

Galatians

Gospel character

Study 11 | Galatians 5:16-25

In the first half of chapter 5, Paul shows that Christian freedom gives us a whole new motivation for living. Some may say, "If I thought I was accepted by God no matter what I did, I would lose all incentive to lead a holy life." The proper answer is: "If when you lose all fear of rejection you discover that you have lost all incentive for holiness, then the only incentive you had was fear!" In normal religion, the motivation for morality is fear-based. In gospel Christianity, the motivation is a dynamic of love (5:6, 14). Now in this passage Paul spells out just *how* we grow in character through this new dynamic.

Read Galatians 5:16-25

- 1. According to this passage what are the two natures at work in every Christian? (vv.16-18)**
- 2. What is the main way they influence us? What does the Christian truly "want" and why?**
- 3. What is set in opposition to the Spirit in v.16? What is set in opposition to it in v.18? What does this tell us about how the sinful nature or flesh actually operates?**

EXERCISE

Read and mark “!” for something that helped you, and “?” for something that raised a question

Fruit of the Spirit

Part A – INTRODUCTION TO THE FRUIT

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all behold the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness, from one degree of splendor to the next, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor.3:18)

The *purpose* of the Spirit

The ultimate purpose of the Spirit’s operation in the Christian is to change us into the likeness and character of Jesus Christ. (cf. Rom.8:29 – “*He predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.*” and Eph.4:13 – “*Till we reach maturity, the fullness of the stature of Christ.*”) So the ultimate goal is not some kind of general comfort, strength or power, but concrete, practical change in our character — how we think, feel, and act habitually and naturally.

The *method* of the Spirit

The (breathtaking) method of the Spirit is to show us the glory of Christ. The complex verb that Paul uses is *katoptrizdomenoi* which means “to behold in a mirror.” This word combines the ideas of looking long and hard at something, and resembling or reflecting something. We are called to long, contemplative gazing at the Lord Jesus and changing so as to reflect his image. What a vivid image! The more we gaze at and contemplate Jesus, the more the Spirit shows us his glory and we become transformed into the likeness of what we see. What does it mean to “see the glory” of something? It means to realize in your heart its importance, beauty and how it connects and affects you. So the way the Spirit creates character in you is by affecting the heart and life by what you see in the person and work of Christ.

The *process* of the Spirit

The Spirit does not enact this Christ-like character in us all at once, but we change gradually, from one degree of likeness on to the next. Therefore, our sanctification is not a crisis as much as a process. Growth does not happen evenly, but in spurts, like botanical growth. (cf. II Peter 3:20)

The *experience* of the Spirit

This transforming process of the Spirit is experienced by the individual Christian as “*freedom*.” This does not mean that effort, pain and hard discipline are not involved, but that primarily and ultimately the development of Christ-like character is liberating. Growing in love, joy, peace, self-control makes you feel you are “becoming yourself.”

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, rude, self-seeking, easily angered.” (1Cor.13:1-5)

The test of the Spirit

The Corinthians had miraculous gifts (*prophecy*), teaching gifts (*can fathom all mysteries and knowledge*), vision and leadership gifts (*faith that can move mountains*), social concern (*give... to the poor*), and a willingness to die for the faith. Yet they were impatient, harsh, critical, rude, jealous, ego-centric. Paul bluntly says that the *gifts* of the Spirit (skills-what we do) is far less important than *fruit* of the Spirit (character — what we are). He says that the gifts of the Spirit are talents that the Spirit uses to help others and get things done, but it is possible to have the Spirit use you this way and have little or even no grace in the heart (*I am nothing*). A gift-operation of the Spirit may or may not operate out of a grace-changed heart. Saul and Judas were used by the Spirit to prophecy, do miracles and so on. Gifts can also operate when our love, joy and self-control are very, very low. But the fruit-growth of the Spirit can only happen in a child of God. The only test that the Spirit has really indwelt you as a child of God is the growth in the fruit of the Spirit.

“Many bad men have had these gifts. Many will say on the last day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?’ [Matt.7:21] Such as these have had... gifts of the Spirit but no special and saving work of the Spirit. Gifts of the Spirit are excellent things, but... they are not things which are inherent in the nature, as true grace and holiness [the fruit] are... [G]ifts of the Spirit are, as it were, precious jewels which a man carries about him. But true grace in the heart is, as it were, the preciousness of the heart, by which... the soul itself becomes a precious jewel... The Spirit of God may produce effects on many things to which he does not communicate himself. So the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, but not so as to impart himself to the waters. But when the Spirit by his ordinary influences bestows saving grace, he therein imparts himself to the soul... Yea, grace is as it were the holy nature of the Spirit of God imparted to the soul.”

(J.Edwards, Charity and Its Fruits. Sermon Two)

The dynamic of the Spirit

Paul’s reference to gongs and cymbals probably refers to the pagan worship in Corinth at the temples of Demeter and Cybele. Pagan worship was a way of putting on a show to merit and attract the favor of the gods. Paul indicates, then, that it is possible to do Christian ministry in the same way. We can help others and do lots of Christian activities

as a way to convince ourselves and others (and God) that we are “*something*.” This is a form of works-righteousness. When gifts are used that way, there are tell-tale signs of impatience, irritability, pride, hurt feelings, jealousy. The fruit of the Spirit then grows as we remember the gospel, rejoice in our salvation, and use our gifts as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. As a result, our helping others will be done in humility, love, patience, tenderness.

Part B — THE UNITY OF THE FRUIT

“Love believes all things, hopes all things...” (1 Cor.13:7) “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Gal.5:22)

These two statements are remarkable. Though Paul talks of “*faith, hope, and love*” in 1 Cor.13:13, in v.7 he says that love has faith and has hope. If you have love you will have faith and hope! In Gal.5:22 he deliberately uses the singular word “fruit” to describe a whole list of character traits. From this we learn a very important point for understanding and discerning the fruit of the Spirit.

This means that the real fruit of the Spirit always grow up together. When we look at the list of traits in the “fruit lists” (1 Cor.13:4-7; Gal.5:22-23) we notice that we are naturally stronger in some rather than others. But our strengths, apart from the Holy Spirit, are due to natural temperament (we have a trait through brain chemistry and early training), or to natural self-interest (we learned a trait in order to handle some issue or condition we met). For example, some people are temperamentally gentle and diplomatic (*gentleness*). But the sign that this is not due so much to the Holy Spirit is that such people are usually not bold or courageous (*faithfulness*). Because of what Paul says about the unity of the fruit, this means that the gentleness is not real spiritual humility, but just temperamental sweetness. John says, “*If a man says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar.*” Notice that he does not say, “If a man loves God but doesn’t love his brother, he is unbalanced.” No, he says he is a liar. True love to God (*love*) goes along with love to others (*kindness*). If they are not all there, they are not there at all.

There are many, many cases of this. Some folks seem happy and bubbly (*joy*) and are good at meeting new people, but are very unreliable and cannot keep friends (*faithfulness*). This is not real joy but just extroversion. Some people seem very unflappable and unbothered — *peaceful* — but they are not *kind* or *gentle*. That is not real peace, but indifference and perhaps cynicism. It enables you to get through the difficulties of life without being always hurt, but it desensitizes you and makes you much less approachable.

Part C – THE DEFINITIONS OF THE FRUIT

1. Agape – love

Definition – To serve a person for their good and intrinsic value, not for what the person brings you.

Opposite – Fear: self-protection and abusing people.

Counterfeit – Selfish affection. Rescuing someone but really rescuing self. Attracted not to person, but to how this person's love makes you feel about yourself.

2. Chara – joy

Definition – Delight in God and his salvation for sheer beauty and worth of who he is.

Opposite – Hopelessness, despair.

Counterfeit – Elation that comes with blessings not the Blesser! Mood swings based on circumstances.

3. Irene – peace

Definition – Confidence and rest in the wisdom and sovereignty of God more than your own

Opposite – Anxiety and worry

Counterfeit – Indifference, apathy, not caring about something. "I don't care."

4. Makrothumia – patience

Definition – Ability to take trouble (from others or life) without blowing. To suffer joyfully.

Opposite – Resentment toward God and others.

Counterfeit – Cynicism. Self-righteousness. "This is too small to be bothered about."

5. Chrestotes – kindness

Definition – Practical kindness with vulnerability out of deep inner security.

Opposite – Envy. Unable to rejoice other's joy

Counterfeit – Manipulative good deeds. "Right hand knowing what left hand is doing."

Self-congratulation and self-righteousness.

6. Agathosune – goodness (integrity)

Definition – Honesty, transparency. Being the same in one situation as another.

Opposite – Phoniness; hypocrisy.

Counterfeit – Truth without love. "Getting it off the chest" for your sake.

7. Pistis – faithfulness

Definition – Loyalty. Courage. To be principle-driven, committed, utterly reliable. True to one's word.

Opposite – Opportunist. Fair-weather friend.

Counterfeit – Love without truth. Being loyal when you should be willing to confront or challenge.

8. Prautas – gentleness (humility)

Definition – Self-forgetfulness.

Opposite – Superiority: self-absorbed self-aggrandizement.

Counterfeit – Inferiority: self-absorbed, self-consciousness.

