

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

A Life Changed by Jesus

WEEK THREE: Galatians 5:16-23

The Fruit of the Spirit: A Brief Introduction

This term we will be focusing on what a life changed by Jesus looks like using the metaphor of the fruit of the Spirit. This common biblical metaphor describes the outcomes of a life lived with God; the virtues and characteristics that out to be the harvest of our lives.

Our central text will be Galatians 5:16-23 but we'll also incorporate other texts that reflect on fruitfulness.

Sermon Outline:

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): Galatians 5:16-23

The fruit of the Spirit is one of two lists in this passage. The other is a list of what Paul describes as "the acts of the flesh". Unlike some Greco-Roman philosophies that drove a wedge between the material and immaterial in which the latter was seen as superior, Paul is more holistic. The acts of the flesh are those actions that are in conflict with the desires of the Spirit. And what does the Spirit desire? Simply put, the Spirit has been given to believers to continue/complete the work of Jesus who himself was sent to bring about the will of the Father to restore and renew all things. The "flesh" represents all of our sinful desires that stand in opposition to God's plans and purposes in the world.

The list begins with two groupings that comfortably fit this definition. Sexual immorality, one of the stereotypical outcomes of human sinfulness tops the list. As a Jew steeped in the Law, Paul no doubt has texts like Leviticus 18 in mind; a long list of prohibited acts. This is followed by impurity which has to do with a slackness in religious practices and rituals; treating them as unimportant. Debauchery, or a violent resistance to any restraint, concludes the list.

The second group – idolatry and witchcraft – fit the pattern of resisting the purposes of God. Idolatry replaces God as the source of the good life which brings with it a different set the values, priorities, and behaviours that set themselves against God. Witchcraft, sorcery, and divination, which are routinely condemned in the Old Testament, are an attempt to control or coerce God.

The third group catches us a bit off guard. It is the longest of the sets – eight long – and all of them are related to our life together. Galatians 5:13-15 suggests that Paul is aware of problems in the community and wants to address them. The question is how is that opposed to the plans and purposes of God? It is critical to remember that the Church, as the body of Christ, is the key vehicle of God's ongoing work in the world. A disunified body makes no sense in the physical world and even less in relation to God's purposes!

Paul concludes his list with drunkenness, orgies, and the like. All of these, Paul says, are obvious. And they are aren't they? Would a community of faith really need to be warned away from these actions?

Why would Paul include such an obvious list? Especially since it doesn't really have a one-to-one parallel with the fruit of the Spirit (For example, if they were parallel lists we might expect "purity" to stand as a contrast to "sexual immorality.")?

There is also a distinction between the “acts” of the flesh without any reference to the fruit of such acts and the “fruit” of the Spirit without any reference to the acts of the Spirit. It may be that Paul is inviting us to fill-in-the-blanks. First, to consider the fruit of following the acts of the flesh – the subversion of the plans and purposes of God. Second, to consider the acts of the Spirit that will bring about the harvest of the fruit of the Spirit.

The consideration of the “acts” of the Spirit also ground the “fruit” from a bit of an abstraction to something more concrete. To love is all well and good, but love is expressed in concrete actions – what are they? Joy is good, but how is it expressed?

Over the next few weeks, as we explore the list of the fruit of the Spirit, this will be a key question for us to grapple with.

Questions to Ask

1. Keeping in step with the Spirit is not some mysterious spiritual practice. It is aligning our lives to the plans and purposes of God in the world through the Church; the desire of the Spirit. Discuss.
2. It is apparent that one of the issues that Paul is addressing is disunity in the community of faith. How does community dysfunction subvert the plans and purposes of God?
3. If the community of faith – the body of Christ – is so important to the plans of God in the world, what can/should we do to reflect this importance?
4. How can we manage the internal conflict we experience between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit? How can we do this in community?

A Prayer to Pray

Pray for each other and for our community of faith that the fruit of the Spirit might become more and more evident in our lives.

A Practice to Try

We were challenged to ask the Spirit to reveal one of the fruits that he desires a harvest of in our lives. Make this a focus of prayer this week.

Readings to Read This Week

The following readings focus on the work of the Holy Spirit.

- Romans 12:3-8
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-31
- Ephesians 4:1-16
- 1 Corinthians 1:10-17
- Philippians 2:5-11

A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

Our vision as a community of faith is to see lives changed by Jesus. In this series we want to consider what that really means – what does a life changed by Jesus look like?

A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

1. As we head into the Christmas season we wanted to remind our community of faith of three opportunities at GBC where a small gift can make a big difference. The *Hopefield Giving Tree* begins in the next week or so and is a chance to make a small donation towards a Christmas hamper for those in need. The *GBC Endowment Fund* is another potential place you might like to make a small donation. Our

hope, over the next ten years or so, is that this fund might slowly grow until it is large enough for the interest to create an ongoing income stream. Finally, while we are tracking well against our *ministry budget*, a small donation at the end of the year would enable us to fund a couple of small projects around the building (e.g., new carpet in the old auditorium for our kid's ministry). More information can be found on Link Tree.