

Increasing in Holiness A Portrait of the Spirit-led life

Intro: Each month this year we've thought together about how to increase in our holiness. For most of our lessons, we let Paul guide us as we looked together at the holy fruit which the Holy Spirit seeks to produce in us to make us like our holy God--what Paul calls "the fruit of the Spirit."

These fruits give us insight into what God considers a holy heart like His. But Paul follows this list with a practical appeal that shows us how those inward attitudes manifest themselves on the outside toward those around us. He calls this lifestyle "walking by the Spirit."

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Gal. 5:25)

It is interesting to me that when Paul talks about walking by the Spirit, he does not focus on mystical experiences, or mysterious feelings or hunches that we might have about what we ought to do. He does not have us looking for unusual "signs" in our day to day life; nor does he have us looking for special revelations that whispers in our ear and tells us what to do.

Instead he gives us a series of exhortations that show us in practical terms what it means to walk by the Spirit so that we might reap the Spirit's blessing of eternal life. In a word, we are "walking by the Spirit" when we devote ourselves to the loving service of those around us. Let's consider Paul's portrait of the Spirit-led life.

We are walking by the Spirit when we:

Refrain from competitive behavior

Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

How we treat others begins with how we see ourselves. Paul warns against an attitude of personal self-conceit in which we boast about our superiority. That self-conceit or boasting works out two ways: 1) by challenging others; 2) by envying them.

The first word means "to challenge to a contest." The idea is that because we think we are superior to others, we look for an occasion to prove our superiority over them. That of course is not love at all. Paul says, *"love is not arrogant."*

The sense of the second word is self-evident. If we think others are really more talented or gifted or esteemed than us, then we resent their position and act out of envy. That kind of envy cost Jesus His life.

"The correction attitude to other people is not 'I'm better than you and I'll prove it,' nor 'You're better than I and I resent it,' but 'You are a person of importance in your own right (because God made you in His own image and Christ died for you) and it is my joy and privilege to serve you.'" (Stott, 157.)

Wow! What a difference that attitude would make in everybody's life. And it is one of the real proofs that we are truly Spirit-led.

And Paul will have no need to say more about what "not" to do. Instead he'll keep us focused on what to do to show that loving service God desires and expects.

Gently restore those who have gone astray

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)

Probably no one needs love more than the person caught up in a transgression; and it is easy to respond to them with anger for leaving the faith or indifference for turning away from what they know is right.

But if we have the holiness God wants, then we will be concerned about the sins of others and how we may help them overcome them. Paul stresses three points:

What to do--"*restore such a one.*" The idea is to put something back in its proper place or condition.

Who is to do it--"*you which are spiritual.*" It is not Paul's purpose to give people a way out of being concerned about those in sin. It is rather to remind us that only those who are spiritual themselves will be in a position to help others. That means that we must come to the sinner out of a spiritual mindset that exemplifies the fruit of the Spirit. How to do it--"*with gentleness considering yourself lest you too be tempted.*" If there is one thing that truly spiritual people recognize about themselves, it is that they have their own failings that need to be corrected and that they too are vulnerable to temptation and therefore need to approach life with a watchful attitude.

We truly present the evidence of being Spirit-led when we have a heart to restore the wayward brother or sister. In fact Jesus in Luke 15 helps us see the love of God for the sinner, his longing that they repent, and his joy when they turn back to him. Can we justifiably call ourselves His children if we feel differently about that?

Help our brethren in their times of need

Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one shall bear his own load. (Gal. 6:2-4)

Some consider this an elaboration on what Paul just said about restoring the erring; I've tended to view these verses as adding yet another manifestation the Spirit-led life--another way that we show love for one another and thus fulfill the law of Jesus. He said the second greatest command of the Law was to "love your neighbor as yourself;" but he made it "new" by saying, "Love another as I have loved you."

Thus Paul commands us to show that love by bearing one another's burdens.

There are things in life that are simply beyond our strength and capacity to meet. A healthy independence is good; but stubbornly refusing help when it is needed is not so good. In addition to casting our burdens on the Lord, we can allow others to help us with them if they are willing. And Paul says we should be willing.

Once more we see that how we treat others is rooted in how we view ourselves. None of us is "too good" to stoop to help those around us. To think so is to "deceive oneself."

The real proof of who we are is in what we are willing to do for those around us. Paul challenges us to take a realistic look not at what others do; but what we personally do to help lighten the burdens of others. No one can do that for us.

Here then is another evidence that the fruit of the Spirit truly fills us within, by the demonstration of love without.

Maintain fellowship with those who teach

And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. (Gal. 6:5)

Clearly Paul is concerned about another relationship Christians have--the relationship between him and those who give instruction to him. We should not be surprised that Paul should include something about this relationship here, since he is giving exhortations about how the fruit of the Spirit is manifested outwardly. What Paul commands is a sense of partnership with our teachers.

Paul uses the Greek word *koinoneo* which means to share with or have fellowship with.

Not surprisingly there are various views about what those "all good things" that teacher and disciple share together. In a spiritual context, it makes sense that Paul is thinking of the "good things" which the word provides in teaching the gospel. The one who hears this could things should "share" them with the teacher in the sense that he embraces and obeys them.

However the whole trajectory of Paul's words seems to be focused on how we may provide help and support to those around us. Thus, Paul may here be thinking about the importance of supporting those who teach the gospel.

Paul used this concept when he acknowledged that no church other than the Philippians had "shared" with him in the manner of giving and receiving (Phil. 4)

To "share with them in all good things" is to appreciate the work that they do in teaching and show that appreciation with material support.

In other contexts Paul likens the process of sharing material things with others to "sowing seed" and reaping a harvest.

Again, such a command shows that we are Spirit-led. For if we truly appreciate the message the Spirit has given us, we will appreciate and honor those who help us understand it and proclaim it to others.

Do good to all men

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Gal. 6:7-10).

It may be that Paul intends this final verse to summarize all that he has said in this section beginning in chapter 5. He has shown the Galatians that there are two fields into which we may "sow": 1) the flesh; 2) the Spirit. To sow to the flesh is to make provision for the practice of the works of the flesh. To sow to the Spirit is to make provision for the practice of the fruit of the Spirit. Our behavior is governed by an immutable principle of sowing and reaping; and Paul wants his readers to understand that that process cannot be ignored with impunity.

If one thinks he can neglect to manifest the fruit of the Spirit outwardly yet receive the blessings of Spirit, he is quite deceived. Moreover, such an attitude makes a mockery of both God's justice to punish evil and His grace to bless the obedient.

The consequences of our actions are laid before us. If we sow to the flesh, we will reap from the flesh corruption. If we sow to the Spirit, we shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.

There may be times when we will become discouraged or lose confidence in that immutable law. Our sowings may seem unfruitful; yet their harvest is assured by the Creator who instilled those principles into the physical universe. Likewise he assures the fulfillment of them in the spiritual realm as well. We shall reap if we do not grow weary.

So then, what could Paul say to encourage God's people to get busy putting God's holy heart into action?

Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

The sphere of our love and fruitfulness starts with the "household of God," our brethren; and we should be looking for every opportunity to show our love to them in the most concrete and helpful ways possible. But the circle of love does not end there. "*let us do good unto all men.*" The love Christ commands is universal; it reaches to every person with whom we can share God's love to meet their needs.

Conclusion: As we approach the end of the year, I hope that we will have used these studies to increase our holiness. There is a great reward for those who do-- they shall from the Spirit reap eternal life in the presence of God.