

others, or is it a lack of self-control? Or over the years do we see love for others, joy in difficult circumstances, peace of mind, kindness toward others, goodness in the way we act toward others, faithfulness to God and to others, gentleness that is humility and self-control?

Those who follow Jesus walk in the Spirit? What does the evidence in your life reveal?



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Evidence of the Spirit

Galatians 5:16-26

TRINITY PULPIT



ruit comes in all shapes and sizes. Well, maybe not all, but quite a few. Some are spherical -- like oranges, blueberries and grapes. Others are oblong -- like mangoes and papayas. Still others are apple- or banana-shaped like... apples and bananas.

Some farmers, though, are challenging our assumptions about the shape of fruit.

Watermelons, for example, no longer need to be the rounded oblong shape with which we are most familiar. Go to the right market, and you may find square watermelons grown by botanical artists. At a restaurant, the cucumbers in your salad might appear heart-shaped rather than round, due to the produce shaping of another farmer.

While amazing, forming produce into basic shapes like squares and hearts is just the beginning.

One agricultural virtuoso has developed a process where pears -- having long been pear-shaped -- can now arrive at your farmer's market in the shape of little Buddhas. The arms and facial features are so well defined that the Buddha appears to be in a prayer-like, meditative state.

These fruits look like beautiful little sculptures or carvings, but no knives are used to create them. These pears are grown this way.

To grow square watermelons and Buddha-shaped pears, farmer's use specially designed molds they attach to the fruit when it first appears. As the young fruit matures, it grows into the mold, taking on the shape of the inside of the tool.

With or without the mold, producing fruit is no easy task. Because of our distance from the farm or orchard, many of us have lost our appreciation for just how difficult this process is. We simply go to the local grocery store and pick-up whatever fruit we like, at a reasonable price. It's all right there before us and we can receive it instantly.

Unfortunately, there's no market where we can acquire the fruit of the Spirit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Homiletics May/June "Jesus Fruit")

These changing forms of fruit might also cause us to wonder what type of fruit is this when we look at it. However, Paul wants us to know that the fruit that is produced in our lives is obvious. Either our lives are showing evidence of the Spirit or evidence of our sinful nature.

We have been exploring the work of the Holy Spirit the past few weeks. We have explored what it means to discern together with the Holy Spirit. Last week we considered what it meant to ask God for wisdom. Today we are considering what a life looks like that is not only controlled by the Holy Spirit, but shows evidence of the Holy Spirit.

Paul is reminding the Galatian church that they are free in Christ and there are many things that can rob the Christian of true freedom. There is the law itself and its regulations. The Jewish Law did not give freedom, but robbed the Christian of freedom. Legalism is not only in the form of the Jewish law, but also in a form reduced Christianity from a relationship with God through Jesus, to a list of do's and don'ts and that was a perversion of the gospel.

Another thief of freedom was antinomianism. That is a theological term from the Greek word lawless. The concept is that Christians in their freedom from legalism are not under obligation to be moral. It is a libertine approach to living. Paul has warned against both extremes as a way of living the Christian life. Both legalism and libertinism are both prisons and slave masters. One reduces faith to a list of moral imperatives and the other, in a very subtle way, leads us to being slaves to our own desires and passions. Either way we are not free.

Paul, in Chapter 5, now argues that there is another way we loose our freedom in Christ and that is to live by the nature of the flesh or the sinful nature. Paul tells us that we must choose if we are going to live by the Spirit or by

sinful nature.

First, we must recognize that life in the Spirit of God is different than what Paul calls the sinful nature or the natural person. Paul describes in detail the evidence of a person who is living by the Spirit and those who live according to their own natural desires.

Paul writes some interesting things about these two ways of living. First, he wants us to understand that they are in conflict with each other. The first word he uses is contrary. Sinful desires are contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit contrary to the sinful nature.

The term here sometimes is translated “against.” The meaning is deeper than contrary or against. It is the antithesis of the other. The Spirit filled life and the sinful life stand in opposition to one another. They also have a direct effect on each other. The term for contrary has the concept of “down or suppression.” Paul is telling us when we live by the sinful nature we suppress the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and when we live by the Spirit we suppress the actions of the sinful nature. In fact, notice Paul says in verse 17 these natures are in conflict one another so that you do not do what you want to do. Some interpret this to mean that the Holy Spirit must suppress what you really want to do. Phillips translates this that the Holy Spirit suppresses you so “That you cannot run wild doing as you please.” However, there is another way to look at this verse. Paul may actually be saying just the opposite. Since Paul is speaking to those of us who follow Jesus and want to please God, Paul is saying that it is sinful nature that we have died to, but still raises its ugly head in our lives and keeps us from doing what we want to do, namely please God. Paul suggests this frustration in his own life in Romans 7 with his discussion on struggling with sin.

Paul writes in Romans 7: 14-25

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work

within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

We have to recognize that we have two opposing natures. One is described as a sinful nature or our natural nature and the other is our new nature in Christ that is controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Paul tells us that there is evidence if we are living by the sinful nature or the Spirit controlled life. Paul reminds us that the evidence of a life lived as a slave to the sinful nature is obvious. Paul gives us a list of acts of sinful nature. Look at the list for a moment. We can place the list into three categories. The first is sinful acts against God the creator.

Sexual immorality- Sexual acts that are not within the good intent of God's creation and plan for man and woman are evidence of the sinful nature. Since sexuality is set forth in the creation story to engage in sexual immorality is to reject God's intent in creation. When we studied what the Bible says about sexuality we discovered that the first commandment from God was to for man and woman to go forth and multiply. At the heart of a Godly sexual ethic is the knowledge that sexuality is a good gift from God and when expressed as God intends which is in the relationship of a man and woman in marriage then we participate in what God has done, even in creation. When we transgress this expression then we sin against God's intent.

Impurity and Debauchery- the term means that which separates us from God and creates a conscience that just does not care what God thinks about our actions. There is a real spirit of rebellion in these words.

Idolatry- The worship of anything or anyone more than God. It is the creation of a god of our making or worshipping something of God's own making, instead of the creator.

Witchcraft is an interesting word, which is really pharmakeia where we get the word for pharmacy or drugs. Those who mixed drugs were seen as sorcerers or witches. Drug use was many times connected with occult and black magic. Pharmekia is really a neutral word. Thus the idea of course there is drug use that heals and saves and is a gift of God's creation. However, I think we can all agree that there is also drug use that destroys.

The next set of actions we can place into the category of sin against one another. When we mistreat each other we also express the sinful nature. Look at a few in this list. Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage that is anger that is out of control, selfish ambition and this implies others

are hurt in our ambition, dissensions, factions and envy. It is interesting to me that we find hatred and jealousy and selfish ambition in the same list of evidence of the sinful nature as idolatry and sexual immorality. Many times when we look at such lists of Paul there are some actions on the list that we say of course that is a sin. Then all of a sudden we find our sin in the list. How can that be we might ask? I believe that Paul's list are formulated as such not to make little of the sins we might all agree on, but to inform us that the actions we don't consider as sinful are just as destructive. Don't miss that Paul is telling us that when we cause factions, strife, dissention, in the body of Christ it is just as much of the sign of the sinful nature as is idolatry. When we look at others with envy, jealousy and are “flying off at the handle toward others” it is just as destructive as witchcraft. They all destroy.

The last list is one that is almost incomplete and Paul is making his point. The final list is licentious. The two he mentions is drunkenness and orgies. The abuse of alcohol is throughout the New Testament that leads to other sinful acts. Many times connected to drunkenness is orgies or revelry, out of control parties or carousing. The concept of course is “out of control” is just that out of control and that can lead to many terrible consequences. Paul then adds and the like.

Paul's comment “and the like” is an indication that he could have gone on and on. Paul is essentially making the point he began with. That is the acts of the sinful nature are obvious. When Paul says and the like he is saying essentially saying “do I have to spell this out for you further?”

As a parent you have had such a conversation with your child. They have done something that is hurtful to them or to others and you are having that talk. You have had this talk before. Finally, you simply say, “you know better than this.” It is an appeal to their better judgment. Paul reminds us that these two ways of living up against each other. As those who are in the Spirit we should no better. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious.

However, Paul writes the fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Notice that the acts of the sinful nature are just that “actions.” They are the natural actions of a life controlled by our natural and sinful nature. However, the evidence of the Spirit is referred to as fruit. The evidence of the Spirit is not something we can choose as much as what God will do in us when we choose God. When

we choose to walk in the Spirit, then God produces the evidence of the Spirit.

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? It is interesting that Paul puts it this way in this passage with four distinct verbs. We are to walk in the Spirit. We are to be led in the Spirit. We are to live by the Spirit. Finally we are to keep in step with the Spirit. Timothy George writes:

Each of these verbs suggests a relationship of dynamic interaction direction and purpose. It indicates an activity that is present and in progress and continually happening.

In the Greek, the idea of walking means to conduct one's daily life but also to walk after someone and in a certain direction. In all these ways we are to daily walk in the Spirit. It is something we do day-to-day. Day-to-day we seek to know God and thus open our lives to the production of the fruit of the Spirit and not the acts of the sinful nature.

In his book “The Forgotten God” Francis Chan suggest that we must stop asking “what is God's will for my life?” and start asking where is the Spirit leading me today?” It is the question of “walking and keeping in step with the Spirit” that leads us to the harder questions of life. It leads us to consider how to act and react with our spouse, children, parents,

friends and strangers.

Now here is the best part. To be open to life in the Spirit is to walk in freedom. We sometimes do not see it that way but Paul is telling us that freedom, real freedom is in the Spirit and not in the doing as we please in the sinful nature. In fact, it is choosing to be controlled by the Spirit that truly sets us free from that which would become our prison and destruction.

It is counter intuitive to how the world thinks. Yet, that is the way of Christ. Think about it for a moment. We find life by dying to self. We find new life through crucifying the old way of life. We find strength when we admit our weakness. We find freedom when we choose the discipline of the Holy Spirit.

So how do we know if the fruit of the Spirit is being produced in our lives? We look at the evidence. It was the old Dagnet Series that said “Just the facts Mam, just the facts.” Paul reminds us that acts of the sinful nature are obvious. In the same way, the production of the fruit of the Spirit can be experienced as well. What dominates our thinking and acting? Is it idolatry, conflict with

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