**THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**

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

**Galatians 5:22,23 (NIV)**

By describing this list as ‘fruit of the Spirit,’ Paul once more sets the Spirit in sharp contrast to the flesh. The preceding list are ‘works’ (literal); this list is fruit. But fruit does not mean passivity on the part of the believer. Recognising that ‘works’ puts emphasis on human endeavour, while ‘fruit’ puts emphasis on divine empowerment, the emphasis in this argument is on the Spirit’s effective replacement of Torah. Not only do people who walk by the Spirit not walk in the ways of the flesh just described, but the Spirit effectively produces in them the very character of God Himself. The activities and attitudes of those who are ‘led by the Spirit’ are the ‘product’ of life in the Spirit. In this context, when the Galatians use their freedom to serve one another through love, they are empowered to do so by the Spirit who produces this ‘fruit’ in them. But they themselves must walk, live, conform to the Spirit.

Much is made of the singular ‘fruit’ in contrast to the plural ‘works’ (‘acts’) and probably more than Paul himself had in mind. Elsewhere in his writings we don’t find the ‘works’ as many and individual but the fruit as one cluster with several kinds of fruit on it. ‘Fruit’ in Greek functions as a collective noun. In both Greek and English one would refer to the ‘fruit’ in the bowl, whether the fruit was of one kind or many. We don’t usually talk about the ‘fruits’ in the bowl.

As with the preceding list, this one is representative and certainly not exhaustive. ‘Love’ appears first which is usual in Paul (c.f. 5:14). The rest of the list appears to be more random. It is a list of virtues which covers a broad range of Christian life reflecting the all-encompassing nature of the activity of the Spirit in Paul’s understanding.

The strong majority of these items have to do with the corporate life of the community and not with the internal life of the individual believer. Individual believers must love, work toward peace, express forbearance, kindness and goodness and be characterised by gentleness and self-control. But lying behind much of this is the situation of the Galatian church, particularly in the light of 5:15 and 26.

(1) love

Paul has already given ‘love’ pride of place in his argument (5:6,13,14). The reason for this is that in Paul’s thinking, this word captures the essence of the character of God that is seen in His relationship with His people. In the Trinitarian benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 where the primary characteristics of the divine Persons are expressed, Paul prays for the Corinthians to know ‘*the love of God*.’ God’s love for His people is what has been poured out into their hearts by the Spirit (Romans 5:5). For Paul this love has been expressed most powerfully in God’s sending His Son, and in the Son’s death on the cross (Romans 5:6-8). God’s love is full of *forbearance* and *kindness* toward His people and finally expresses itself in the self-sacrificial death of Christ on behalf of His enemies.

In this present letter Paul has described the indwelling Christ as the one ‘*who loved* (us) *and gave himself for* (us)’ (2:20). This is almost certainly what he means by the law of Christ in 6:2. Such love is the direct result of being loved by the God whose love has been lavished on us in His Son, who likewise loved us and gave himself for us, and by whose indwelling presence we now live. For Paul love is the result of a personal encounter with the living God, who above everything else loves His people.

Love is self-sacrificial giving of oneself for others. Love heads this list over against the ‘works of the flesh’ because it stands at the very opposite of the self-centredness of most of the items in that list. Love brings to an end ‘hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy’ (5:20,21a). This can only be lived out in the context of other people, especially other believers. This is Paul’s solution to ‘indulging the sinful nature’ (5:13) and ‘biting and devouring one another’ (5:16).

(2) Joy

Paul is probably not thinking so much of the personal, individual experience of joy (although it can’t be excluded altogether) but of the joy that characterises life together in Christ. Life in Christ, and therefore life by the Spirit, is a life of joy. The Christian community should be marked by joy (1 Thessalonians 5:16). There are two other texts where joy, peace and the Holy Spirit stand together (Romans 14:17; 15:13). The context of the section where both are found (Romans 14:1 – 15:13) is an appeal for Jewish and Gentile believers to ‘accept one another’ (15:17) rather than to judge or look down on each other (14:1-4). A righteousness that includes joy and peace in the Holy Spirit will have little room for strife (Galatians 5:15) or disdain of others (5:26 – 6:5).

For Paul, the presence or absence of joy is unrelated to circumstances. It relates in its entirety to what God has done for us in Christ through the Spirit. We are to ‘rejoice’ but more particularly we are to ‘*rejoice in the Lord always’* (Philippians 4:4). A community that knows what it is to ‘*rejoice in the Lord always’* is not a community easily given over to ‘biting and devouring one another.’

For us the future has already made its appearance in the present. God’s people have already tasted of the life to come. Already they have full pardon, full forgiveness. By the Spirit they cry out ‘Abba’ to the God who has loved them and given His Son for them. This is cause for joy, as we ‘*eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope’* (Galatians 5:5). Joy begins at the individual level but must characterise the believing community, to whom God has given His Spirit.

(3) peace

As with love, peace for Paul is especially associated with God and His relationship with His people, and as with love and joy, peace is especially a community matter.

God Himself is often described as the God of peace, the God who dwells in total *shalom* (wholeness, well-being) and who gives this *shalom* to His people in their life together. We sometimes miss that Paul seeks peace where strife or unrest is close at hand. The final response to unruly charismata in the believing community is the ‘*God of peace’* (1 Corinthians 14:33). To a community where the unruly-idle live off others, Paul prays that the God of peace will give them peace at all times (2 Thessalonians 3:16). In a context where believers are warned that those who cause divisions and put obstacles in the way, Paul assures them that the God of peace will bruise Satan under their feet shortly (Romans 16:20).

Most of the times Paul mentions peace in his letters occur in a community or relational setting. Christ is ‘our peace’ who has made Jew and Gentile one people, one body (Ephesians 2:14-17) who are therefore urged to *‘keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’* (4:3). Similarly, in the Romans 14:1 – 15:13 argument, Jew and Gentile together are urged to ‘*make every effort to do what leads to peace’* (14:19). In the strong exhortation of Colossians 3:12 – 4:6, the believers urged to ‘*let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace’* (TNIV). From the present Galatian context (described in 5:13) the need for peace is equally clear.

(4) patience

This word carries the sense of forbearance or even longsuffering (KJV). A drawback with the term ‘patience’ is that we naturally think of patience as something very individualistic and a quality that needn’t relate to people. In Paul’s writing, patience is always used in contexts involving forbearance towards others. Paul describes God’s attitude towards human arrogance as one of forbearance and kindness (Romans 2:4). These are the first two words that describe love in 1 Corinthians 13:4 and occur together again in Colossians 3:12 when one ‘puts on Christ.’

(5) kindness

This word and the next, ‘goodness,’ are both exclusively Pauline words in the New Testament. Because both words generally occur in lists, they are not easy to define. The clues come from their associations with other words. ‘*Kindness’* is used to describe God’s character or activity toward people. In 1 Corinthians 13:4 it expresses the active side of God’s love, while ‘forbearance’ expresses the passive side. ‘*Kindness’* is God’s active goodness, lavished on those He loves. His kindness is found in the thousands of acts of mercy toward people like us who deserve God’s wrath (Ephesians 2:7).

Where ‘kindness’ occurs in conjunction with forbearance, it expresses God’s active grace toward others and so stands in marked contrast to the self-centred ‘works of the flesh’ with their hostile-to-others way of life. The Spirit not only empowers one to endure the hostility or unkindness of others; He also enables one to show kindness to the one who has not shown kindness to us, and to actively pursue their good. If ‘*patience’* (longsuffering) means not to respond back to someone’s ill-will, ‘*kindness’* looks for ways to help them.

(6) goodness

‘Goodness’ is very closely associated with ‘kindness.’ If there is a difference, ‘goodness’ is the more all-embracing quality. The adjective (good) from which the word ‘goodness’ is formed, is a primary word to describe God’s character in the Old Testament. Believers can be ‘*full of’* goodness (Romans 15:14). In practice it becomes ‘doing good.’ This is the quality of Christian grace, produced in the life of the believer by the Holy Spirit, that Paul picks up on at the end to bring conclusion to the present argument (6:9-10). Those who ‘sow to the Spirit’ are those who ‘*do good to all*.’

(7) faithfulness

This is Paul’s primary word for ‘faith,’ describing one’s basic stance toward God of utter trust in His trustworthiness. in the Septuagint it was the central Greek word available to translate the concept of God’s faithfulness. In Romans 3:3 Paul declares that the ‘unfaithfulness’ of God’s people does not call into question His ‘faithfulness.’ Here, ‘faithfulness’ is clearly a better understanding than ‘faith.’ In this Galatians 5 passage, the emphasis seems to be on one living out one’s trust in God over the long haul. True ‘faith’ always includes the element of ‘faithfulness,’ and so true faith expresses itself in love (Galatians 5:6)

(8) gentleness

In the earlier English versions of the New Testament this word was usually translated ‘meekness.’ For Paul it derives its Christian meaning from its relationship with Christ. In Matthew 11:25-30, this is one of the two words used to describe the character of Jesus, which He, as the only Son of the Father, revealed about the character of the Father to the ‘infants’ – over against the wise and understanding.

‘*Gentleness’* carries the sense both of personal humility (a proper estimation of oneself in God’s sight) and a considerateness toward others. This is the fruit Paul will appeal to in 6:1 when he urges those who walk by the Spirit to restore a brother or sister overtaken in a fault. One needs to do so with the Spirit’s gentleness not only because the life of the other person is at stake, but also because one keeps in mind one’s own susceptibility to temptation. In this Galatians 5 list it contrasts the ‘work of the flesh’ called ‘selfish ambition. It is the fruit of the Spirit at work in those who do not think too highly of themselves (6:3) and who, in humility consider others better than themselves (Philippians 2:3). They look after others needs before their own.

(9) self-control

This is the only word in Paul’s list that does not appear elsewhere in Scripture with reference to the character of God. The noun is only used here but the verb is used in 1 Corinthians 7:9 regarding sexual temptation and in 1 Corinthians 9:25 regarding the self-discipline of the athlete. It is the only virtue in the list clearly aimed at the individual believer. In contrast to the rest of the list which takes aim at those eight ‘works of the flesh’ that primarily relate to relational matters, this one takes aim at either – or both – the sexual indulgences that appear in the first three ‘works of the flesh’ and/or the excesses that conclude the list.

Self-control is not the same as abstinence (1 Corinthians 10:31-33; Romans 14:1023; Colossians 2:16-23). Because of this fruit of the Spirit, one is free to abstain from anything for the sake of others, but abstinence is not heralded as a virtue on its own.

‘*Against such things there is no law’* (5:23b).The main point of the argument of Galatians is that the work of Christ and the coming of the Spirit have eliminated Torah altogether from the agenda of God’s people. The Law exists because people are evil, not because they are good. It exists then, against sin and not against virtue. Paul’s thinking is: when these virtues are evident in one’s life because of the presence of the Spirit, Torah is not relevant. There is no need for Torah to say ‘you shall not kill’ to people who by the Spirit are loving one another. This does not mean that such a reminder is irrelevant. But the need for Torah to ‘hem in human conduct because of transgression’ (3:19,22) has come to an end with the coming of the Spirit, God’s own way of fulfilling the promised new covenant. This is Torah being written on the heart so that God’s people will obey Him (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27). The elimination of Torah does not mean the end of righteousness. To the contrary, the Spirit produces the real thing, the righteousness of God Himself, as His children reflect His likeness in their lives together and in the world.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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