

The Fruit of the Spirit and Being Led by the Spirit
Galatians 5:13-26

Turn to Galatians 5. This Scripture covers many basics about daily Christian life, about the choices and priorities of daily Christian life, and about the forces acting on us every day.

Two forces are front and center in this Scripture, the flesh and the Spirit. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit, that's clear enough. What exactly "the flesh" means here is not so clear. In Galatians 5, the flesh does not seem to be one part of our inner self, the bad part of us, or our fallen nature, or something like that.

In Galatians 5, the flesh seems to be something not our real self, in the same way as the Holy Spirit is not a part of our real self. They are both forces pulling on us, and our real self needs to choose which pull to follow. Sometimes people capitalize "Flesh" here, to catch that sense that it is not a part of us but a force that acts on us, as the Holy Spirit acts on us. Not a bad idea.

The works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:19-23 give us a useful summary of what God wants us to leave behind, and what God wants us to pursue. When we repent, when we say, "God, I will live in your ways," to what exactly are we agreeing? We're agreeing to turn away from the works of the flesh, and toward the fruit of the Spirit.

But there is much more in this Scripture than those two lists, so we will look at the whole section, vv13-26.

Setting There were two things going on in the Galatian churches that will help us understand this Scripture. One, the Galatian churches were nervous about the law of Moses. They were gentile Christians, and after Paul left, Jewish false teachers came in and told the Galatian churches that they would not inherit all of God's blessings unless they kept more of Moses' law.

Paul has spent pretty much the whole letter up to this point showing why this was wrong and how dangerous this teaching was to the gospel and faith in Christ.

Two, the Galatian believers were not getting along with each other. Relationships between believers in those churches were terrible. I will read vv15 and 26: *If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. V26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

Imagine these between people in God's congregation: Biting and devouring each other, destroying each other, being conceited, provoking and envying each other. Keep that in mind, and I will begin in 5:13 and we go through this to v26.

5:13 *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* Christ freed us from the law of Moses. We can use this freedom two ways: One, we can use our freedom to break the law of Moses.

Or two, we can use our freedom to humbly serve one another. The Christ who freed us says, “use your freedom to serve one another humbly in love.

The first fruit of the Spirit is love, and the last is self-control. The first and the last are actually the most important on that list, and we can see it already in v13. The Flesh wants indulging, the Spirit wants humble loving service to each other. Shall we indulge the Flesh? No. (self-control). We will humbly serve in love. (love)

¹⁴ *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”* If we do this, we actually **keep** the law of Moses. We were **freed** from Moses’ law, but in case we were **worried about breaking** Moses law, the good news is that if we humbly serve one another in love, we **keep** the law. (love)

This command from Leviticus 19, *love your neighbour as yourself*, which was a favorite of our Lord, appears three times in the NT letters: here, Romans 13, and James 2. And every time the neighbour is the brother or sister in our congregation. Don’t miss that.

5:15 *If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.* Treating each other as the neighbour, loving each other as ourselves, humble loving service, is the very opposite of biting, devouring, and destroying; being conceited, provoking and envying.

5:16 *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.* If we do NOT have the Law of Moses, what will guide us? If we are free from the Law of Moses, who will show us how to live? The answer is: the Holy Spirit. *So I say: walk by the Spirit.*

In each of us, and in every one of our households and congregations, the Flesh is at work and the Spirit of God is at work. We who belong to Christ will certainly *have* the desires of the Flesh. We already know that. The Spirit does not take away the desire, the desire of the Flesh is alive and well. But the Spirit will lead us not to *fulfill* those desires. (self-control)

The desires are all there. Make sure you get this: walking by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, does not take away the desires of the Flesh. It does not. Jesus was tempted in all the common ways, and so are we. By walking by the Spirit, with the Spirit’s help, we will not *fulfill* those desires. The Spirit does *not* take away the pull of the Flesh, the Spirit produces self-control.

5:17 *For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you may not do whatever you want.*

This explains the ongoing struggle in every believer, every home and church. The Flesh is our attraction to sin, that dark force that pulls us to sin. The Holy Spirit, on the other side, pulls to God's ways. They are pulling us in different ways, they are at war with each other, and every one of our lives is a battle ground, Flesh and Spirit at war, fighting to control our lives.

5:17d *You may not do whatever you want.* Picture Paul writing to the congregations of Galatia, and they are biting and devouring each other, destroying each other, provoking and envying each other. *No*, he says. He understands that we desire those things. But that is not living in God's ways. The Spirit will lead away from those dark desires. Self-control front and center here.

5:18 *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* If you are led by the Spirit. Our Scripture uses three phrases to describe the Spirit's role: "Walk by" the Spirit (v16), be "led by" the Spirit (here in v18), and "keep in step with" the Spirit (v25). *Walk by* the Spirit, be *led by* the Spirit, *keep in step with* the Spirit. These are all talking about the same thing.

They all describe the Spirit pulling us toward serving one another humbly in love, and leading us away from the desires of the Flesh (love and self-control).

5:19-21a *The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, quarrels, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, divisions, separations ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.*

When we repent, we agree with this, we turn away from these things and things like them, we agree before God that we will aim our lives away from these things.

This list has 15 sins. (And folks, these come out of the law of Moses. Moses covered all this.) The first five are more individual sins, and the last two. But the eight in the middle are relational sins. Here are the eight: *hatred, quarrels, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, divisions, separations, and envy.*

Remember what kind of problems were going on in Galatia. Remember that this discussion began with using our freedom to serve one another humbly, in love. The one great command was to love our neighbour as ourselves. How do we treat the people that are close to us? In our churches, jobs, and families. Those are the battleground of the Flesh and the Spirit.

5:21b *I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.* Why do these people not inherit the kingdom of God? Simple: they didn't repent. They never actually decided to live in God's ways.

All of these sins have been done by people who love the Lord Jesus. Sad but true. Most of us will have regular battles with at least one of these works of the Flesh. But if it is the flavour of our lives, then we did not repent. We cannot be sinless, but we can aim our lives away from this.

5:22-23a *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness and self-control.*

If the Holy Spirit were to completely take over your life, so that you were totally filled with the Spirit every minute, what would that look like? These fruit. If we *walk by* the Spirit all the time, and are completely *led by* the Spirit, and *keep in step* with the Spirit, what will the Spirit produce? This.

When we think about walking by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, and keeping in step with the Spirit, our devout imaginations take us to all kinds of exotic places that are on the edges, but are not the center. The fruit of the Spirit is the center. None of the other stuff.

The fruit of the Spirit is much like the beatitudes, in the sermon on the mount. Later in that sermon, Jesus said, “*Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, did we not cast out demons in your name, and prophesy in your name, and perform many miracles?’ And I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me.’*”

Galatian congregations: bite, devour, destroy, provoke, envy. That’s the work of the Flesh. Spirit-led congregation and household: the atmosphere in the group is loving, joyful, peaceful. In which kind of gathering would you rather be, a Flesh gathering or a Spirit gathering?

And then we have the nerve to find repentance a *burden!* God calls us from darkness to light, from destroying each other to helping each other, and we think repentance is a *burden?* We want to be saved by faith but not repent? That is good news? It is not. God would be a neglectful parent if he did not insist that we repent, turn from the Flesh and toward the Spirit.

On the other hand, there are churches around that bite, devour, destroy, provoke, and envy. That is true, and it is just as bad as we think it is. It is new? No. It is not new. It is old. The Galatian churches did these. And so did the church in Corinth.

And people now point out these things and say the church won’t last. If these troubles signaled the end of the church, it would not have lasted to the end of the first century. Make no mistake, these destructive things are all around us.

Did Christ love the Galatian churches less than Paul did? No. Paul’s love and concern was just the overflow of Christ’s great love and concern. And that is just how he now sees the churches that still do these things. The problem is awful. But Christ’s loyalty to churches is greater. On the other hand, because of these things, individual churches do fade and die. My home church did.

5:23b *Against such things there is no law.* These things do not break the law of Moses. The Galatians are gentiles, but some Jews scared them about the law of Moses.

There are still pockets of Christians who want the Law of Moses. We are not under Moses, but Paul still respects Moses. Though we are free from that Law, it is important to Paul that we are also, by the Spirit, and keeping the law of Moses, and not breaking it.

Here's what Paul says in our Scripture about the Law of Moses. 1, In Christ we are FREE from the law of Moses. 2, loving each other KEEPS the law of Moses. 3, the Spirit REPLACES the law as our guide. 4, the fruit of the Spirit does NOT BREAK the law of Moses.

5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Being joined to Christ gives us a big advantage, a big head start, in walking away from the Flesh. It is hard enough as it is, as we all know. Without being joined to Christ in his crucifixion, there would be no chance.

5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. We have new life by the Spirit, eternal life, we are born again. Since that is true, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. The Galatian congregations were born again by the Spirit, but were not keeping in step.

Walk by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit. All talking about the same thing, love and self-control. We will *have* the desires of the Flesh, but let's not *fulfill* them. Self-control. We cannot do whatever we want, since the Flesh is pulling hard. Self-control. Humble loving service.

Let's clear up a few other things about walking by the Spirit and being led by the Spirit.

1, We still need our minds. We are to love God with all our mind. If we did not need our minds, if we did not need training and thought, God would not have given us the list of 15 works of the flesh, and 9 fruit of the Spirit. We need our minds, we need to know.

The Spirit does not to bypass our mind, he works in partnership with it. That's why we have so much teaching in the whole Bible, including all the Spirit Scriptures. We need our minds.

2 The Spirit does not micromanage our lives. He leads us so that love and self-control are our basic character, our character turns away from the works of the Flesh and toward love and self-control. But how exactly we live that out, that's our business. The Spirit's job is to make sure we are a certain kind of person, NOT to make every decision.

Once in a while God directs a particular event in our lives, but that's not the real interest of the Spirit. His job is to give us an urge to humbly serve. Then his job is done, normally we decide how that will look. I wanted God to micromanage my life, I was taught that, I was sincere. But God had no interest in that, not for me. Wouldn't touch it. I slowly realized from Scripture that he had no interest in that. It may be different for others. Fine. But not taught in the Scriptures.

None of us can take care of every needy person we know. Which of them should we humbly serve? The Spirit does not intend to make those choices for us. The Spirit leads us to be a person who humbly serves. We manage it from there ourselves. Use your heads, brothers and sisters.

3. The Spirit does not make this easy. Self-control is never easy. There is a notion that if the Spirit is leading, we'll be energetic about obeying and it will all flow nicely. This notion says, that if it feels uphill and difficult, then we are serving God in the Flesh. Don't you believe that. The Flesh does not serve God in any fashion. We know what the Flesh does, and it is not that.

There is too much in the Bible about endurance and labour and toil among powerful servants of the Spirit for us to assume the Spirit makes this easy. He might one day, and not the next, but it is all fruit of the same Holy Spirit.

5:26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Walking by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, keeping in step with the Spirit; this Scripture uses those terms to mean the same thing. It means we control the desires of the Flesh, which are alive and tireless in all of us. The Spirit does not take away the desires, but the Spirit leads us away from them.

We live out walking by the Spirit and being led by the Spirit above all by our relationships in our church and in our household. Family relationships and church relationships are the Flesh/Spirit battle ground. Where there is regular humble service, people are walking by the Spirit and are led by the Spirit. Where relationships are peaceful, people are led by the Spirit.

It takes two people to have a peaceful relationship. One can want loving and serving peace, but the other is not good at self-control yet. Nothing new there. You, for your part, show the fruit of the Spirit.

There is, among us, quite bit of genuine love, of the joy of the Lord, of peaceful relations, and of self-control. Whenever relationships are like that, the Holy Spirit is alive and well and showing his power. Amen.