

GALATIANS—WEEK 5

TRUE FRUIT



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Galatians, Week 5 — True Fruit
The Cover Picture is Peter and Paul by El Greco (1541–1614)
It depicts the confrontation described in Galatians 2:11.

In this final section, Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. While the works of the flesh are many, the fruit of the Spirit is one package. Part of that package is losing the competitive attitude that pervades our nature (and modern society).

Do not get sucked into “I’ve Arrived Syndrome”.

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1 Galatians 5:16–21 (ESV)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

This passage starts out by describing the battle between the Spirit and the flesh that goes on inside of each of us. *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other.* This brings to mind the classic image of a tiny angel and a tiny devil sitting on our shoulders trying to talk us into being good or being bad.

But then what do we make of Paul’s command to *walk by the Spirit*? How do we do that? Note: the word “not” is emphatic in the Greek — *walk by the Spirit, and you will [definitely] not gratify the desires of the flesh.* Okay great, but how? Should I just flick the little devil off my shoulder?

Well, Paul will later write a similar, more detailed instruction to the Ephesians.

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ... put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. — Ephesians 4:17, 22–24 (ESV)

So, “*walk by the spirit*” doesn’t mean some hyper-spiritual way of living. Rather it’s just a colloquial way of encouraging the Galatians to walk the walk like the Spirit-led Christians that they are.

Today’s passage goes on to give a chilling list of seventeen sins of the flesh. Paul ends the list with “*and things like these.*” So it’s not a precise list, just some examples. Paul then adds that these sins are a fair description of the unsaved.

And so they are.

The list of *works of the flesh* seems inordinately long, and the ending even says that it’s not a complete list. What’s the point in Paul writing it this way?

Note the wide range of sins mentioned. It includes super creepy sins like *sorcery* and *orgies*. They’re there to get our attention and horrify us.

But it also includes sins like *impurity, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, and dissensions*. We’re sure to see ourselves somewhere in there, especially given the tag line, “*and things like these.*”

Paul’s point is that this is serious. And it isn’t about somebody else; it’s about me.

2 Galatians 5:22–26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Unlike the list of works of the flesh, this list is specific. Paul doesn't say, "and things like these." Plus, the Greek word for fruit (καρπός, kar-pos) is singular. These are the work of the Spirit, not the works.

So, we get a profound conclusion—while we all have different sins, the fruit of the Spirit is a package. We should have all these things. The list in detail is:

Love (ἀγάπη, a-ga-pay) — love, charity, devotion to someone's wellbeing [note that it's listed first];

Joy (χαρά, char-a) — joy [second only to love in prominence];

Peace (εἰρήνη, ei-ray-nay) — 1) peace, harmony, 2) welfare, health [presumably definition 1 here];

Longsuffering (μακροθυμία, mak-ro-thu-mia) — 1) patience, steadfastness, endurance, 2) forbearance, patience [the BAGD lexicon says it's definition 2 in this passage];

Kindness (χρηστότης, chray-sto-tase) — goodness, uprightness, generosity;

Goodness (ἀγαθωσύνη, ah-gah-thoh-soo-nay) — 1) goodness, uprightness, 2) goodness, uprightness, generosity [the multiple repetitions are not typos; this is straight out of BDAG];

Faithfulness (πίστις, pis-tis) — 1) that which causes trust and faith, a) faithfulness, reliability, b) promise, oath, troth, c) proof, pledge, 2) trust, confidence, faith (in the active sense);

Gentleness (πραΰτης, prau-tase) — gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness;

Self-control (ἐγκράτεια, en-kra-tay-ah) — self-control.

Weakness in any of these must be addressed. However, it's important to understand that if one of these is weak or lacking, the answer is not greater discipline and self-control. It's walking by the Spirit.

These things come from God, not by effort.

The challenge here is to figure out how all these fit together into one package called the fruit of the Spirit. These are not gifts; different people have different gifts. These are what the Holy Spirit gives to us all.

All Christians should study this list and develop their own interpretation of what these gifts mean collectively and how they form an integrated package. They do seem to have a common feel.

For me, it's something like "contentment in Christ".

But everyone should find his or her own sense of this.

3 Galatians 5:25–6:3

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

“When angry count to ten before you speak. If very angry, count to one hundred.” — Thomas Jefferson

There needs to be a parallel passage for Christians—something like, “When you encounter someone’s sin, meditate on ten of your own before you speak. If the sin is very offensive, meditate on one hundred.”

Practicing Christianity means practicing grace. The problem with this is that our sinful nature is essentially competitive, as is our society. *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another.*

This is not new. The Roman colosseum was a place where everyone could look down on gladiators, often wishing for their death. How on earth could something that mean and nasty become popular?

But look at all the modern TV shows that tap into the same emotions. Remember the Jerry Springer Show? How about Cops? “What ya’ gonna do? What ya’ gonna do? What ya’ gonna do when they come for you?” We love watching people fail.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/schadenfreude>

And don’t make the excuse that we love seeing justice served. “America’s Most Wanted” was about justice. These shows were about entertainment.

So, Paul’s command here is important. *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

Wait. *Tempted?* *Tempted* to what? How does this have anything to do with temptation?

It’s about the temptation to love watching people fail. Instead, Paul says, be a team. *Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* Our mission is a team mission; focusing on selfish objectives wrecks everything. It’s like what Ben Franklin said during the American Revolution, “*We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.*”

And, in addition to being counter-productive, not lifting up a fallen brother reflects a false self-image. *For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

Never forget who you are and what Jesus rescued you from.

This is easy to say (and write about) but hard to do. Spend some time thinking about on who you know that has been *overtaken in any trespass*. What can you do to *restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness*?

4 Galatians 6:4–10

But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

This seems to start out contradicting the previous passage. Verse 6:2 says, “Bear one another’s burdens.” Verse 6:5 says, “For each one shall bear his own load.” The Greek words for burden and load are different—a load is much lighter than a burden—but that’s not really the point.

The point is about comparing ourselves to others. Whether sharing a great burden with a team, or working alone on a small load, Christians should be focusing on the task at hand, not wasting time thinking, “What a good boy am I.” In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis gives this as the definition of humility:

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble" nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. ... He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.

Lewis gives a beautiful example of this in letter Number 14 of *The Screwtape Letters*. (Warning for anyone not familiar with them: they’re written from a demon’s point of view; “The Enemy” is God.)

The Enemy wants to bring the man to a state of mind in which he could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) or otherwise glad at having done it than he would be if it had been done by another.

Tim Keller summarizes this as, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself: it is thinking of yourself less.”

The last paragraph in today’s reading may feel disconnected, but it’s not. If you have time, read the chapter in *Mere Christianity* titled “The Great Sin”—it’s only six pages—then reread today’s passage.

See how it all fits?

If you don’t have a copy of *Mere Christianity*, I strongly recommend buying one and taking the time to read the whole thing. Even better, get one of the boxed sets. They include *Screwtape* and other classics.

Mere Christianity is available, for free, in pdf form here.

<http://www.drjeffdaniels.com/home/free-ebook-mere-christianity-by-cs-lewis>

5 Galatians 6:11–18

See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Paul begins this concluding section with a curious note. Though half-blind and not accustomed to writing, Paul has taken the pen from his amanuensis (possibly Tertius, see Romans 16:22) and written in his own hand. The clumsy script that results adds yet another personal touch to what is already a gem of a personal letter. It's a pity that the original is long gone, since no copy can do this justice.

Then Paul makes two final points about those who *would compel you to be circumcised*. First off, they're doing it to show off— *that they may boast in your flesh*. They even think that by this *they may not suffer persecution*. Hold on there a moment. Persecution? Why would they be persecuted?

Experts. The intelligentsia of the day, particularly the Jewish ones, have been studying circumcision all their lives. Regardless of their view on whether Jesus is the messiah, they're not about to let go of the body of knowledge that makes them experts. The idea that circumcision isn't needed any more is anathema to them.

"It's difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on not understanding it." — Upton Sinclair

Paul's other final point is that the circumcisers aren't keeping the law themselves. I suspect this is related to a psychological phenomenon I observed on a business trip to Israel. It seemed to me that observance of the ceremonial law there was rather lax. An Israeli explained that since they were in Israel, they didn't need to worry about it as much. They have arrived.

This might be the case with circumcision. Since, back then, circumcision was the sign of the covenant, being circumcised meant you'd arrived.

You don't need to stress over the law.

Do not think that we're immune to the "I've Arrived Syndrome." Christians do this too.

John Nunnikhoven describes this as, "Say the sinners' prayer and I'll meet you at the pearly gates."

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Is the tiny angel winning?
2. How are these things all one fruit?
3. Have you ever seen this done right?
4. How do we defeat pride without become proud of defeating it?
5. Have you seen the I've Arrived Syndrome?

Items for prayer: