

## The Flesh versus the Spirit

Galatians 5: 19-26

In our previous study, Paul challenged believers to walk in the Spirit. While this is what the Lord desires, and we are unable to walk pleasing to Him apart from the Spirit, there is another significant purpose for walking in the Spirit – in so doing, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

We are well aware that the flesh is strong. We deal with temptation on a consistent basis. We are also aware that the flesh and the Spirit are contrary to one another. They are in continual opposition. We cannot walk in the Spirit while seeking to fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Our text today is a continuation of the verses we examined in the last study. Here Paul deals with the [contrasts](#) between the flesh and the Spirit. I want to consider: [The Flesh versus the Spirit](#).

**I. The Works of the Flesh** (19-21) – In these verses, Paul describes the works of the flesh and the corruption associated with these works. Notice:

**A. Their Description** (19-21a) – These works of the flesh fall into three distinct categories – physical, spiritual, and relational.

### Physical

- **Adultery** – Unfaithfulness in the marriage relationship.
- **Fornication** – A broad term, referring to all illicit sexual activity.
- **Uncleanness** (Impurity) Moral impurity, actions or behaviors that pollute and defile.
- **Lasciviousness** (Sensuality) Excess and lack of restraint, sexually in this context.

### Spiritual

- **Idolatry** – Worshiping idols made of men's hands or imaginations.
- **Witchcraft** – (Sorcery) *Pharmakeia*, from which we get *pharmacy* and *pharmaceutical*. It was originally used of medicines in general but came to be used primarily of mood- and mind-altering drugs similar to those that create so much havoc in our own day. Many ancient religious ceremonies involved occultic practices in which drugs were used to induce supposed communication with deities.<sup>i</sup>

### Relational

- **Hatred** – Enmity, hatred, hostility.
- **Variance** – Strife and contention.
- **Emulations** – Envy, jealousy, anger. Covetous resentment.

- **Wrath** – Indignation, wrath – expressed with unrestrained hostility, often apart from provocation.
- **Strife** – Conflict, strife, contention, one of scheming dissension.
- **Seditions** – Division, rebellion, separating into factions.
- **Heresies** – Embracing and promoting false doctrine while denying the truth of the Gospel and the Scriptures.
- **Envyings** – Extreme jealousy. No merely coveting what another has, but begrudging their possessions. This attitude seeks the loss of others' possessions and the hope of suffering in the process of loss.
- **Murders** – To maliciously take the life of another.
- **Drunkenness** – Being drunk.
- **Revellings** – Rowdy, boisterous, and crude behavior. Uncontrolled indulgence.

**II. The Fruit of the Spirit (22-25)** – Paul offered a distinct contrast between the works of flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Notice:

**A. Their Description (22-23)** – Paul lists the characteristics present in the fruit of the Spirit.

- **Love** – Agape love, God's sacrificial, selfless love. "The form of love that most reflects personal choice, referring not simply to pleasant emotions or good feelings but to willing, self-giving service."<sup>ii</sup>
  - **Joy** – Inner gladness, provided by the Spirit as we walk with the Lord.
  - **Peace** – To bind together, to join, to weave together. It means that a person is bound, woven and joined together with himself and with God and others...experiencing the highest good.<sup>iii</sup>
  - **Longsuffering** – Patience while enduring suffering; perseverance in the midst of difficulty; being constant, steadfast, and enduring.
  - **Gentleness** – Being kind, good, considerate, and gracious.
  - **Goodness** – Filled with virtue; filled with good and expressing good will toward others.
  - **Faith** – Being faithful and trustworthy; loyal in devoted allegiance to the Lord; a complete trust and faith in God.
  - **Meekness** – Gentle, tender, humble, and mild. It speaks of strength under control.
  - **Temperance** – The ability to control the body and the lusts of the flesh. Able to practice restraint in temptation.
- [Against such there is no law, 23b](#). Even the world itself encourages and prizes such behavior and characteristics in humanity. God has not spoken against these, but rather has sent His Spirit to develop these characteristics in all believers.

**B. Their Culmination** (24) – [And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.](#) Paul revealed a simple truth that is to be expected in those who walk in the Spirit while bearing the fruit of the Spirit – they will have the ability to crucify the flesh and the affections associated with its lusts. The flesh and the Spirit are contrary to one another.

➤ Those who walk in fellowship with the Lord, being filled and guided by the Spirit, will be enabled to overcome the lusts of the flesh. Where the fruit of the Spirit abides, the works of the flesh are defeated. If we are committed to walking in the Spirit, we will show forth the fruit of the Spirit and abandon the works of the flesh. [Rom.6:5-6 – For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:](#) <sup>6</sup> [Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.](#) [Rom.8:12-13 – Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.](#) <sup>13</sup> [For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.](#)

**C. Their Persuasion** (25-26) – [If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.](#) <sup>26</sup> [Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.](#) Again, this is simple yet profound. As believers, we live in the Spirit. Upon salvation, the Spirit takes up residence within us. At that moment, we are filled with the Spirit. If, then, we live in the Spirit, we are expected to also walk in the Spirit. While the Spirit abides within, providing guidance and conviction as needed, it is possible for one to ignore the Spirit and grieve Him through disobedience. In order to walk pleasing unto the Lord, we must walk in the Spirit. [Col.1:10 – That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.](#)

➤ As Paul concluded his thoughts regarding the fruit of the Spirit, he left a strong admonition for those who faithfully walk in the Spirit, [Verse 26](#). We must guard against an attitude of conceited self-righteousness or perceived spiritual superiority. Our walk with the Lord, guided by the Spirit, should never create a desire for vain glory – to be put upon a pedestal regarding our spiritual walk. We are what we are by the help of the Lord through the guidance of His Spirit. We have nothing to boast in other than Christ Himself.

➤ We are not to provoke one another, challenging others to debate or stirring up strife within the body of Christ. Those who become arrogant in the faith often desire to challenge the spirituality of others, in an attempt to make themselves appear more spiritual. We cannot walk in the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and be contentious at the same time. (See verse 15).

➤ Finally, we must guard against being envious of the spiritual walk of others. Rather than being jealous of the walk of another, or the Lord's blessing in their lives, we should watch their life and seek to emulate their walk in order to be more pleasing unto the Lord. Those who are walking in the Spirit will rejoice at the blessing and spiritual maturity of another rather than being jealous or

envious. We are not called to build our own kingdoms, but rather to seek the growth and health of the kingdom of God.

**Conclusion:** This has been a straightforward study regarding the contrasts between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. What does the mirror of God's Word reveal in our lives? Are we walking in the Spirit, bearing the fruit He produces in our lives? Have we put to death the lusts of the flesh in order to walk pleasing unto the Lord? Is the Spirit abiding in your heart, having been saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ?

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<sup>i</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Galatians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 161–162.

<sup>ii</sup> MacArthur Jr., [Galatians](#), 165.

<sup>iii</sup> Leadership Ministries Worldwide, [Galatians–Colossians](#), The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1996), 87.