

CULTIVATE THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT; ERADICATE THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH

In the October 2013 lesson, “God Requires Holiness,” we explored God’s requirement of “holy and righteous living.” To be “holy” is to be sanctified and separated unto God for His use. The Bible tells us to be holy because God, our Father, is holy. Leviticus 11:44, 45, I Peter 1:16. This month, we will explore what holy living looks like.

In the fifth chapter of Galatians, Apostle Paul explains that the pathway to holy and righteous living begins with walking in the Spirit. Galatians 5:16-26 says:

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

In this passage of scripture, Paul describes the battle that each Christian must face; we desire to live in accordance with the Holy Spirit, yet our human and fleshy nature also wants to sin. Paul then lists the sinful actions and desires that we must eradicate (the lusts of the flesh) and the characteristics that we must cultivate (the fruits of the Spirit). As we walk with the Lord, the fruits of the Spirit

should become more and more abundant in our way of living while the lusts of the flesh become less and less prevalent in our life. Every day we must choose to walk in the Spirit and live for Jesus.

Walking in the Spirit

When Paul speaks of the Spirit, the flesh, and their battle against each other, he is not describing a literal battle against the human body. He is describing the process of allowing the Holy Spirit, which lives within us, to control our mind and actions (walking in the Spirit) versus the process of allowing our fleshy, sinful desires to control our mind and actions (walking in the flesh). The Holy Spirit desires to lead us into holy and righteous living through obedience to the Word of God. The flesh wants each and every sinful desire to be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit and the flesh are contrary one to the other, and it takes vigilance, prayer, and complete submission to the Holy Spirit to win. Pure and simple.

In order to win this battle, we must fully submit ourselves, our mind, and our desires to the Holy Spirit. Paul explained in verse 18, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” If we allow the Holy Spirit to have free reign in our life and to lead us, then we will desire to obey and please God more than we desire to please our flesh. Whether to walk by the Spirit or to fulfill the desires of the flesh is a choice we must make because we cannot do both. We need to be attuned to the Holy Spirit because it will prompt us to do the right things. When we heed the Spirit’s promptings, we will make the right choice and choose Jesus over pleasing our flesh.

Eradicate the Lusts of the Flesh

Paul listed some of the lusts of the flesh that we must overcome. This is not a complete list of every sin imaginable, but rather is a representative sampling of sinful desires and characteristics that should not be a part of our life:

- Sexual Immorality
- Impurity and Debauchery
- Idolatry
- Witchcraft
- Hatred
- Discord
- Jealousy
- Fits of Rage

- Selfish Ambition
- Dissensions
- Factions
- Envy
- Drunkenness
- Orgies

In his Wiersbe Bible Commentary, Dr. Warren Wiersbe notes that these sinful acts fall into three broad categories: sensual sins, superstitious sins, and social sins. The sensual sins consist of drunkenness, sexual immorality and impurity, adultery, fornication, orgies, pornography, and homosexuality (Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9). All of these acts will defile a person and prevent them from growing and flourishing in Christ. We must strive to keep our body and our mind clean, Christ-centered, and unpolluted with the sensual sins.

The superstitious sins include idolatry and witchcraft. Idolatry occurs when we put anything ahead of Christ. Idols can be wealth, cars, jobs, material possessions, entertainment, partying, loved ones, or even ourselves. Anything that we put more time and energy into than we put into serving and obeying the Lord, is an idol. Engaging in witchcraft, astrology, sorcery, and other acts of the occult is also sinful. But, there is another layer to the concept of witchcraft. The word “witchcraft” originated from the Greek word “pharmakeia,” which means “the use of drugs and potions.” The word “pharmacy” is derived from “pharmakeia.” Today, drug addiction is at an all-time high. Addiction to prescription drugs, street drugs, marijuana, and alcohol are pervasive.

The social sins include hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy. How we interact with other people is of critical importance. The Bible tells us to love others as much as we love ourselves. Mark 12:31. That means we should avoid harboring anger and bitterness toward others, gossiping, being jealous of others’ success, being self-centered and arrogant, and behaving in a manner that is rude and hurtful to others. These things are not a part of our Christian walk.

Those who are walking according to the flesh and fulfilling its desires will routinely exhibit these characteristics. Paul explained that people who practice these sins as a matter of habit and lifestyle will not inherit the kingdom of God. However,

through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can eradicate these sinful deeds. That does not mean that the desire to sin will disappear, but we have to power to overcome sin. The Bible tells us to “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” Romans 13:14. It is a choice, and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to choose Jesus.

Holy living is a process, and it is not something that will happen overnight. We will slip up and make mistakes. We will never get to a point where we are completely sinless. That is why Christ died for us, so that our sins can be forgiven. Over time, as we walk with the Lord, we will become more sanctified. As we become more sanctified, the fruits of the Spirit will become more and more plentiful in our life and we will become increasingly able to resist giving in to our fleshy desires.

Cultivate the Fruits of the Spirit

Paul listed the fruits of the Spirit that we must actively cultivate in our life. People should see these traits in us as Christians. The fruits of the Spirit are:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Forbearance
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

Love is the most important fruit, which is why it is listed first. The other fruits of the Spirit are manifestations of love. When we love God, we also experience joy and peace. We obey the Word of God because we love Him, and as we keep His commandments, we abide in His love and experience it in a deeper way. This brings joy and peace into our heart and enables us to keep going even when bad things happen.

The next three fruits, forbearance, kindness, and goodness, describe how we ought to interact with others. We should practice forbearance, kindness, and goodness toward others. This means not seeking revenge when wronged or

holding ill will toward others. Rather, we must show kindness and goodness even to the most obnoxious, offensive people. It is easy to show kindness to our loved ones, but the real test is showing kindness and goodness to our enemies. The Holy Spirit will help us to do this.

The remaining fruits, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, describe how we ought to govern ourselves. We should be faithful and dependable in all things, especially when it comes to the witnessing for Christ and serving others. We should also be gentle and not abuse authority, show off, or throw our weight around. Lastly, we should have self-control. These Fruits of the Spirit are the result of a life lived in submission to the Holy Spirit. If we live in accordance with the Word of God and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, then these characteristics will be manifest in our life.

In conclusion, Paul urges us to walk in the Spirit. This involves being faithful in prayer, personal Bible study, church attendance, and spending quality time with Christ. A Christ-centered life provides fertile ground for the fruits of the Spirit to flourish in our life. Choose to live for Christ. Choose Jesus today!

God bless!