peace, patience—and we might read Titus 3: **But when the *kindness* of God our Savior . . . appeared.** (Titus 3:4–5). **Goodness** is all He ever did. Was He gentle, or meek? He describes His heart toward the weary with those very terms (Matt. 11). And did He exhibit **self-control**? Only every second of every day of His life.

The Son of God didn't walk in the flesh. He put on flesh and walked in the Spirit—perfectly. And He did so that we might too. Sinclair Ferguson says it this way: “Our Lord Jesus became the Bearer of the Spirit, in order to be the Bestower of the Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> That's why—*He* is why—we're no longer enslaved to the deeds of the flesh.<sup>30</sup> That's why—*He* is why—we bear any fruit at all.<sup>31</sup>

Galatians 2:20 says it this way: **I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.** His love, His joy, His peace, are to be *ours*, in order that we might be like Him. Which is precisely what Paul's aimed at. Recall Galatians 4:19: **My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.**

And none of this is out of nowhere. This was God's purpose for the fullness of time. The vineyard wouldn't always be bare. He promised that a shoot from the stump of Jesse would come. And from those roots would come fruit.

## Conclusion

A few weeks back a picture showed up in Julie's family group text. It was a picture of fruit. And beneath that picture was this caption: “First peaches of the year.”

Now, what did I immediately think of? Those nine peaches?

No, that picture pointed me to baskets and baskets ahead.

Paul's stated that those practicing the works of the flesh will *not* inherit the kingdom of God. Which strongly implies something Paul's already made clear: those indwelt by the Spirit do. They didn't earn that inheritance, of course. But by faith they receive it. In fact, the Spirit Himself is a pledge of that which is to come (Eph. 1:14).

I say all *that* to say that the Spirit's fruit is a preview,<sup>32</sup> a glimpse into what we'll enjoy forever. Which won't be joy here and there, peace in a moment that quickly passes. But instead love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in *us*—and in *everyone* around us—forever.

The firstfruits are, in fact, a foretaste.

This is what the Father purposed. It's what Christ purchased. And it's what the Spirit brings about.

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<sup>29</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, “John Owen on the Spirit in the Life of Christ,”

<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2001/john-owen-on-the-spirit-in-the-life-of-christ/>

<sup>30</sup> Question 43 from the Heidelberg Catechism, on the benefits of the cross, says this: By His power our old man is crucified, so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule us.

<sup>31</sup> Galatians 4 already declared that the Spirit of His Son Himself is in our hearts (Gal. 4:6).

<sup>32</sup> See Romans 8:23 and James 1:18