

## The Spiritual Fruit of Freedom

*Galatians 5:16-26*

May 29, 2022

This is the last Bible Study of the quarter, and we will not be meeting in the summer. So, it's nice to finish with the three lessons from *Galatians*, and with this particular uplifting passage. This immediately follows Paul's words in last week's lesson about how we should live reflecting the freedom we have in Christ Jesus.

**<sup>16</sup> Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy,<sup>[a]</sup> drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

**<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ<sup>[b]</sup> have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.**

- a. [5.21](#) Other ancient authorities add *murder*
- b. [5.24](#) Other ancient authorities read *Christ Jesus*

Here Paul sets side-by-side two different ways to approach life. In verse 16, Paul tells us to “**Walk in the Spirit**” (KJV). That is the way of saying not just how you physically walk, but how you live your life. The more modern translation loses that flavor. The other path, gratifying the “desires of the flesh” is a very way of saying to follow the baser desires of our human nature. “Desires of the flesh” is more than the needs of the human body. “What the Galatians needed was assurance that if they abandoned the law and trusted their all to the Spirit, they would not go

down in defeat in the civil war between their good and evil impulses.” (Raymond T. Stamm, *Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 10, p. 560, Exegesis)

Yes, it is true that laws against things like the list in verses 19-21 can inhibit people from doing such things. But, look at how our society views such laws. They are against “having fun,” which is held up as if it is our highest purpose. That is especially true when the media focus is on encouraging the consumption of conveniently available products, and the behavior that goes with using them. Paul isn’t saying laws against destructive behavior are bad. But righteousness guided by the Spirit is a more trustworthy and rewarding way to live. “In this chapter, Paul uses three verbs to describe the new life in the Spirit: ‘walk’ (vs. 16), ‘are led’ (vs. 18) and ‘live’ (vs. 25) – conduct, guidance, and companionship. Those who are led by the Spirit are free from the law in the sense that they have risen above it and are living a life that needs no law because it is better than the best that the law can produce. Christian freedom is not legalism in another form.”(Stamm, op cit. p. 561)

In verse 19, the word “obvious” (NRSV) is translated also as “plain” (RSV) and “manifest” in KJV. The point is, the destructive nature of these acts isn’t hard to discern. Furthermore, they are flaunted, as if to show the rest of the world that the person doing such is arrogant and unrepentant. Such a person of the flesh is often proud of doing these things, especially when they have enough power to thereby hurt others without suffering retaliation. Unfortunately, that is the kind of power too many people aspire to achieve.

The lesson book writer (Rev. Babb) discusses the possibility of focusing overly much on the wrong list. She mentions the ascetics who focus on the first list by making a point of not doing any of these things, and then carrying that idea to extremes of isolation and even removal from society. Yes, the tongue is a dangerous weapon, as both Jesus and Paul describe. But does that mean that we should avoid speaking? Babb’s point is, that if we focus on not doing things on the first list, and other associated things once or twice removed, we can end up essentially creating, or following, a new form of Law. We can let following these rules define our righteousness, while overlooking the second list in verses 22 and 23. That isn’t much different from the Pharisees and Scribes of Jesus’s day. They let their visible obedience to a plethora of laws, many unwritten and beyond the scope of the *Bible*, define their righteousness. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, *Matthew* 5:17 – 6:23, discusses much this same issue at length and in many of its manifestations.

Now, at this point we might like to go down that list of “works of the flesh” one by one and discuss them, and maybe gloat over the fact that we don’t behave like that. (*The Interpreter’s Bible* spends 3 ½ pages doing just that! Of course, that’s necessary for reasons of needing to be comprehensive.) But, in the spirit of the lesson writer’s comments, let’s not dwell on that. Instead, let’s skip to verse 22 and the fruits of the Spirit.

**Love:** This is the word “agape” as translated to English. If you want to understand this kind of love, you can’t do better than to read *I Corinthians* 13. It is characteristic of God’s love. Paul is telling us that we can love that way too.

**Joy:** The Greek word comes from the same root as “grace.” It is characteristic of love, “agape” love. It springs from a life of good will, generosity, rejoicing for others, forgiving, and singing even when rejected or even persecuted. Besides Paul, Luke in his gospel and in Acts often refers to this kind of joy. A few of many examples include Luke 1:47 (the Magnificat), 2:20 (the shepherds rejoice), 6:23 (rejoicing when persecuted for Jesus’s sake, one of the Beatitudes), ... Acts 16:25 (Paul and Silas singing hymns in prison).

**Peace:** This word inherits meaning from both Greek (harmony) and Hebrew (shalom), which encompassed total well-being, soundness, and success. It’s not merely the absence of war. This is a peace past all understanding that comes from God. God gives us this peace, that relieves our anxiety about worldly issues.

**Patience:** This is translated “long-suffering” in KJV. The word conveys a sense of allowing one to keep temper under control despite provocation, not subject to bursts of anger or rage, and able to suffer without retaliation, thus imitating the kindness of God. This leads us to the next word in the list.

**Kindness:** This is “gentleness” in KJV. It indicates “goodness,” “honesty,” and “excellence of character.” It is associated with “patience” above. Paul is especially mindful of God’s great kindness in relieving us of the burdens of the Law in Jesus Christ, a burden Paul struggled under for many years.

**Generosity:** Both RSV and KJV give “Goodness” here. From a Jewish perspective, a measure of goodness was in the giving of alms. Paul also took the word to mean as good for something. As Jesus said, “Let your light shine.”

**Faithfulness:** In KJV, “Faith.” In Galatians 3:11 Paul quotes Hab. 2:4: “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” (We usually hear, “The righteous shall live by faith.”) Paul sees righteousness apart from faith as impossible.

**Gentleness:** In KJV, “meekness.” The word encompasses modesty and courtesy. I think of it as the opposite of “talking trash,” the deliberate belittling of others for psychological advantage, especially in sports, that seems to be so prevalent in our day.

**Self-control:** (“Temperance” in KJV.) More generally, this means mastery of self. It has been applied to sexual desire, that self-control needed by an athlete, and resistance to all of the various self-indulgences in the earlier list. Paul elsewhere suggests three tests for consideration, even when something was lawful and not harmful. Is the action helpful? Is it constructive? Is it to the glory of God? (I Cor. 10:23, 31) (Stamm, op. cit. p 569)

Having given us this list, Paul comments “There is no law against such things.” He is right; there isn’t. But there are certainly social pressures that push us away from these ideals, in the interest of conforming to the expectations of society. I was in the Navy. Admiral Halsey is quoted as saying, “I never trust a sailorman who doesn't smoke or drink.” There were certain expectations for behavior in that environment, and many others, that pressure us to compromise with what God intends for us, or which are just plain harmful. Paul tells us that, by the Spirit, we can deal with these issues and still have peace. It’s not necessarily easy. But, God is there with us. By living in the Spirit, we walk with God with his assurance or our relationship as His sons or daughters forever.

*Prayer: God of earth, rain, sunshine, vines, fruit trees, and berry bushes, help us follow the Spirit’s lead so we can experience a life rooted in you. We want to bear good fruit that mirrors the character of Jesus in our lives. Amen.*