

One of my earliest childhood memories, was when I was a little kid, and our whole family, for some reason had come into town (Goondiwindi). Mum & Dad & my brother & sister & I, were all walking down the main street of Goondiwindi (I can still picture it)...

We were on the South side of the street, heading West, and it was about where the old picture theatre used to be... And me, being an independent little maybe 4/5 year old, decided "I don't have to walk behind mum & Dad, and I don't have to walk beside them, holding onto their hand,, I'm going to go out in front". And I did...

But of course, Mum & Dad stopped for a moment, but I didn't know – I kept going, and they had to call me back...

But the clearest memory, and the most painful memory, was when we started walking again, I was alright for a little while, but then I slowed down, and Dad stepped on the back of my foot (he stepped on my heel)... It hurt; It tore my shoe off; And there I was, standing in the street, looking back at him, crying "Why'd you do that" (as if he'd done it to purposely hurt me), and he simply said, "If you want to walk out in front, you've gotta keep clear of my feet." I had to go and sit on a step of a shop (maybe CBA), and put my shoe back on... humiliated...

And while it hurt, that was a big lesson for me (that I never ever forgot), that to prevent pain, I had to keep in step with my father.

But that's the way we can sometimes be with God. We get all independent, and we want to go off in our own way – we want to set our own lead,,, and then when we get hurt, we look back at God, and blame Him, “Why'd you let that happen???”

Today, we're talking about 'keeping in step with the Spirit' ...

Last week we talked about how ²⁴ those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

“The flesh”, is that worldly propensity we have, to sin – it's that part of us, that wants to rebel against God, and put ourselves as No. 1.

Before we become Christians, we were led by the flesh. But when we repent of who we were, and we repent of our sin against God, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and turn ourselves over to Him, we're born again. We put to death, our old fleshly self.

And so, now that we belong to Christ Jesus [we] have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

And we were told (last week) that the works of the flesh are evident...

sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

To the Spiritual person, ‘works of the flesh’ are evident...
And we finished with a rather brutal verdict: **I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

It was a verdict that was spoken to Christians... , which is why Paul is saying to this church in Galatia, and he’s saying it to us today, ²⁵ **If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.**

You see, living by the Spirit, begins when we put to death the flesh – when we’re born again in Christ. But from then on, there’s going to be this continuous battle (between the flesh and the spirit) (we talked about that last week)...

So, what’s it mean, to “live by the Spirit”? You know, some people might want to highlight spiritual signs and wonders, and they might say that ‘Living by the Spirit’ is all about:

- Supernatural healings;
- Prophecy;
- speaking in a spiritual language;
- falling over in the Spirit;
- add your favourite sign or wonder here....

But do you know what Jesus said??? He said “

Matthew 16:(ESV) 4 An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign,.....

Alright, it's actually the flesh that's craving signs... But more importantly: When Jesus was telling us, how to distinguish between a Godly teacher & a false teacher/prophet... This is what He said:

Matthew 7:13-23 (ESV)

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognise them by their fruits.

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will

I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Now, that's rather sobering, isn't it... To:

- “**Live** by the Spirit”
- “**Be led** by the Spirit”
- “**Walk** in the “Spirit”

isn't about signs and wonders... In fact, **many** people (**many**) who called Jesus “Lord”, and claim to have:

- Prophesied (in His Name);
- cast out demons (in His Name);
- done mighty works (in His Name);

(and they believed that they did),,,, To them, Jesus will say:

'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Now please, don't get me wrong. I'm **not** saying that **all** who do spiritual signs and wonders are false teachers/prophets....

And we thank God for when He does do these amazing supernatural acts in His Name... But we should never equate “supernatural signs and wonders” as:

- “**Living** by the Spirit”
- “**Being led** by the Spirit”
- “**Walking** in the “Spirit”

Supernatural signs follow false prophets too. Jesus said:

Matthew 24: (ESV) 24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

So,

- “**Living** by the Spirit”
- “**Being led** by the Spirit”
- “**Walking** in the “Spirit”

is **not** about the demonstration of signs and wonders.... It’s about a life that’s transformed in Christ Jesus... It’s about a life that has not only put to **death** ‘the works of the flesh’, but a life that is **keeping in step** with the Spirit.

Now, I don’t keep statistics on this, but if I did, I’m pretty certain that the Bible verse that I quote most (in my sermons), is in this passage that we’re studying today... And the reason that I find myself quoting this verse over; and over; and over again, is because it gives us a picture of the wonderful, beautiful transformation that Holy Spirit works in our hearts...

This transformation is the antithesis of the old fleshly man/woman that we once were – it’s the opposite... We once were vile, despicable enemies of God,,,, and yet He loved us (not because He could see the good in us) – before we were saved, God knew that we were totally depraved – there was no good in us at all...

But He also knew, that in Christ, all of that sin is dealt with – all of it is taken away, and when He looks at us, our sin hasn’t just been cancelled – it’s been taken away – it’s been atoned for. Christ bore our sin on the cross, and He paid for the cost of our forgiveness. He redeemed us... And so when God looks upon the repentant sinner, the sin is gone, and He sees the righteousness of Christ.

He then fills us with His Holy Spirit... He writes His Law on our heart... Why does He do that??? I'll tell you why – It's so we can be **led** by the Spirit, and walk **with** the Spirit. And I'll tell you what that looks like.

The verse that I believe I have quoted more than any other verse, is Galatians 5:22-23

Alright, so just before it, we've heard what 'works of the flesh' look like, and he says **I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

And here it comes:

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

You see, spiritual signs and wonders, can be faked.

- illusion;
- suggestion;
- placebo affect;
- manipulations;
- Satan himself can mimic signs & wonders... For instance, the magicians of Pharaoh did it.

But what **cannot** be faked, is a life **totally** transformed to the likeness of Christ... Oh somebody might be able to fake one or 2 things: e.g. Might be able to show "Joy" & "kindness", but not very patient; not so gentle...

The first thing we need to understand, is “fruit” in “fruit of the Spirit”, is **singular**... We run into this problem because our English word “fruit”, is the same word, whether it’s singular or whether it’s plural.

Alright, so if I say to Robyn, “I’m going to the shop to buy some fruit”, she’s probably going to be very surprised if I return with 1 banana.

Are you with me??? In English, it’s the same word, whether it’s a single piece of fruit, or whether it’s many pieces of fruit – it’s still “fruit”, not “fruits”...

Not so, in the Greek. In the Greek, there **is** a plural word for “fruits”, but that’s not the word here. The word that’s used is καρπός (karpos), which is “fruit”(singular).

My mum loves to garden. And back on the farm, she had a large shade-cloth area, and under the shade-cloth was a large water tank, which helped to stabilise the temperature a fair bit. And so in Summer it was cooler; in Winter it was warmer...

Anyway, right beside the tank, she was able to grow a plant called a “Monstera Deliciosa”. Does anyone have one of these growing at home??? Anyway, rarely, and it’s a big event when it happened, this plant would grow a fruit (sort of segmented; almost look like a bread fruit/corn cob). And it often gets described as being “one fruit, many flavours” ... Some would think it tastes like:

- *pineapple;*

- *banana;*
- *mango;*
- *a bit like a fruit salad...*

One fruit, many flavours...

And this is (sorta) what the fruit of the Spirit is – it’s not “different fruits”, so that you have some fruits and not others... (It’s not like Spiritual Gifts)

If we all have the same Holy Spirit of the Son of God in our lives, the fruit of the Spirit of Christ (many flavours, one fruit) will develop in our lives.

And so, it’s not about me being full of joy and kindness, but lacking love and patience... If I am keeping in step with the Spirit, the one fruit (of all of these flavours) is the evidence that I’m walking in the Spirit...

Are you with me??? We’re talking about the Character of Christ here:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control;

If any of these are lacking, that’s a sure sign, that I’m not walking in the Spirit. Are you with me???

Walking in the Spirit isn’t about ‘signs and wonders’ – it’s about the transformational work of Christ in our hearts... Paul’s just told us, that it’s slavery to be tied to the Laws of God,,, but living by the Spirit, fulfills the Law of God,,, because against such things, there is no law.

love

Love should be our core business. Love for God. Love for one another. Jesus said:

Matthew 22:(ESV) 37 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

The Apostle Paul said, if we don't have love, we're nothing...

joy

Joy isn't about 'fleshly happiness' it's about 'Spiritual gladness'.

Your life might be like a sad country song:

- *the drought has killed the crops; and then*
- *the flood washed the stock away;*
- *the ute's broken down; and*
- *your best dog's run away...*

- *you ran over your wife's favourite cat; and*
- *your kids won't talk to you; and*
- *to top it all off, your footy team is at the bottom of the ladder*

But, our joy doesn't depend on 'fleshly happiness'. Your life may be like a sad country song, and yet your heart is filled with joy...

- It's a joy that our eyes are fixed on eternity – not today...
- It doesn't matter if I've got no money. God will provide what I need, and my wealth is in heaven...
- It's a joy that comes from knowing that we're loved by God; and
- it's a joy that focuses on the resurrection.
The fact that Christ is raised, means that disciples of Jesus will be raised too.

And there are many stories of disciples of Jesus, who were killed for being witnesses for Christ, and yet they were filled with Joy as they were brutally slain...

That's the sort of joy we have in Christ. If I come to church to try and receive a bit of joy, there's a bit of a problem there. Because when we come to church, this is a place for us to express the joy that we already have, just as we express it in the world...

peace

When we keep in step with the Spirit, we can be filled with trust (faith) in God... And so no matter what's going on, not only will we have joy, but we will have peace...

God's 'got this'...

patience

As the prayer goes, “Lord, give me patience, **and give it to me now!!!**”

The Greek word for “patience” is μακροθυμία, (makrothymia), meaning “big suffering” (long suffering)... It’s not about “I suppose I can wait an extra 5 minutes to get my coffee because ‘Stevie Jeans’ is busy this morning” – it’s not that sort of patience....

It’s “big suffering” “long suffering”... Probably the best way to describe it, is it’s the opposite to being “short tempered”ⁱ If there was such a word as “long tempered”, that’d be the one.

This sort of patience is about “restraint”, when ‘the flesh’ is urging us to “anger”... And so, when somebody does you wrong, and you just want to lash out, the spiritual answer, is patience. The Spirit restrains the fleshly urge to retaliate.

kindness

It’s the opposite of “nastiness”. It’s doing good, even to those who have wronged you.

God is kind. And genuine kindness is something that just about everyone will warm to. But it’s gotta be genuine, because, is there anything more off-putting than someone who’s trying to ‘appear’ kind, when in reality, they’re actually ‘a nasty piece of work’...

goodness

When somebody described Jesus “good”, He said: **Mark 10:(ESV)**
18 “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

“Goodness”, without a doubt, is a character trait of God...
And the only way that you and I can **be** good, is by the Spirit of God...

But the type of goodness, represented by the Greek word ἀγαθωσύνη, (agathōsynē), is a goodness, demonstrated by generosity. It’s an uprightness a person has, when they give to those in need...

faithfulness

The Greek word πίστις, (pistis) is a noun, but it can be used in 2 ways. It can be used to describe “faith”, as in: “I have faith in Jesus Christ”. Or it **can** mean the quality of “faithfulness”. Because God is faithful – because God can be relied upon, Disciples of Jesus should also be faithful/reliable... Your ‘word’ should be depended upon...

gentleness

Is to be gentle; mild; friendliness...

We might sometimes describe a person as being “a gentle giant”. It’s somebody who possess a great deal of strength, and they could cause a great deal of harm, but they’re gentle. They don’t use their strength to bully and get their own way...

That's the sort of gentleness we're talking about. It's not weakness – it's strength, controlled by the Spirit.

And the final one on the list: **self-control**

And the Greek word behind “**self-control**”, is more about “control of one's passions”, than what it is about the ‘control of anger’... It's self-control, when it comes to sensual desires... *Self-control is something I have to work hard at, because I want to eat more than I should...*

So, that's the list of the fruit of the Spirit, but once again, it's not a definitive list – it gives us a bit of a picture of the character of God, which is the fruit of the Spirit.

Now, as we go through that list, I realise something about myself::: “God has brought me a long way”, but He's still got a long way to go... And that's the thing with fruit. Fruit grows/develops.

Our oranges, are almost ready to pick. But our orange tree flowered, and started setting these tiny little oranges, while I think last season's crop were still on the tree. From about September/October, these oranges have been growing, and it's taken months, and they're still green...

So it is, with the Fruit of the Spirit. When we give our lives to Jesus, and crucify the fleshly nature, we will **immediately** notice the work of the Spirit, growing the very character of

Christ in us, but we will not be perfected until the day of His coming...

And I get so frustrated with myself, “God, please get rid of this fleshly Michael. I’m fed up with him. I want to see the character of Jesus in me.”

Do you feel that way??? Well, be encouraged:

God hasn’t given up on us, and let us not give up on Him.
The task for us, is:

- to live each day, keeping in step with the spirit.
- Renouncing the flesh;
- I’ve crucified the flesh, and I’m going to stick another nail in the flesh; and
- I’m going to commit to walking with Christ, keeping in step with the Spirit,

that this fruit (the very character of Jesus) would become the dominant feature in my life...

Let’s pray:

Lord, we want to thank You,
that You are perfect.

Full of:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control

Lord, we ask that You would fill us with Your Spirit,
and help us to keep in step with Your Spirit,

that the very character of Your Son,
would become our character.

And Lord, may we be a witness to you in this.
We know that when we are characterised by
the works of the flesh,
the world see us and gloat.
We give you a bad name.

Lord,
may we honour You,
as we keep in step with Your Holy Spirit.
And may our lives overflow with:
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control
to Your Glory,
Amen.

ⁱ Bruce, F.F., 1982. *The Epistle to the Galatians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.