

Keeping in Step with the Spirit (Part 2)

Galatians 5:22-26

In case you're new to this church, you may not know that okra is a pretty big deal to me. I give an update about once a year on how my okra patch is doing. This year my okra is a little behind schedule, but I think I'll be okay in August. My okra is only a few inches tall now (**photo of small okra plants**). I had to replant them a couple of weeks ago because my original row of okra mysteriously died. By the grace of God, when these plants mature, they will look like this (**photo of large okra plants**).

As with any crop, you have to be clear about which part of the plant you plan to harvest. If you plant carrots or radishes, you're planning to harvest the roots, right? If you plant spinach or lettuce, you're planning to harvest the leaves. And if you plant strawberries or tomatoes, you're after the fruits. The same thing is true with okra (**photo of okra pods**): your crop isn't a success unless you actually harvest the fruit - the okra pods. At the end of the growing season, I will evaluate my row of okra by how much fruit it produced (not by digging it up and looking at the roots or by how prolific the foliage).

When it comes to our spiritual life, the humble okra plant has much to teach us. You can evaluate whether or not God is having His way in your life by looking for the fruit of the Spirit. Just as something has gone terribly wrong if an okra plant doesn't actually produce okra, there's something wrong if these qualities don't surface in our lives:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control . . .

You can be very busy for God, you can attend church every Sunday, and you can do all sorts of disciplines, but if you don't have peace and patience, something's wrong. In this imagery, God is a farmer/gardener who wants our lives to produce this **fruit**. Paul wants us to understand that the Spirit intently desires to produce this fruit in our lives.

We'll spend most of our time this morning discussing each of these virtues listed as the fruit of the Spirit, but first I'd like to make three points of context about this list.

Three points of context about the "fruit of the Spirit":

First, ***this list is representative (not comprehensive) of the fruit that the Spirit produces in our lives.*** We made a similar point last week when we discussed the deeds of the flesh; there are other vices not on that list that the flesh produces if given the chance. And there are other virtues than these that the Spirit wants to produce in our lives. For example, humility and thankfulness aren't listed as aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, yet they are foundational to life in the Kingdom.

Second, ***although the Spirit produces these qualities in our lives, we aren't passive in the process.*** I say this because elsewhere almost all of these same qualities are imperatives/commanded. Love: "Love one another fervently from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22). Joy: "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). Peace: "Let

the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Colossians 3:15). Colossians 3:12 speaks of putting on a heart of compassion, **kindness**, humility, **gentleness** and **patience**. We are supposed to actively pursue the very qualities that the Spirit wants to produce in our lives.

Third, ***all believers should be characterized by all of these qualities (in contrast with the gifts of the Spirit which differ from person to person)***. Spiritual gifts are abilities that the Holy Spirit gives to individuals for the common good. These gifts differ from person to person. Not everyone has the gift of teaching or administration or healing; that is perfectly fine. By contrast, every aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is for every believer. It’s not acceptable to say, “I really don’t have any self-control, so don’t expect any from me.” No, the Spirit wants to produce the fruit of self-control in the life of every believer.

Understand the qualities that the Spirit desires to produce in our lives. (vv. 22-23)

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Let’s discuss these one at a time.

Love. Love was an obvious virtue to mention first because earlier in the chapter Paul wrote that if you “love your neighbor as yourself” you’ve fulfilled the entire Law. First and foremost the Spirit desires to make us people who love. Love is so foundational because “God is love” (1 John 4:16). And God demonstrated His love for us by sending His Son to die for our sins. God’s love is a sacrificial commitment to our well-being.

Fundamentally, a Christian is a person who has received and experienced the love of God. When we love others, we are only treating others the way God has treated us. By saying that the fruit of the Spirit is love, Paul is saying that the Spirit within us desires to equip, empower, and motivate us to have a sacrificial commitment to the well-being of others.

Joy. Joy is a lot more stable than happiness. I would define joy as a deep satisfaction in God and His ways. If you have joy, you continually find yourself satisfied in who God is and in what God is doing. This understanding of joy allows us to make sense of Scriptures like James 1:2-3 which commands us to be joyful when we’re in the middle of tough circumstances. Even when you’re going through tough times you can find deep satisfaction in knowing that God is refining you and giving you endurance.

A couple times this past week someone asked me, “How’s your week going?” My immediate response was to bellyache about how busy the week was, but I quickly found myself talking about how “good” the week had been. Even though I was busy, I found myself very satisfied by all sorts of things: the conversations I’d had, the experience of kids and workers and parents at VBS, reports of God doing significant things in others

lives, etc. That satisfaction is joy. It's not always the case, but this past week I had a type of joy that trumped my busyness.

Peace. We often speak of peace as the absence of hostility - as when two countries at war sign a peace agreement. But biblically peace also (perhaps primarily) has a more positive connotation of wholeness and well-being. God Himself is often described as "the God of peace" - the God who brings wholeness and well-being to His people (1 Corinthians 14:33, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, Romans 16:20). We understand that Jesus Himself was "our peace" (Ephesians 2:14-17); Jesus' death and resurrection addressed the fact that we were enemies of God and estranged from one another.

In the context of Galatians 6, it's safe to say that the Spirit desires to produce peace within us individually so that we will experience peace corporately. Whereas the flesh produces enmities, strife and disputes, the Spirit gives us a sense of wholeness that makes all sorts of conflicts seem too petty and too trite to even bother with.

Patience. The KJV translated this term "longsuffering." If you are patient, you are willing to suffer for a long time (if necessary) in your relationships with others. The presupposition behind this virtue is that there will be people that cause you to suffer. If nobody ever wronged you or rubbed you the wrong way or inconvenienced you, you wouldn't need patience. But in this world others *will* cause you to suffer by what they say and think and do. Given that reality, the Spirit desires to give you patience.

The flesh, of course, wants you to go a very different direction. If you side with the flesh you will be harsh and demanding and demeaning. If you side with the Spirit, you will be willing to suffer for a long time (instead of having a very short fuse).

Kindness and Goodness. Kindness and goodness are often used as synonyms (the LXX used both terms to translate the same Hebrew word "good" (*tov*). God is described as both kind (Romans 2:4) and good (Mark 10:18). As with the rest of these virtues, a person is god-ly by showing kindness and goodness to others.

The kindness of God was expressed most fully by the death of Jesus. Ephesians 2:7 says that God has shown "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." God's kindness is very similar to His mercy - tenderly lavishing blessing upon us instead of giving us what we deserve. When we are kind, we show this same tender mercy to others. The term goodness a bit broader and includes the idea of generosity (Cole, p. 167).

Faithfulness. Faithfulness is a virtue that speaks to ongoing commitment to God over the long haul. Instead of being devoted to God one day and then apathetic the next, a faithful person lives out his/her faith day-in and day-out. A faithful person is consistent over time. You can rely upon a faithful person to be consistently devoted to God.

Gentleness. Jesus described Himself with this term: "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden. . . Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and

humble in heart. . .” (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus wants people to know that if they come to Him, they won’t find someone who is harsh and arrogant; they would find someone who is **gentle and humble in heart**. In other words, He relates to us with gentleness and humility by default. He is naturally/normally gentle toward us.

The Spirit wants to give us this same quiet strength that allows us to be gentle and humble toward others. We’ll see next week that the person God uses to help others turn from their sin must be gentle.

Self-control. This virtue confirms that our wills are to be fully engaged as the Spirit produces these qualities in our lives. Self-control is simply the capacity to control yourself, instead of being “out of control” or at the mercy of your flesh. The idea is that the Spirit Himself wants to give us this capacity to control how we live our lives.

Of course we need self-control in many different areas of life. Sometimes we feel like we have no control over what we think - whether it’s sensual thoughts or angry thoughts or jealous thoughts. If we have self-control, we’ll have the capacity to control what we think about and how intensely we think about those things. Sometimes we need self-control in what we say. Have you ever walked away from a conversation and thought, “Wow, I wish I hadn’t said the first thing that popped into my mind. . .”? We need self-control in our speech.

These are the qualities that the Holy Spirit wants to produce in our lives. After listing these nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, Paul says, “against such things there is no law.” Paul is taking yet another shot at those who said that if you don’t live by the law that you’ll end up living in sin. The law was “against” things like murder, immorality, idolatry, injustice, stealing, coveting, etc. Such laws are irrelevant for people who are walking by the Spirit because their lives are already characterized by love, joy, peace, and patience. Laws are against vices, not virtues.

Keep in step with the Spirit as He produces these qualities. (vv. 24-26) In these verses Paul argues that we have the responsibility to participate with the Spirit as He produces these qualities in our lives. In verse 24 Paul reminds them that when they came to Christ they turned their backs on the flesh and its desires.

24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

By using the imagery of crucifixion, Paul was saying that when they came to Christ they intentionally and decisively died to the flesh. A true believer is someone who says, “I am done with my life in the flesh; I will now live in the Spirit.” As we’ve seen the past couple of weeks, this doesn’t mean that the flesh is eradicated; that won’t happen until the return of Christ. We need to come back to this place of repentance again and again throughout the Christian life.

In verse 25 Paul challenges the Galatians to live in a way that's consistent with the way they began the Christian life.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

The first phrase could be translated, "Since we live by the Spirit. . ." Paul is reminding the Galatians that the Spirit gave them life in the first place (see 3:3). He's simply arguing for continuity when he says that since we live by the Spirit, we should also **walk** by the Spirit. Here Paul uses a term found only three times in the New Testament (here, 6:16, and Philippians 3:16) and carries the idea of *keeping in step with* or *conforming yourself to* someone.

Verse 26 indicates that Paul still has in mind the conflict in the church at Galatia. Once again he warns them against allowing the flesh to have its' way.

26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Don't side with the flesh or things will get ugly. Side with the Spirit and you'll be full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. *Keep in step with the Spirit as He produces these qualities in your life.*

In terms of application I'd simply encourage you to ask yourself this question:

Application: Which of these virtues does the Spirit desire to produce in my life at this time? Perhaps as I described the virtues that the Spirit produces, one or more of them seemed most relevant for your life. Perhaps you've even seen how the lack of some quality has caused grief for you and those close to you.

I'm not going out on a limb in saying that the Spirit desires to produce more patience in some of our lives. Our impatience can be disheartening to the people we live and work with; it causes all sorts of relational troubles. Let's say you identify patience as something that the Spirit obviously wants to produce in your life. What do you do next?

Maybe you've merely tried to "manage" your impatience or hide it when it surfaces. But what about wholeheartedly trusting the Spirit to make you a patient person? What about keeping in step with the Spirit who already desires to produce patience in you?

In practical terms, ***we keep in step with the Spirit through:***

- Prayer
- Reflection
- Responding to the prompting/working of the Spirit

Sometimes we never get around to praying for virtues that we need. We lament that we're not more patient, but God gives us the freedom (and responsibility) to ask for the things that we need. Ask God to show you ways that you're impatient. Ask God to show you the fall-out in relationships.

By reflection I mean thinking deeply about Scriptures that describe patience and thinking deeply about what our lives and relationships might be like if we were long-suffering.

If we're praying and thinking deeply about a virtue like patience, we're in a position to respond when we're in some situation in which the Spirit prompts us to be patient. We'll have a sensitivity to the Spirit that we didn't before. We don't see patience as some burdensome demand; we see it as the fruit of walking with God - the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. We be in a position to pay attention to the prompting and working of the Holy Spirit as we live our lives.

Ultimately we need to get to the place where we are convinced on a heart level that these qualities are essential for every aspect of our lives. In marriage, for example, a husband needs to be someone who is full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That's the profile of a great husband. That's also the profile of a great wife, a great mom/dad, a great son/daughter, a great employee, a great boss, a great pastor, a great friend, a great _____. The only way we will have the fruit of the Spirit is by keeping in step with the Spirit.