

Series: The Fruit of the Spirit

Title: “Walk”

Text: Galatians 5:16

Lesson 3

To really understand how the fruit of the Spirit is produced in our lives, we must take a serious look at another verse from Galatians that came before Paul’s list found in Galatians 5:22-23. In particular, we must comprehend what the apostle meant when he said, “I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). The apostle’s words contain the key to unlocking all of the fruit of the Spirit. Plain and simple, it is when we “walk by the Spirit” that things like love, joy, peace, patience, and so on begin to manifest themselves in our lives.

This leads us to the million dollar question — “What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?” I can remember struggling with this concept as a younger believer. During my college years, I earnestly sought to grow in my faith. It didn’t take long in my journey to discover I needed help. I seemed completely unable to curb certain desires. A few sins were hard to stop.

By His grace, the Lord brought me to the place where I saw my need for Him. Whereas sanctification had previously been an exercise in self-will and human-centered behavior modification, I became acutely sensitive to the necessity of the Spirit’s help. I remember attending a Christian camp for teenagers and college students. On one particular evening, a camp speaker spoke on Galatians 5:16, the passage I cited earlier. He spoke of the need for believers to “walk in the Spirit.” I thought to myself, “That’s what I need!”

The problem was that I didn’t walk away from that experience with an understanding of what it means to actually walk in the Spirit. I was confused. Such an activity seemed mystical, subjective, and hard to grasp. I knew I had found the key to Christian living, but I didn’t understand how to use it.

This chapter is focused on helping us understand how to “walk by the Spirit.” Without a knowhow in this area, we will never produce the fruit of the Spirit. Worse yet, a failure in this area will lead us to live lives dominated by the works of the flesh. To become believers who “walk buy the Spirit,” it is important to consider what is meant by the word “walk.” We will also examine what is meant by the “desire of the flesh” of which Paul spoke. Understanding these concepts will go a long way in helping us live by the Spirit. Ultimately, such knowledge will result in the production of the Spirit’s produce in our lives.

Walk This Way!

In Galatians 5:16, Paul encouraged his readers to “walk by the Spirit.” He maintained that such a lifestyle would keep them from living according to the desires fo the flesh. If we want to understand how the fruit of the Spirit is produced in our lives, it is necessary that we first comprehend what it means to “walk by the Spirit.”

The word translated “walk” in Galatians 5:16 is a popular one in the New Testament. It was literally used of the physical act of walking — the act wherein a person puts one foot in front of another in order to move forward (Matthew 4:18).

However, it was often used as a metaphor to depict the mode and method of the Christian life (Ephesians 4:1). Used spiritually and figuratively, the term was used to speak of how one conducted his or her daily life.

Paul's figure of speech was fitting. Walking is something we do on a regular basis, so believers should regard their relationship with God as an ongoing, everyday type-of-thing. Additionally, walking is an act that touches everything we do. When we wake up in the morning, we walk from our bed to our daily activities. Unless we are physically impaired for some reason, we walk in our home, at work, in between daily chores, and so forth. Walking touches every domain of life, and our relationship with Christ should as well.

In calling believers to "walk by the Spirit," Paul called them to conduct their lives in light of the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives. He wanted them to live with an ongoing awareness and influence of the Holy Spirit in all they did. According to the apostle's words in Galatians, such a lifestyle results in two realities. First, his readers would not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Second, his readers' lives would produce the fruit of the Spirit.

There's No Way!

Let's consider the first result of walking in the Spirit in more detail. Paul promised his readers that they would "certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh," if they learned to "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16). The apostle's language was strong in the Greek of the New Testament. He used an emphatic negation, employing two negative words that made up a double negation.

In English, double negatives are mostly frowned upon. It is not correct to say something like, "I don't have no money" or "He doesn't want none." While such expressions constitute bad English, they were permissible in Koine Greek, the language of the New Testament. Speakers and authors would often use such language to emphasize a point. Paul employed such grammar in Galatians 5:16. His intent was to strongly deny the possibility of a reality.¹ He wanted his readers to know that there was no possible way a person who walked in the Spirit could simultaneously fulfill the desires of the flesh.

When my wife and I were preparing for marriage, we enlisted in pre-marital counseling. It was actually required by the pastor who performed our wedding ceremony. We learned several important things over the course of five sessions. To this day, I often remember one of them. Our counselor advised us to not use absolute statements in marriage. When couples are in conflict, it can be damaging to the relationship for one to say things like, "You are always rude and selfish!" or "You never pick up after yourself!"

Indeed, it is rarely a good idea to use absolute statements in any domain of life. In fact, there is a saying that encapsulates the value of avoiding such statements — "Never say never!" While such an axiom is certainly valuable, it is important for us to see that Paul gave an exception to such worldly wisdom. His language in Galatians 5:16 made an absolute statement. He wanted to be unequivocal — if one lived by the

¹ Brooks and Winberry, 119-120.

Spirit, he or she would *never* fulfill the desires of the flesh. It is absolutely impossible for one to commit sin when he or she is living in step with the Spirit.

Paul's words are instructive for us. The Holy Spirit is our pathway to resisting the promptings and pulls of our mere humanity. If we want to stand strong against the temptations of the flesh, we must learn to live by the Spirit. Human means of reform and improvement will never suffice. For the life of God to be produced in our lives, we need a supernatural work to take place in our souls. We need God to work. As a result, a walk with God is the key to seeing the produce of the Spirit appear in our lives.

Desire, Good or Bad?

What was the "desire of the flesh" of which Paul spoke? It is important to note that the word rendered "desire" wasn't necessarily a negative one in the original language of the New Testament. There is often confusion over this matter because of the way in which some modern translations have used the word "lust" instead of "desire." In today's lingo, the word "lust" is often used in a negative sense, evoking thoughts of wanton, licentious, and greedily sinful behavior.

In the language of the New Testament, lusts weren't necessarily bad. In fact, the term was often used to speak of healthy and holy desires. In Luke 22:15, Jesus used it in referring to His fervent desire to take of the Lord's Supper with His disciples. But our Lord also used the word in a negative sense. In Mark 4:19, he used it to warn of how a desire for the things of the world can overwhelm one's desire for God's Word.

In a sense, the Bible viewed "desire" as neutral in and of itself. Desire could be evil or bad based on the direction to which it was aimed. The use of the term in the New Testament reveals that we are all driven by desires, whether good or bad, evil or righteous. The key to living the Christian life well is to faithfully steer our desires toward the good.

Is not this the teaching of the entire Bible? From both the Old Testament and New Testament we learn that the battle for a godly life is a battle of our desires. The Lord revealed such to be true in the Shema, one of the foundational passages of Scripture for Jews living under the Old Testament. It said, "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Jesus similarly upheld the pivotal place of desires in godly living when He issued the Great Commandment. After being asked which was the most important of all of God's commands, He replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

Directing Our Desires

The fact that "desire" can be either positive or negative reveals that finding our delight in the right types of things is a key to Spirit-directed living. If we want to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we must direct our desires toward the Lord and His Word. When our hearts are set upon Him, our souls will be transformed and the character God desires will emanate from our lives. Directing our desires to the right place is a necessity, if we want to "walk by the Spirit."

The problem is that we have an enemy who likes to wreak havoc in the area of human desire. Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been tirelessly ensnaring people by corrupting their desires. For millennia upon millennia, he has waged a spiritual war wherein he coaxes human kind to satiate natural, God-given desires through counterfeit means of fulfillment.

It Started in the Garden

Consider Moses' account concerning the original sin. Genesis 3 tells of the way in which Satan seduced Eve. It says he caused the woman to doubt God's Word (Genesis 3:1). Adam and Eve knew well that the Lord had commanded them to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16-17 and 3:2-3). They also knew that the consequences of disobedience were severe (Genesis 2:17). However, they were duped by Satan because of Satan's appeal to their desires.

Scripture says Satan deceived the woman by saying, "God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Notice what the Devil did — he incited the woman to sin by provoking a desire within her heart. It was her lust to "be like God" that first prompted the woman to sin. Afterward, more desires were awakened — "The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom" (Genesis 3:6). The end result of forbidden desire was sin. Once she was enraptured with lust for power ("be like God") and pleasure ("good for food"), the woman transgressed God's command. Scripture says, "So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Genesis 3:6).

The fall of humanity stands as a showcase of the power and peril of misplaced desires. Sin starts with inappropriate lusts. The New Testament confirms this reality. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Satan used his same old strategy. He appealed to Jesus' natural desires (Matthew 4:3-4). James, the half brother of Jesus, would later remark on the way in which desire is the channel through which believers are enticed to sin. He said, "Each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death" (James 1:14-15).

Believers should be wise concerning the ways of the enemy. Satan's tactic is to trick us into fulfilling natural, God-given desires through shallow, sinful, and second-rate means of fulfillment. We all have certain desires that aren't bad by themselves; however, they can solicit sin if we don't fulfill them in God-honoring ways. Spirit-directed living is the means of curbing and controlling our desires rightly.

The Sin of Solomon

Solomon understood these realities. He attempted to fulfill natural desires for sex and security by marrying many wives (1 Kings 11:4-6). Later in life, he would regret his actions and he would advise his son concerning the snares of sin. In doing so, he would appeal to his past experiences, encouraging his son to find fulfillment in God's ordained means of fulfillment.

Instead of making unholy alliances with foreign nations, the youngster was encouraged to trust in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5-6). Faith was the means of satiating a desire for security, not a marriage to a pagan woman. Instead of marrying many

women, the youngster was to take delight in the wife of his youth (Proverbs 5:18). A blissful marriage covenant committed to God's design for intimacy was the correct means for satiating desires for physical intimacy, not a harem of concubines and foreign wives.

A Practical and Spiritual Battle

All of the aforementioned realities provide us with great insight for producing spiritual fruit. If our lives are to be adorned with the produce of the Spirit, we must learn to "walk by the Spirit." Such a walk involves a battle over our desires. Fruitful Christians know how to direct their desires toward the Lord. When the heart is fully set on Christ, the mind and the will are transformed. Such transformation involves an inner-work, but it also results in an outer-display.

To really grasp what it means to "walk by the Spirit," I believe Christians need to become familiar with two concepts. Namely, it is important for believers to see that there is both a practical and spiritual side to such a lifestyle. Too many see the Spirit life as a vague, mystical type of thing that is devoid of any real action. They fail to grasp the fact that there is real, objective meat in Paul's words in Galatians 5:16. The call to "walk by the Spirit" was not a call to mystically stoic spirituality. Instead it was a call to practically and spiritually live one's life underneath the Spirit's control.

Practical Side

To walk in the Spirit, we must first see that there is a practical side to such a walk. Such is seen in Paul's words in Galatians 5:16 in his mention of "the desire of the flesh." Though the word translated "flesh" can refer to many things within the New Testament, the usage of the word in Galatians 5:16 referred to that part of our mere humanity that often stands in opposition to the work of God in our lives. According to Paul, an integral part of the battle to produce spiritual fruit centers on "the desire" that emanates from this flesh.

We looked at the meaning of the word "desire" earlier in this chapter, remarking on the way in which it could refer to either positive or negative desires. For now, it is important to note that the word was similarly used by John in 1 John 2:16. In that passage we read, "For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world." According to John, there are three main desires that constantly tug at the human heart — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride.

Interestingly, one can see all three of these desires at play in Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7). They were also present in Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). In addition, Solomon's moral failure was marked by unfaithfulness in regard to the same three desires (1 Kings 10:26-11:3). From studying Scripture, it is clear that Satan has used the same three desires to ensnare people for aeons.

If we want to be spiritually strong, producing the spiritual fruit God desires, we must be wise concerning these desires. It is important to realize that there are certain desires that come from the flesh that are not evil and sinful in and of themselves. Whether or not a desire is sinful is based on how we fulfill that desire. When John spoke of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, he spoke of

desires that can be good and healthy when fulfilled through the right means. Let's examine each of those desires in a little bit more detail to understand what I mean by this.

The Desire of the Flesh

There are certain cravings that emanate from our human bodies that are perfectly natural and healthy. Most have normal bodily cravings for things like rest, food, and even sexual pleasure. In fact, it can be argued that God actually gave these desires to us. Consequently, it is pleasing to Him when we fulfill these desires through His God-given ordained means. Didn't Solomon tell his son, "Let your fountain be blessed, and take pleasure in the wife of your youth" (Proverbs 5:18)? Sabbath rest, eating nutritious foods, and physical intimacy within the context of a marriage covenant are God's means of us satiating God-given desires of the flesh. Unfortunately, many look to the wrong means of fulfillment. As a result, they end up fulfilling the desire of the flesh in ungodly ways and perverting God's plans for humankind.

The Desire of the Eye

God has given each one a natural desire to obtain and possess material things. There is nothing wrong in His eyes with His people working to make money and obtain possessions. Solomon observed these realities (Proverbs 16:26). The desire for money and material things can become unhealthy or inordinate. Some fall prey to what Scripture calls the "love of money" that is the "root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Possessions and prosperity aren't bad by themselves, but they become bad when we make them more important than our Lord. It is for this reason that Jesus said, "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). A healthy desire to make money and possess necessary material provisions is good, but things are amiss when people develop a godless desire for money in which they try to find significant, security, and satisfaction in life through material things.

The Pride of Life

Most translations refer to John's third desire in 1 John 2:16 as something like "the pride of life." John's language was an obvious reference to the toxic love of self that often motivates people to live for their prestige and prominence over others. Being significant and being praised is what's most important to people who give in to such desire. Instead of living for God's glory, such people live primarily for their own glory.

It's worth noting that a desire concerning one's reputation isn't all bad. Scripture says, "A good name is to be chosen over great wealth; favor is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). It is advisable to have a healthy regard for what others think about you. What is inadvisable is the lifestyle in which one lives to be liked, praised, and placed on a pedestal.

Finding Fulfillment in the Right Means of Fulfillment

Do you see that not all "desire" is bad? In order to produce the fruit of the Spirit, we must reverse the Christian tendency to see certain God-given desires as being evil. A large part of the spiritual war against the lusts of fallen humanity is recognizing Satan's strategy. He constantly tempts humanity to fulfill our natural desires for sleep, sex,

food, material provisions, and a healthy reputation through ungodly means. If we want to “walk by the Spirit,” we must be wise concerning these things. When we find fulfillment for our natural fleshly desires in God’s ordained means of fulfillment, we will position ourselves to walk in the Spirit and produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Spiritual Side

Paul’s reference to “flesh” brings to mind the practical side of living by the Spirit. His mention of “walk” sheds light on the spiritual side. As mentioned earlier, the word rendered “walk” was often used figuratively in the New Testament to speak of how one conducted his or her life. According to Paul, believers must live their lives in step with the Spirit in order to avoid fulfilling the desires of the flesh in ungodly ways. The question for all is one of *how* — namely, how can we actually live our lives under the Spirit’s direction? From Scripture, let’s consider four ways we can pursue the influence of the Spirit over our lives.

Personal Worship

Worship is the ground zero of Spirit-directed living. The word rendered “desire” in Galatians 5:16 was used by Jesus in Luke 22:15 to speak of His zeal to worship with His closest followers. Jesus advocated secret times of prayer and personal worship for His disciples in Matthew 6:6-9. If Christians want to give the Spirit sway over their lives, they must regularly connect with the Spirit through both corporate and private times of worship.

Priorities

Desire is often the child of priority. If you desire the wrong things consistently, it is likely that you have made place for those things in your life at some point in the past. To steer your desires correctly, you must be diligent about your priorities. It is for good reason that Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Psalmist used the same word rendered “desire” in Galatians 5:16 to say, “Lord, you have heard the desire of the humble; you will strengthen their hearts. You will listen carefully” (Psalm 10:17). Through the help of God’s Spirit, the godly direct their desires toward the Lord. Such prioritizing is an integral part of Spirit-filled living that is often overlooked.

Passions

The spiritually wise understand that God is ultimately the one who can give a person the right type of desires. Using the same language from Galatians 5:16, the Psalmist (Psalm 37:10), Solomon (Proverbs 10:24, 20:3), and Paul (Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:17) all gave testimony of godly, God-given desires within the human soul. If believers want to “walk by the Spirit,” they should pray and ask God to cultivate godly passions in their souls.

Paths of Fulfillment

Finally, finding fulfillment in God’s paths of fulfillment is an integral part of Spirit-directed living. This idea has been mentioned numerous times already, so it doesn’t need much repeating. However, it is worth noting that the Psalmist used the word

rendered “desire” from Galatians 5:16 in Psalm 103:5 to say, “He satisfies you with good things; your youth is renewed like the eagle.” God is not a curmudgeon who detests human desire. He simply desires for His people to fulfill their desires according to His designs. Learning this reality is key to living a life in which the Spirit is given way to produce its fruit.

Decoding the Mystery

Perhaps you have struggled like I once struggled. Maybe the act of walking in the Spirit has seemed like a mystery. When one realizes that there are both practical and spiritual steps one can take to experience the Spirit’s leadership, things become much clearer. Sure, there will always be a level of mystery associated with the ways things work. There is an unseen realm we cannot fully comprehend. However, if we learn to set our hearts on the Lord and find delight in Him, we will set ourselves up to walk in the Spirit so that we can both avoid the ways of the flesh and produce the fruit of the Spirit.