

THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE ALWAYS PRODUCES A GOOD LIFE

Galatians 5:19-26

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus said, "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit." We are made good by the gospel through the Spirit, not by keeping the law, not by our own moral effort. When we are made good by the gospel, through the Spirit, then we live good lives. Everyone can know whether or not they have been made good by the gospel. There is an absolutely infallible way to tell whether you are walking by the Spirit or fulfilling the desire of the flesh. All you need to do is compare your actual, lived life to these two lists and you will know. Everyone who is walking by the Spirit is exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit and everyone who is fulfilling the desire of the flesh is exhibiting the works of the flesh. The works of the flesh are what come natural to all humans. The fruit of the Spirit is the good life that is always produced in those who belong to Christ, who trust in his saving life, death and resurrection. In this study we will examine why it is that Paul can so confidently say that the gospel always produces this good life, which is described by the fruit of the Spirit.

STUDY

1. What do we learn about "the flesh" (sinful nature in NIV) from these passages in Galatians and Romans?

- Compare Galatians 2:20 with 5:24: *If you compare Galatians 5:24 with 2:20 you will see that my flesh is me without Christ. 5:24 says that all who belong to Christ crucified the flesh and 2:20 says I have been crucified with Christ. Therefore, prior to conversion "I" and "my flesh" are identical.*

- Galatians 3:2-5 ("human effort" in v. 3 is "flesh" in the original): *"Observing the law" and "attain your goal by the flesh" are synonymous phrases. They are the opposite of "believing what you heard" and "beginning by the Spirit" and "God gave you his Spirit". Here it would appear that "flesh" believes in itself, in its own power and ability to do what is necessary to gain heaven. The flesh does not want to believe in Christ or depend on the Spirit. The flesh aims to prove it is good enough for God by obeying the law.*
 - Galatians 5:13 & 24: *The flesh has passions and desires that are sinful. It wants to pursue pleasure in various kinds of sinful ways including, but not limited to, sexual immorality, greed, drunkenness, etc.*
 - Galatians 5:17: *The desire of the flesh is exactly the opposite of the desire of the Holy Spirit. The flesh wants what the HS hates and the HS wants what the flesh hates.*
 - Romans 7:17-25: *The flesh is "sin living in me". It is not good in any way. It keeps the "Spirit formed me" from doing what I want. "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my flesh, for I (the Spirit created me) have the desire to do what is right but I (the whole me who lives by the Spirit while being indwelt by my flesh) cannot carry it out." The flesh can only obey sin, it cannot overcome or deny sin. The flesh desires evil. I will not be free from the flesh until Christ returns or I die.*
2. John Piper defines "flesh" in this way: "Flesh is the old ego that is self-reliant and does not delight to yield to any authority or depend on any mercy. It craves the sensation of self-generated power and loves the praise of men. The flesh is the proud and unsubmitive root of depravity in every human heart, which exalts itself subtly through proud, self-reliant morality, or flaunts itself blatantly through self-assertive, authority-despising immorality." Do you agree or disagree with this definition? Why?
3. What is the relationship between v. 16b and vv. 19-21?

All who are “fulfilling the desire of the flesh”, which is all non-Christians all the time and all Christians sometimes, perform these works. The way you know that you are fulfilling the desire of the flesh is by witnessing these works in your life. To use the metaphor of bad trees bear bad fruit and a tree is recognized by its fruit, these works prove infallibly what is happening in an individual life.

4. Why does Paul finish his list by saying, “and things like these?” Compare this list to Col. 3:5-9 & Mark 7:20-23. What are other examples of “works of the flesh”?

This is not an exhaustive list of the works of the flesh. Paul is making this list to give us some idea of the kinds of things that human nature performs. Other things that could be added to the list from Mark and Colossians include: lust, evil desires, greed, anger, malice, slander, filthy language, lying, adultery, theft, murder, evil thoughts, lewdness, deceit, arrogance, folly.

5. Take one or two of these “works” and answer the question, based upon what it means to fulfill the desire of the flesh, why do I do this behavior, feel this emotion? How does this explanation differ from how you might answer this question if you did not know about Galatians 5:16-26?

Let's begin with sexual immorality. I'll take a very common kind of sexual immorality, looking at pornography on the Internet. Let's say a wife finds out her husband is looking at pornography and commands him to go get help. He goes to the counselor and after a few sessions of getting to know the man and his background the counselor explains to the man why it is that he is addicted to pornography. Every counselor has to answer the why question before he can answer the “how do I change” question. You need a diagnosis before you can prescribe a treatment. The counselor might say something like this. "You've never been comfortable around women, beginning with your mother. She was always critical of you and you felt like you could never please her. You felt distant from her and not accepted by her. In addition, your dad regularly called your masculinity into question by comparing you to your older brother who was a star athlete. In this comparison you always came up short. You were embarrassed a number of times by

women in your teens when you asked them out on dates and they rejected you. Even now, though you are married, you feel that your wife does not really respect you and her lack of sexual interest in you reinforces your self-perception that you are inadequate and unacceptable as a man. It is only in the world of sexual fantasy that you can feel good about yourself as a man. You escape the pain of your emasculated manhood by engaging in sexual fantasy." I'm not just making this up. This is the kind of stuff you will be told by most counselors. You can read this in much of the sexual addiction material.

If you went to Paul as your counselor and asked him, why am I addicted to pornography, what would he say? After he patiently listened as you told your story, then he would say something like this: “The reason you are addicted to pornography is because you believe that the pleasure that you receive in sexual fantasy is infinitely superior to the pleasure of having your sins forgiven, being loved by God and going to heaven. You believe that you have a right to sexual gratification and you are unwilling to love your wife with no strings attached. You are unjustly angry at your wife for not being as interested in sex as you are and you are paying her back for her unwillingness to satisfy you the way you want to be satisfied. You think that God's plan for sexual fulfillment, sexual relations with one woman in the context of a marriage in which you must die to yourself and serve her, is infinitely inferior to your plan for sexual fulfillment.” In short, you look at pornography because you are fulfilling the desire of your flesh, not living by the Spirit.

6. Paul says that anyone who lives like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. How can he say this after he has just spent the previous 5 ½ chapters saying that no one becomes a son of God and an heir based upon their keeping of the law?

We've already seen in vv. 5 & 17 that Paul does not believe there are any Christians who do not sin, who is perfect. The verb that Paul uses here is in the present tense and means to do or to practice. Therefore, this warning literally says that those who continually do these things as a way of life shall never inherit the kingdom of heaven. Christians can lapse into these things but Christians cannot live in these things. How can Paul make such an absolute statement? The reason he can do so is because we have been born of the Spirit, we have begun the Christian

life by the Spirit and according to vv. 16 & 18 all true Christians are living by the Spirit and therefore they are not fulfilling the desire of the flesh. Christians, while we still commit acts of sin, really are different from what we used to be. We are progressing, yet not perfect. We are declared not guilty but perfectly righteous because of what Christ has done, not because of what we do or don't do. But all who are justified are being sanctified. Christians hate performing the works of the flesh. They despise their anger and jealousy and drunkenness and sexual impurity. Christians are in a war against their sin and express it by confessing their sins and fighting to sin less. We are looking for ways to kill our sin, not to live in it. Christians aren't looking for explanations of their sin that place the blame on someone or something outside of themselves. When a Christian sins he says, "Look at what I did," not "Look at what you made me do" or "Look at what my bad circumstances made me do."

7. How does this list and this warning make you feel? When you do the things listed here or feel/think these things, how do you usually answer the question, "why am I like this?"

8. Why is "fruit" singular, while "works" is plural?

Paul uses the singular to show that Christian character is a whole. All of this fruit is being produced in all Christians who are living by the Spirit at all times. They are all interconnected and cannot exist without each other. As many have pointed out this is an excellent summary of the character of Christ himself. By making "works" plural Paul indicates that any one of these actions or emotions or belief systems proves that the flesh is at work.

9. What is the connection between v. 16a and vv. 22-23?

When you live/walk by the Spirit you don't fulfill the desire of the flesh but the Holy Spirit produces his fruit in and through you. This is a description of the kind of life a person will live when they are obeying the command, "live by the Spirit." Just as an apple tree bears apples, so a Christian who is walking by the Spirit bears the fruit of the Spirit. The life that is within is manifest in the life that is lived.

10. Based on Galatians 2:20, 3:2-5, 3:14, 4:6, 5:6 & 5:22-23, John Piper says that we obey the command, "walk by the Spirit" in this way, "...you allow the Spirit to control you by keeping your heart happy in God. Or to put it another way, you walk by the Spirit *when your heart is resting in the promises of God.* The Spirit reigns over the flesh in your life when you live by *faith* in the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you and now is working everything together for your good." Imagine that your teenage son, instead of doing what you ask him to do, takes your car and leaves the house and gets in an accident because he ran a stop sign while playing with the radio. He's OK but the car is totaled. Assuming that Piper is right, how will the fruit of the Spirit be born in your life instead of that work of the flesh called, "a fit of rage?"

You must trust that God is working all things together for your good and the good of your son. You must believe that God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ. You must remember God's patience, kindness and gentleness with you in Christ and his command for you to exhibit those same qualities towards your son. You must believe that being like Jesus and glorifying him is infinitely better than making your son pay for what he has done to you. You must believe that being loved by God is better than being respected by your son and getting your work done and not having to buy another car. In short, the way the Spirit produces his fruit is by his showing you the glory of Christ and his salvation so that you trust in Christ and all that he promises you and are satisfied with that. If having a respectful son or getting your work done or not having to buy a new car is what you must have to be happy, then you will exhibit the works of the flesh but if Christ is what you must have then the fruit of the Spirit will be manifest in your life.

11. Why does Paul end v. 23 with "and against such things (the fruit of the Spirit) there is no law"? What does he mean by this?

Paul concludes with this phrase because he is seeking to show the Galatians and us that the way to live the Christian life is not by keeping the law. This is not the "fruit of law-keeping" but the fruit of the Spirit. Here is another reason why they should not listen to the false teachers who are telling them that the way to be a Christian is to keep the OT law. Law keeping never produced this life and never will. This life is

produced by the Spirit as we trust in Christ. F.F. Bruce says in his commentary, quoting S.H. Hooke, "A vine does not produce grapes by Act of Parliament; they are the fruit of the vine's own life; so the conduct which conforms to the standard of the Kingdom is not produced by any demand, not even God's but it is the fruit of that divine nature which God gives as the result of what he has done in and by Christ." Bruce goes on to say, "...when these qualities are in view we are in a sphere with which the law has nothing to do. Law may prescribe certain forms of conduct and prohibit others, but love, joy, peace and the rest cannot be legally enforced." There is no law that can produce this life and no law can condemn those who are living like this.

12. In vv. 24-25a Paul states two things that are true for all Christians. What are they?

First he says that everyone who is trusting in Christ crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. This is simply another way of saying what he said in 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me..." Or as Paul says in Romans 6:3-4, "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father we too might live a new life." Our old nature, our flesh, which believes that life can be had apart from Christ by reliance upon our own wisdom and strength, has been dealt a fatal blow. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are able to not sin, which is not true of all who are outside of Christ. Not only did we die with Christ but the Spirit also gave us new life through our union with Christ as v. 25 says.

13. Because these two things are true, how are we supposed to live according to v. 25b?

The result is that we now live our lives by living in step with the Holy Spirit, by being led by the Spirit, by walking by the Spirit. This again means that we are living by faith in Christ and all that he promises to be for us. We do not live by working hard at keeping the law but merely by trusting in Christ as the one who kept the law for us and gained for us "sonship" and all the resources of heaven.

14. What does v. 26 mean and why is this the final result of "keeping in step with the Spirit" in contrast to living under the law? (Expanded translation: Let us not engage in empty boasting which always provokes fights and promotes envy, thus destroying relationships and communities.)

Have you ever heard a sports fan, after his team wins say something like this, "We played an awesome game. We're so great. We're the best team in the NFL. Nobody can beat us. We're number one baby." What's wrong with those statements? What's wrong is that "we" didn't do anything. The fan is full of "empty boasting" because he did nothing. The team did much but he did nothing. Therefore, he has no ground for pride. He has no ground for looking down on anybody else. Everyone who lives by the Spirit and thus bears the fruit of the Spirit has nothing to boast about. If you are keeping in step with the Spirit and thus not engaging in the works of the flesh, you have nothing to boast of. If you do boast of anything it is empty boasting. If you boast about your keeping of the law to be made right with God, your boasting is empty because you have never in your whole life kept God's law. Anytime humans boast about their own goodness or righteousness, their boasting is empty, vain, not true. What is always the result in our relationships when we start boasting about the things we have done? Again, if you think about sports fans you can see what happens. If you start boasting about all that you and the Packers have done together in the presence of a Bears fan they are going to feel provoked and envious. When a Bears fan feels provoked and envious what does he do? He begins to slander the Packers. He begins to wish harmful things upon Brett Favre. Since you are boasting about what you and your team have done, you take his slander personal. In other words, a fight ensues. Paul is going right back to v. 15. If you are living the Christian life on the basis of law keeping then you are engaging in empty boasting and when you do that you are provoking others and producing envy in others and bringing chaos into the church. So again, the only way to have a happy family or a happy church is to live by the Spirit and thus bear the fruit of the Spirit. When you live like this you will not engage in empty boasting and thus bring chaos into your family and church.

15. How have you seen "empty boasting" provoke fights and promote envy in your relationships?