



Galatians 5:16-26
A Spirit-Filled Summer
Bear Fruit of The Spirit

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So we've been in a series this summer looking at the Holy Spirit – what the Spirit's role is, how the Spirit operates in our lives, and so forth. And for most people, the Spirit is the most mysterious and misunderstood facet of our Trinitarian God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit is often thought of as being “out there” and difficult to relate to. The irony of this is that Jesus has sent the Spirit to be with us. For instance, in John 16 – a passage we looked at several weeks ago, Jesus says the Spirit is the comforter or the advocate and in part is here to convict us in regards to sin. Jesus also says that the Spirit will guide us into all truth. That's not a Spirit that is distanced from us, but rather one who is quite close and interacting with us.

So at least from Jesus' perspective, the Spirit is very present, accessible, and relatable for *us*. Not just for him, but for you and me. That's his intention. And as we continue our Summer Series on the Holy Spirit, today's passage from Paul in his letter to the church in Galatia really emphasizes this understanding of the Spirit that Jesus has. Life in the Spirit is not as complex or “out there” or weird as some people might think.

We get that right off the bat in this passage. Paul writes in verse 16, “**So I say, walk by the Spirit...**” (**Galatians 5:16**). *Walk* by the Spirit. It's a simple metaphor for “living” by the Spirit. “Walking” is an every day thing. Most of you have been doing it for your entire life minus probably about 1 year. I can still remember when our oldest child learned to walk. I can't remember any of my other kids very definitively because once you've got more than one you can't remember any of those things. But Blake was about 11 months old when he took his first steps. He was a little advanced for his age – though once he started walking and getting into everything we wondered why on earth we ever encouraged it to happen in the first place – which we used to do up until he started walking. What were we thinking? Tip for you new parents or “someday” parents – don't rush your kid to walk. It'll happen when it's supposed to happen. That's just a free bonus for you this morning.

But the point is: walking is simple. We learn it when we're about a year old.

It's an everyday thing that nearly every human being does. And **Paul is admonishing us Christians to simply “walk in the Spirit.”** Living by and with the Spirit is a common, every day thing for disciples of Jesus. Living by the Spirit is not something that only happens in worship when your all-time favorite worship song or hymn happens; it's not something that happens only at Christmas when we all raise our candles up as a group metaphor to let the light of Christ shine; It's not something that only happens at a baptism or at a Christian camp or on a missions trip. In other words: it's not something you “feel” at certain “extra-spiritual” times.

Living by the Spirit is the daily sustaining, guiding, inspiring power for the life of the Christian. It's as much a part of the life of a Christian as walking. We are to “walk with the Spirit.” And when we do that, **Paul continues to say in verse 16 that we “will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”** Now, by “flesh” he doesn't just mean your skin or even just your body. Paul often uses this word “flesh” to speak to our nature. So in this case, it's our sinful nature he's speaking about. And our sinful nature is in conflict with the Spirit.

When I read this, I think of movies or tv shows – and I don't have any specific ones that I can recall – but we've all watched scenes in them where a person is trying to make a decision about something. And sometimes there will then be a little angel on one shoulder trying to convince the person to make one decision, and a little devil on the other shoulder trying to convince the person to make a different decision. That's an appropriate picture for the battle between the Spirit and the flesh.

We see it in our dog all the time. Our family joined the Covid puppy craze and got a dog a couple months ago. **(Photo of Waverly.)** She's learning to do what's right, but it's hard some times. Like when we want her to drop the ball or toy in her mouth. She wants to do what's right and please us, but she *really* wants to keep that ball or toy, too. So she'll kind of gnaw at it, or shake it around, or even drop it for a split second and then pick it back up...before eventually she will drop it. It's usually like a 20 second process to follow a simple command: Drop.



It's like there's a battle going on inside her: one is her fleshly self – her nature that wants to hold onto the ball or chew toy – but then there's this other side of her that wants to please us. And the fact is, when she does drop it, we praise her and pet her and that all is a treat for her, and then we throw it and she gets to go fetch it which is lots of fun for her, too. So it's not like forsaking her fleshly self is forsaking fun and joy in her life. In fact, it's just the opposite! She gets bored of chewing on those things if we walk away because she won't drop them.

So the flesh and the Spirit are in conflict with each other. And the stuff of the flesh can look really tempting – but like a dog with a ball and no one to throw it because she won't drop the ball, it gets old after a while. Worse than that: the ways of the flesh lead to all kinds of brokenness: brokenness with God, brokenness with loved ones in our lives, broken society, and a broken world.

And Paul lists some of the things that are of the flesh and not of the Spirit here. And maybe not all of these things are temptations for you personally – like maybe witchcraft isn't real high on the list for many. Some of these are things that are *temptations* for some people – like sexual immorality or impurity or drunkenness. Others are things we really *don't want* to be true about us but some people act out in these ways anyway, like hatred, fits of rage, or jealousy. And in case for some reason none of these things are things that you're tempted to do, or that you struggle with, you're not off the hook, because Paul ends the list with “and the like.” In other words, this list isn't complete – there are other things that are of the flesh.

So let's look at three of these in some practical contexts. And I'll pick on three that are easy to overlook: **Three of them here that don't get a lot of attention but can ruin a church or a family or a company are “discord” “dissensions” and “factions.”** In any kind of a “Team” setting – and I consider churches, families, places of work, our schools, our circle of friends...any group of people who are interacting together for a common purpose...these are all teams. And nothing derails a team more than discord, dissensions, and factions. If I were to add one more thing to these three items – and since Paul clearly indicates that the list isn't complete, and this one is

listed as “unholy” elsewhere in Scripture, I think we can safely do that – I would add “gossip” because it often fuels these other three. These kinds of things will completely derail a team from its mission.

It is so important that in a team setting we not engage in these kinds of things. So when someone at your place of work says something that drives a wedge between people – whether it’s gossip, or a complaint, or just talking about things with you that aren’t appropriate for the two of you to be discussing, then it’s important to not engage in that behavior. And to take it a step beyond not engaging it – which though good to do, is passive – but to actively be “anti-faction” or “anti-discord” or anti-gossip”....then a kindly worded statement to the person who’s speaking out of turn is needed. Invite them to speak with the right person – instead of talking behind someone’s back about their job performance, then that person should talk to the person themselves. Or to their boss. Whatever is the appropriate action. Same thing applies in a family or in a church, school, non-profit organization, a circle of friends...and so forth. It’s important to have the right conversations with the right people, or else discord, dissension, and factions can grow, and tear apart the good thing that’s being worked toward.

Now, the challenge is that the things in this list *can* be satisfying to engage in, in their own twisted way; but we’re only satisfying our own flesh – our own desires. They’re not beneficial to others; they’re bearing bad fruit, not good fruit. In the context of the church, it’s also not beneficial to God’s mission through the church – so it’s not beneficial to God, which ought to be of first importance for those of us who follow Jesus.

What is beneficial is to exude the fruit of the Spirit instead. Notice it’s not the vegetables of the Spirit. Have you ever wondered why it’s not? This last week, a long-time church member mentioned to me why it might not be the “veggies of the Spirit.” If you go all the way back to Genesis and the Creation account, God gives Adam and Eve fruit bearing trees to eat. For example, Eve says in Genes 3:2, “We may eat *fruit* from the trees in the garden...” No mention is made of vegetables. And so what I learned this week is that vegetables are probably a result of sin – they aren’t mentioned in Scripture until later, well after “the Fall.” So the conclusion is that

vegetables are bad for your spiritual health. ☺ Sounds like fantastic theology, if you ask me – though you should still eat your veggies. Regardless, it's the “fruit of the Spirit.” So fruit is the positive Biblical metaphor for living by the Spirit.

And as I look at the fruit of the Spirit – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” – I don't see a list there that is really all that controversial. I mean, there have been many times where the *secular* world (not just Christians) has very much embraced many – if not most – of these things. In fact, if you ask 10 people walking down the street about these – if they're the kinds of things they'd like to describe them or their friends, etc., I think 10 out of 10 would say “yes!” Most of these are things that a lot of the world would say “Yes, we agree with that.” You'd think Christians would have more influence in the world, given that these are things that the world values as well.

And there are a couple struggles that happen here. One struggle that the world (non-Christians) has is they don't realize that these are fruit of the Spirit. **All of these things in their most genuine, pure form, are fruit of the Spirit – from the Spirit of God, whom Jesus sends into the world.** We can't conjure them up on our own – at least, not in any meaningful, lasting form. People can experience these apart from the Spirit; but they're fleeting...they're shallow and hollow versions of the real deal that comes from the Holy Spirit. And as we saw last week, and we've seen at other times in this series as well, the Spirit comes into our lives when we know/believe/trust Jesus Christ. Jesus himself has sent the Spirit; so experiencing the fruit of the Spirit to the fullest extent means knowing Jesus in your life. If you're someone here this morning or watching online and you're wondering why you don't have lasting, trustworthy peace or joy or love or any of these other fruit that are listed here...I'm telling you – actually this passage is telling you – that it's because you don't have the Spirit in your life, which is because you don't know Jesus. Jesus makes all the difference. He's the key that unlocks a foundation that is built to last, and when our lives are built on that we bear this kind of fruit.

And that's not to say that Christians always get this right. We (Christians) get

it wrong a lot, too, and find our sense of love and peace and joy and so forth in places that aren't in line with the Spirit. Why? Because of the second struggle people have with this, and it gets us back to what Paul wrote about earlier: **There's a struggle between the Spirit and the flesh.** Sometimes the fleshly way of living is attractive and we slip and we stumble...or sometimes it just gets a hold of us even if it's not really attractive – like with anger or jealousy. We Christians don't bear this fruit very well sometimes, and unfortunately it negatively impacts our witness in the world. But, as Paul writes, we are to put those things to death. In fact, he's more graphic than that, as he writes in verse 24 that: **Those who belong to Jesus have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).** Unfortunately, even Jesus-loving, Bible-studying, Spirit-filled Christians can have those things come back from the dead and cause problems sometimes. And when that happens we need to lean into the Lord, turn to Him in prayer, and re-crucify whatever it is that's out of step with the Spirit.

And the thing of it is, is that: **The fruit of the Spirit is so much better than the ways of the flesh.** Like a dog that won't drop the ball but then gets bored by itself: The ways of the flesh can be tempting, but in the end they leave us (not just bored, but) broken and hurting. The fruit of the Spirit is lasting, fulfilling, and contagious (bad word choice in Covid-19 era); this fruit in our lives blesses the people around us.

Chuck Swindoll tells a true story that reminds us of the goodness of the fruit of the spirit. He writes, “While speaking at a retreat, I noticed one couple sitting in the front row at each of my sessions (speakers don't forget such things). The wife was a brilliant and witty woman who laughed at all of my jokes! But her husband merely glared at me. For three days he did this. His lips were puckered. He looked like he'd been sucking rivets off a skateboard. After the final session, his wife approached me with a smile and an extended hand. “I just want to thank you,” she said. “I haven't seen my husband laugh this hard in years.”ⁱ

The fruit of the Spirit shows our life transformed, and it actually *does* come through us and show on the outside...and it is so good! It lasts, it blesses others, it encourages, it brings satisfaction and purpose in life.

And as Paul started this section off: **We experience it when we simply walk through life with the Spirit.** It isn't really rocket science. We do have to be wary of the fleshly desires, and there can be struggles...but you don't need a PhD in anything to walk with the Spirit, and "walking in the Spirit" will lead to bearing the fruit of the Spirit. We don't need to over-think this or – somewhat ironically because this is the fruit of the Spirit – we don't need to over-spiritualize it, either.

We just have to walk through life with Jesus as our foundation. Leaning into Jesus, praying, studying His Word, being open to God's Spirit leading us and giving us opportunities to be the hands and feet of Christ...it's just going through life always aware that God's Spirit is right here, right next to you...keeping Jesus on the forefront of our minds. And as we do that, we will walk with the Spirit, bearing good fruit in our lives: we will bear the fruit of the Spirit. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/the-fruit-of-the-spirit-is-not-lemons>