

The Holy Spirit

Week 10: The Fruit of the Spirit and Sanctification -- Galatians 5:16-26

Walk through an orchard in late summer and you will notice something: the trees are not straining. No branch grits its teeth to produce a peach. Fruit happens when a living branch stays connected to a living root, season after season, sun and rain and pruning doing their slow work. Now read the most famous list Paul ever wrote: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." Notice the word he chose. Not the achievements of the Spirit, not the merit badges of the Spirit, the fruit. Character that grows. And notice the word is singular, fruit, not fruits, one cluster, one character, growing together in one life. Paul is describing what a person increasingly looks like when the Spirit who dwells in him (last week's truth) is given the run of the house.

But Paul is no romantic about orchards. Right beside the fruit list stands another list, blunt as a police report: "the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." Two crops, two sources. And between the lists, a war: "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." Every honest Christian knows this battlefield from the inside. The question is never whether something is growing in your life. Something always is. The question is which crop you are watering.

Here is where this study's earlier weeks pay their dividend. How does the Spirit grow His fruit in a Christian? Not by magic, and not by miracle. The Spirit sanctifies through the word He inspired: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth," Jesus prayed (John 17:17). We are transformed "by the renewal of your mind" (Romans 12:2), beholding the glory of the Lord in His word and being changed "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). That is why Paul's commands in this passage are walking commands: "walk by the Spirit," "keep in step with the Spirit." A walk is daily, deliberate, direction-by-direction. You cannot be carried to Christlikeness in your sleep. But neither do you walk alone: the Spirit who marked the path in Scripture dwells in you to strengthen you on it (Ephesians 3:16), and God Himself works in you "both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

So this week is the study's growing season. We will stand at the orchard fence and look honestly at both lists, asking which one our families, coworkers, and brethren would say describes us. We will learn why the fruit is the Spirit's true ongoing signature, more impressive, in fact, than the miracles were, since a transformed temper testifies louder in your house than a tongue ever could. And we will get practical about cultivation: what to plant, what to pull, what to water, and how to wait. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." The Resident is ready. The season is now.

Group Discussion: If miraculous gifts were the Spirit's signature in the first century, the fruit of the Spirit is His signature today. Why do you think Christians are often more fascinated by claims of miracles than by the slower miracle of a transformed character? Which would actually be harder to explain away in a neighbor or coworker?

Personal Reflection: Read the nine-fold fruit slowly: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Which one has grown most in you since you became a Christian, and who helped it grow? Which one is currently the runt of the orchard, and what is it costing the people closest to you?

Read Galatians 5:16-26

Study Questions

1. Paul commands, "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16), and later, "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25). What do these walking metaphors teach about how the Christian life actually works, and how does the Spirit lead a Christian's steps today (John 17:17; Romans 12:2; Psalm 119:105)?
2. "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh... to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (5:17). Where is this war hottest in your life right now? Be specific with yourself: what does the flesh want in that arena, what does the Spirit's word want, and which side has been winning?
3. Paul says "the works of the flesh are evident" and lists fifteen of them before adding "and things like these" (5:19-21). Looking at the list closely, it covers sins of passion (immorality, drunkenness), false religion (idolatry, sorcery), and, at greatest length, sins of relationship (enmity, strife, jealousy, rivalries, dissensions, envy). What does the list's shape teach us about what the flesh does to a congregation, and why does Paul warn that those who practice such things "will not inherit the kingdom of God"?
4. It is easy to read the works-of-the-flesh list and check off the sins we have avoided while skimming past the ones we practice, especially the relational ones: strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, envy. Which item on Paul's list have you been treating as a personality trait rather than a sin to crucify? What would repentance look like there this week?

5. The fruit of the Spirit begins with “love, joy, peace,” and Scripture grounds each in truth the Spirit revealed: God’s love poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5), joy in believing (Romans 15:13), peace with God through justification (Romans 5:1). How does each of these graces grow from believed truth rather than from circumstances, and what does that teach about how the Spirit produces them?
6. Patience, kindness, goodness: the middle triad of the fruit faces outward, toward people who are difficult, needy, or undeserving. Think of the person who tests your patience most. What would it look like, concretely, this week, for the Spirit’s patience, kindness, and goodness to reach that person through you?
7. The fruit is singular and the list climaxes with “self-control,” while the works of the flesh are plural and chaotic. Paul adds that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (5:24). What do the singular fruit, the crucified flesh, and Romans 8:13 (“by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body”) teach about the Christian’s active role in sanctification?
8. Crucifixion is slow, deliberate, and final; Paul says the flesh must be crucified, not negotiated with. What passion or desire have you been negotiating with, feeding it just enough to keep it alive? What would it mean to drive the nail this week: the account deleted, the bottle emptied, the relationship ended, the apology made?
9. Some teach that sanctification comes through a miraculous “second work of grace,” an instantaneous experience that perfects the believer. From this passage and the study so far, how does the Spirit actually sanctify the Christian, through what means (John 17:17; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 2:12–13), at what pace (2 Peter 1:5–8; 3:18), and how would you answer both the perfectionist who claims sinlessness and the defeatist who claims change is impossible (1 John 1:8–9; 1 Corinthians 10:13)?
10. Look back across the whole passage, the war, the two lists, the walking commands. The Spirit who dwells in you intends a harvest that your family, your congregation, and your

neighbors can pick and eat. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this truth, and one act of deliberate cultivation, something planted, pulled, watered, or crucified, that you will carry out this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 15:1-8, the vine and the branches, abiding as the secret of fruit; Romans 12:1-2, transformation by the renewing of the mind; 2 Peter 1:5-11, the supplemented faith that keeps a Christian from being unfruitful; Colossians 3:5-17, putting to death the earthly and putting on the new self; Psalm 1:1-3, the tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit in season