

Galatians 5:22-26

Gal 5:22 (NKJV) **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ²³ **gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.** ²⁴ **And those *who are Christ's* have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** ²⁵ **If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.** ²⁶ **Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

Having dealt with the “**works of the flesh**”, we now come to these nine characteristics that Paul describes as the “**fruit of the Spirit**”. The contrast and differences between these two lists is a little overwhelming, and what we have clearly seen is that someone who is habitually practicing any of the “**works of the flesh**” as a habit and manner of their life “**will not inherit the kingdom of God**”. Please make no mistake about what Paul has stated in the latter part of v21. This is as strong language as can be used, and it offers no flexibility whatsoever. This is not what we would call a “soft” part of the gospel, but is one of the very straightforward and convicting statements of Scripture. Paul makes no apologies for using such a strong and irreversible statement that people who are consistently and habitually involved in the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. One of my favorite verses in the New Testament is [2 John 1:9](#) which says,

2Jn 1:9 (NKJV) **Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.**

It is an eternally tragic scenario that for some reason the modern church culture has minimized the reality of these verses and has unfortunately accommodated many persons who have a very ongoing ungodly lifestyle. The tragedy is simple – they are giving people the notion that they are saved when in reality they are not. The local church is the “**pillar and ground of the truth**” ([1 Timothy 3:15](#)), yet it appears that it has lost its focus on rightly dividing and appropriating God’s truth in its midst. The church of Jesus Christ cannot compromise the truth for anyone, and especially on issues related to salvation. Nothing is more appalling than accommodating people’s sins and giving them the impression and illusion that they are saved when in reality they are not saved.

So, what Paul does is to provide a listing of godly attributes and characteristics that are the authenticating evidence of the work of God’s Spirit in a person’s life, and a firm ground of assurance of their salvation. I have stated many times in this portion of our study that as a Christian when you read the “**works of the flesh**”, it should be a source of great encouragement and assurance to you because you know that those characteristics are not prevalent in your life. Paul is going to talk about the “**fruit of the Spirit**” as the evidence of biblical salvation, so every professing believer should be able to look at their life and honestly assess their life if these attributes are actually being developed in them. Listen to what Jesus said in [Matthew 7:15-20](#). In this context these verses are specifically addressing false prophets, but the principle is still the same.

Mt 7:15 (NKJV) **"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.** ¹⁶ **You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?** ¹⁷ **Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.** ¹⁸ **A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit.**

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Now, so far in this passage of Scripture in [Galatians 5](#) beginning in v16, we have seen what it means to “**walk in the Spirit**” (v16) and what it means to be “**led by the Spirit**” (v18). In v22-26, Paul will address the “**fruit of the Spirit**” and what it means to “**live in the Spirit**”, as well as what it means that the believer has “**crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**”. These four verbs – “**walk, led, live, crucified**” – are validating descriptions of the Christian life and they provide a picture of how the Christian life is to be lived out. The governing verb of the four is the word “**walk**” in v16 because it is in the imperative mood. The verb “**walk**” is the imperative command given to the believer, whereas the verbs “**led**” and “**live**” are in the present tense, indicative mood, active voice indicating that these two verbs are the ongoing evidence of what it means to actually “**walk in the Spirit**”. I.e., if someone is actually walking “**in the Spirit**”, then they will be “**led by the Spirit**” and they will “**live in the Spirit**”. Also, because of their having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, they have “**crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts**”. The verb “**crucified**” is in the aorist tense, indicative mood, and active voice which simply means that it is something that happened in the past as a fact. The active voice simply implies that the believer is actually appropriating that work of God’s Spirit into their life and that the believer is providing actual evidence of the Spirit’s work in their life.

From a kind of overview of these five verses, there are several things that we want to see initially before we do the actual exegesis of the verses. **The first observation is that the Christian life has very clear and evident characteristics and attributes to it**, and we should never diminish that reality in any way. If I can say it a different way, there should never really be any doubt that someone is a genuine believer. Paul has created a contrast, a dichotomy, a spiritual gulf between genuine believers and false believers, between what is produced in an unbeliever’s life and what is produced in a believers life – and there is no mistaking the differences. It is the difference between the list of v19-21 and the list of v22-23. We fully acknowledge that any believer during certain seasons of their life may drift away from the things of God, not grow spiritually, live in sin, and be disobedient to God. However, that does not negate the reality that the Spirit of God is constantly working to produce and develop His godly attributes in that believer. If someone is truly born of God’s Spirit, then there will invariably be godly evidences of that in their life. Stated another way, the “**fruit of the Spirit**” is God’s indication of genuine salvation in a person’s life. We affirm without any hesitation that the Christian life is portrayed as “spiritual growth”, and so allowances have to be provided to allow for that growth to occur. [1 Peter 2:2](#) speaks of this when it says,

1Pe 2:2 (NKJV) as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

[2 Peter 3:18](#) reiterates the same thing when it says,

2Pe 3:18 (NKJV) but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

We know that whenever someone is saved that the Holy Spirit begins the process of sanctification in their life. It is a **God-ordained process** that provides the believer with everything that is necessary for meaningful spiritual growth. In the same way that a believer does not have the power to justify himself or glorify himself, neither does he have the power to sanctify himself. Stated another way, a believer

cannot save himself, and in like manner he cannot grow by his own efforts and resources. A believer can never divorce his spiritual growth from the Holy Spirit. If in reality that was possible, then there would be no need for the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. The success that a believer enjoys in the Christian life is never measured by what he or she does for God, but solely on what the Holy Spirit is able to do both in them and through them. So, in the case of this passage, please appreciate that God Himself is the guarantee that this work of the Holy Spirit will take place. That is one reason why in v22, Paul calls this work as the **“fruit of the Spirit”**. He does so because it is the Holy Spirit who is producing this fruit in the believer’s life. It is not called the **“fruit of the believer”**. It is not called the **“fruit of commitment”**. It is called the **“fruit of the Spirit”**. It is not the believer producing God’s fruit in themselves, but it is the Holy Spirit that is producing His biblical fruit in their life. This fruit is God’s work, the evidence of God’s salvation. If God had left it up to us individually to produce His fruit in our life, we would all fail miserably and never succeed. Some of us have a difficult time with His help, so to have to produce this fruit in our life on our own would be a spiritual disaster. So, everything that Paul encourages the believer to do in this passage is being done **“in the Spirit”** – **“walk, be led by”**, and **“live”**. If I can express it in another way, these verses create the necessary reality of an ongoing and perpetual spiritual dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The classic passage in the New Testament on how a believer actually bears biblical fruit in their life is found in [John 15:1-8](#) and Jesus’ teaching on **“the true vine”**. We will look at that passage in some detail as we progress through these verses. What you will clearly find is that bearing spiritual fruit in our life is directly proportional to our **“abiding in the vine”** and our being **“pruned”**. Now, I want to make a simple statement that comes from [John 15:8](#) which reads as follows,

Jn 15:8 (NKJV) By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Every believer is going to produce some level of spiritual fruit in their life, but what God is after is what Jesus called **“much fruit”**. I.e., it is more than possible for the Holy Spirit to produce more spiritual fruit in my life if I learn what it means to be receptive to Him and if I truly understand what it means to **“abide in the vine”**. Most Christians are fairly non-receptive to the Holy Spirit, and one reason for that is because they fail to **“abide in the vine”**. They have not yet figured this out. They are satisfied with just coming to church and making token passes at spirituality. In that scenario, all that the believer is doing is living the Christian life in the power of their flesh. They have forsaken this quality and discipline of abiding in the vine for much lesser priorities and have become more than comfortable in justifying that that is perfectly okay based on their particular lifestyle circumstances. Trust me, but every believer’s flesh will find creative ways to circumvent this kind of discipline in their life. Too often we are more than satisfied with mediocrity in the Christian life versus a deep seated commitment that is witnessed by continuously abiding in Christ. Unfortunately, the church at large has actually fostered this attitude and approach by constantly watering down, almost dumbing down what genuine commitment to Christ involves. This superficial entertainment mentality in the emergent church and many traditional churches has been very effective in drawing people away from a biblical definition of true Christianity. It is redefining Christianity with a very unbiblical image of what genuine discipleship really is. Jesus said in [John 8:31](#),

Jn 8:31 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

The second observation is that believers do not have the power to crucify the flesh in their own power. At first reading, v24 seems to indicate that it was the believer who autonomously crucified their flesh, but that is not accurate. V24 reads,

Gal 5:24 (NKJV) **And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

This verse clearly points us back to [Galatians 2:20](#) which reads,

Gal 2:20 (NKJV) **I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

The crucifixion of the flesh that Paul is addressing happened at the believer's conversion and it was something the Holy Spirit accomplished – not the new believer. I know from personal experience that I have never crucified my flesh. To the contrary, it is always there to create conflict and tension in my life. However, what I do know, and this is the essence of v24 is that the control that my fleshly passions and desires use to have over my life were crucified in the past at the moment of salvation. At that moment we as believers entered into a relationship with Christ where the flesh was no longer able to rule and reign over our lives. Right now as a believer, you have been supernaturally empowered by God to live victoriously over the impulses of sin that try and drag you down every day, but it all is made possible as you abide in Christ and in the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. You can never divorce spiritual growth from the Holy Spirit. Please do not forget that the New Testament word for “**spiritual**” always means “of the Spirit”. I.e., spiritual gifts are gifts of the Spirit. To be “**spiritual**” is something that proceeds from the Holy Spirit and it refers to things communicated by and imparted by the Holy Spirit. So, the “**fruit of the Spirit**” and the power to “**live by faith in the Son of God**” are realities that are imparted to the believer by the Holy Spirit. They are not self-endowed abilities, but spiritually endowed abilities. That is why as we progress through these verses, the emphasis will be centered on yielding ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit and to the Word of God. Anything else will lead to spiritual frustration and failure.