

Reading: Galatians 5:16-25

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

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. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

New King James Version (NKJV)

Preaching notes:

Galatians 5:22 and 23, titled as "the Fruit of the Spirit" is an extremely popular and well-known section of scripture and you will, I'm sure, have heard many sermons concerning them. These nine characteristics are given to us by Paul as part of his desire to help the Galatian believers to stay firmly and closely to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice that he begins 5:22: "by contrast", this is the biggest clue to the fact that the true Christian life is one of transformation, it is contrasted against something else, another type of life that looks very much unchanged (what Paul calls "a life satisfying the desires of the flesh").

Whilst I'm sure we can all readily agree that those "works of the flesh" such as murder, sorcery, fornication and idolatry are completely contrary to a Christian life, Paul's purpose is to expose the fact that factionalism, dissensions and strife are equally (yes equally) in opposition and just as damaging to the Christian life. This is the true Gospel that Paul received in the Spirit from Jesus, "Paul an apostle sent not by human commission or human authority but through Jesus".

This is teaching that flows throughout the New Testament, straight from the mouth of God (in particular Jesus teaching from the Sermon on the Mount), the letters to the Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16, to the Romans 12, the letter to the Ephesians (unity in the body and the old life versus the new Ch.4) and the letter of 1 Peter. These are but a few examples and demonstrate that Bible literacy and study is essential for a fulfilling Christian life.

If we lose touch with the one, true Gospel of Jesus Christ or believe it's meaning can be reinterpreted for 21st Century society we have already lost touch with the teaching of Jesus and along with the Galatians we are following a different gospel, a different path and a different destination.

Notice that we use the singular to talk of "Fruit of the Spirit", there is a common misunderstanding that these are gifts that come to us in different ways, similar to the

Spiritual gifts that Paul talks of in 1 Corinthians 14. We do not receive these characteristics singularly, the idea that someone can be “walking in the Spirit” but be joyless or have a bad temper or be given to factionalism is not contemplated. It may sound harsh and binary to some, but it is completely true, you are either walking in Spirit or you are not. The Fruit of the Spirit are qualities of unity, they are all to be within everyone who is filled with the Spirit and faithfully following Jesus.

Lastly, verse 24, to crucify the flesh is a metaphorical yet purposeful action that we take as a “declaration of war” against the desires of the flesh, as I have previously quoted John Calvin “we must labour and fight and apply our utmost energy”. But be assured, we are not alone in this battle, God is with us through His Spirit and we walk, not alone, but with brothers and sisters who, also being tempted, undertake the same battle with us.

Amen