



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

FRUIT – *Galatians 5:13-26*

1 Questions to consider

How should we live as Christian believers? What's the best way to live? What do we need to know in order to live well and to God's glory? How should we pray for God's enabling to live for him?

2 How Galatians answers the questions

Galatians is a letter written with such questions in mind. Paul spends the first four chapters helping his readers understand more deeply the significance of Jesus' death as enabling them (and us) to come to God through faith alone. Then he asks, 'In light of the wonderful free grace of God, how should we then live?' and the last two chapters focus on this.

He starts chapter 5 by saying that believers should be living in the freedom that Christ has bought for them. We should not go back to the old ways in which we lived before we became Christians but Paul realises that this can happen all too easily. But he says, 'The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love' (v.6).

3 What does Christian freedom mean?

But that's a bit vague, isn't it? So Paul goes on to say more specifically what he means in the rest of Ch.5, both negatively and positively. Our freedom in Christ should motivate us and enable us to 'serve one another humbly in love' as we live by the Spirit (v.13,16).

So, Paul says, don't engage in activity that is consistent with the slavery of the flesh but engage in activity that is consistent with the freedom of the Spirit. He envisages a battle going on within the Christian (v.16-17), a conflict for which we need the help of the Holy Spirit if we are to win and so live in the freedom which is of God.

4 No longer slaves to sin but free to serve

Christians have a new freedom. They understand that, at one time, they were slaves of sin. But Christ has set them free and given them forgiveness through his death and resurrection. So now the question is, *What does this freedom look like?* The answer is that freedom looks like service. 'Christ has set me free in order that I might serve the living God,' we might say. We are now slaves to God, and we call that Christian freedom. And true freedom only comes from obedience to God, enabled by his Spirit working in our lives.

5 Life in the Spirit – negatively

So how should a Christian live and be led by the Spirit? Paul devotes the rest of Gal 5 to answering this. He first outlines the sort of sinful acts which all believers should reject, which he calls 'works of the flesh', ie acts of our sinful human nature.

- **Sexual sins** – sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery.
- **Religious sins** – idolatry and witchcraft/sorcery.
- **Social sins** – hatred, quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.
- **Drinking sins** – drunkenness, wild parties/orgies and the like.

Those who live like this, says Paul, will not inherit the kingdom of God (v.21).

'He is referring to habitual practice, rather than the infrequent, and repented of, lapses. For someone continually to indulge the sinful nature without battling against it is to show that Jesus has not saved them, and that the Spirit has not renewed them. Paul wants to banish complacency.' (Tim Keller, *Galatians for you*, p.149-50).

6 Life in the Spirit – positively

To be led by the Spirit (v.18) is to change and be changed, to be the people God wants us to be. Paul has talked about the acts of the sinful

nature, but now he switches to the FRUIT of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit's growth is both **gradual** and **inevitable**.

'We are saved by faith, not by growing fruit; but we are not saved by fruitless faith. A person saved by faith will be a person in whom the fruit of the Spirit grows.' (Keller)

So what are the different aspects of the Fruit (**v.22-23**)?

- **Love:** perhaps the most important fruit, as **1Cor 13** and **John 13:34-35** make clear. Love binds us all together in perfect harmony (**Col 3:14**); it is THE mark of life in Christ. Giving oneself for others and their good, to encourage and strengthen them.
- **Joy:** a delight in God for the worth and beauty of who he is. It doesn't depend on our circumstances, and may be known even in sorrow (**2Cor 6:10**) since God grants grace even in pain. We are to rejoice whatever our circumstances (**1Thes 5:16**), trusting that God is working all things together for our good.
- **Peace:** a confidence and rest in the wisdom and control of God, so as to replace anxiety and worry.
- **Patience:** an ability to face trouble without hitting out, to endure difficult situations and people without losing one's equanimity. Its opposite is resentment towards God or others.
- **Kindness:** an ability to serve others practically, being generous to others, especially in extending compassion to those who are not loving in return.
- **Goodness:** integrity, being the same person in every situation; living a life of moral decency, being both truthful and loving.
- **Faithfulness:** being loyal, trustworthy and dependable. Utterly reliable – can be counted on to fulfil responsibilities. True to one's word.
- **Gentleness:** meekness in behaviour, speaking gently in situations which need a calm word, humility. It is a characteristic of Jesus (**2Cor 10:1**).

- **Self-control:** ability to restrain oneself, to pursue the important over the urgent, not being impulsive. The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviour in the face of temptation and impulses.

7 Conclusion

When we consider closely all the fruit of the Spirit, we perceive that one aspect of it cannot be seen in isolation from any of the others. Then we see that we are in far more need of growth in the fruit of the Spirit than perhaps we think. Believers do feel the tug of 'fleshly desires' (5:17), and we are often aware of a spiritual battle going on within us. And so Paul concludes that, just as we are to live and be led by the Spirit, so also we are to keep in step with the Spirit (v.25), and that will be shown by our actions as we grow the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

For homegroups

1. How would you summarise the different lifestyles Paul describes in Gal 5:13-26? What happens when people live by the sinful nature and not by the Spirit (v.15,21)?
2. What does it mean to 'live by the Spirit' (v.16)?
3. Why is it so easy to recognise the acts of the sinful nature (v.19-21)?
4. Paul assumes that even though all Christians live by the Spirit, we do not always keep in step with the Spirit (v.25-26). In what ways do we/you struggle to keep in step with the Spirit?
5. Why is *fruit* a good description of the Spirit's work in us (v.22-23)?
6. Can you think of incidents in the gospels when one or more of the fruit of the Spirit were particularly clear to see in Jesus?
7. Which of the fruit of the Spirit have you sensed in yourself or been told that others see in you? In what ways do you see the Spirit's fruit ripening in your life? What fruit would you like to cultivate more? Perhaps ask the Lord to cultivate a couple in particular.
8. What steps can you take this week to co-operate with God in growing the fruit of the Spirit in your life?