

## **Introduction**

As I came to this passage for this morning I began with a sense of the stark contrast that is set before us. And so I set forth my title and chose a graphic that is expressive of contrast with fruit set in contrast against a black background. But the more I meditated on the text and studied the context, the more I became convinced that what Paul is setting before us is more of a complete opposition. It is as he said in 5:17. "The desires of the flesh are AGAINST the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are AGAINST the flesh, for these are OPPOSED to one another to keep you from doing the things you want to do." The stark contrast is in effect a way of illustrating two powers that are completely at odds with one another. We need this picture. We need it to be ingrained on our minds. Mortal combat is what is at hand. We do not merely have two competitors, but two enemies one of which is evil and the other holy. We have a description of the core of every human being by nature set against the description of the holiness of God flowing through human beings who have been rescued from themselves by the power of God. The contrast could not be more stark. The adversaries could not be more contentious. Knowledge of this contrast and knowledge of the battle it presents are crucial for a right understanding of what is at stake every single moment of every single day of our lives.

[Read text and Pray]

As I said, the contrast Paul sets before us is a conflict of complete and utter opposition and antagonism. As we saw last time in verses 16-18, Paul tells Christians how to overcome the enemy. We must walk by the Spirit. Now lest we underestimate the importance of walking by the Spirit, Paul informs us of what is at stake. He presents to us the stark contrast, or perhaps better, the complete war that exists between the flesh and the Spirit. He contrasts them in a number of ways. I am going to work through the contrasts Paul sets forth. Then, I will point us to several critical lessons we need to take away from this text.

So, let's see ...

### **I. The Stark Contrasts.**

A. Fundamentally, the contrast is between the flesh and the Spirit. Verses 19-21 are concerned with the flesh and verses 22-23 are concerned with the Spirit. We need to have it clear in our minds what is indicated by "the flesh" and by "the Spirit." As for the flesh, Paul is not talking about the flesh which is our bodies. Jesus became human in addition to his deity. He assumed a human body. John says of him that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory." But Jesus did not assume "the flesh" about which Paul is speaking. Here "the flesh" speaks of the depraved nature of humanity since the fall. "The flesh" is consumed with oneself either in legalistic superiority or in wanton indulgence in sinful pleasure or both.

John Piper has captured the essence of the flesh in this description.

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. ... In its conservative form it produces legalism—keeping rules by its own power for its own glory. ... In its more liberal form [it] produces grossly immoral attitudes and acts. ... 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.

(Walk by the Spirit!; Galatians 5:19-26)

We must not lose sight that a legalistic moralism for self-glory is just as depraved as wanton overflow of immorality. It may seem that in this text Paul's focus is not on the legalistic side of the flesh. However, think on those numerous items he places in the middle of his list—enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy. Such are the result of moral legalism.

The flesh is the depraved core of fallen man. It is contrasted here with the Spirit, which is the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit. In conversion a human being is first regenerated by the Spirit of God. The human being through faith is justified by God and he becomes a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads the people who belong to Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit directs and empowers them. He is the Holy Spirit. He leads God's people in the way of holiness and righteousness. He writes the law of God upon their hearts. His presence brings life and strength to overcome the desires of the flesh which remain with a believer even though he has been set free from the dominion of those desires. The Spirit's presence brings with it the desire to do what pleases Holy God. So there we have the fundamental essence of the contrast. Here we have enemies on opposite sides—the flesh which pursues its own glory and the Spirit which pursues the glory of God.

B. Next, we see that the distinction between the flesh and the Spirit reaches to the nature of what each produces. In verse 19 Paul describes the produce of the flesh as WORKS and the produce of the Spirit as FRUIT. It is a striking difference—works of the flesh are set opposed to the fruit of the Spirit. The contrast stresses a difference as to how the outcome is produced. Works of the flesh are the natural actions, emotions, attitudes, and contemplations performed by a fallen human. These works of the flesh know nothing of grace. Whether an action, emotion, attitude, or contemplation, the so-called works of the flesh reflect a spirit of entitlement. It is the spirit of "I deserve." We see this everywhere in our culture. It says the greatest love is to love myself. It says I should possess what I think I deserve. I am worthy. If it makes me happy, then there is no fault in it. If I don't get what I want I am right to envy, to jealousy, to scream out in a fit of rage. So the works of the flesh are selfish pursuits of self-exaltation. John Piper gets it right when he says, "The flesh is convinced of its own merit and expects God and man and nature to pay dues by giving the satisfaction it desires. When these payments of satisfaction are not made, the flesh reacts the way it does, not to earn anything, but because it feels that it already had earned what it didn't get." Works are saturated with a sense of merit. They are captivated with thinking highly of oneself.

In stark contrast, the Holy Spirit is the one who in the converted person produces godly actions, emotions, attitudes, and contemplations. These are NOT the works OF the individual but the gracious workings of the Spirit of God THROUGH the individual. They are the result of the Spirit of God transforming and empowering one who belongs to Christ. They are produced by grace not for the glory of man but for the glory of God. If the tree is good, it will produce. The fruit will come forth. Whereas the works are captivated with self, the fruit is captivated with God, for it is God at work through the Spirit for a person both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So the second point of contrast is between "works" and "fruit."

C. The contrast Paul sets forth is between flesh and Spirit, between works and fruit, and next we see a contrast as to the CHARACTER of each. We have lawless vs lawful. Paul explicitly declares of the fruit of the Spirit that "against such things there is no law." By implication the works of the flesh are unlawful. Of the works of the flesh, Paul also says that they are "evident." That is, it is obvious what the works of the flesh are. You can't miss it. The point of this contrast is that the works of the flesh are by their nature lawless. John says in 1 John 3:4 that sin is lawlessness. There is nothing

right about the works of the flesh and there is nothing wrong with the fruit of the Spirit. We need a reminder of this reality. One sin, one breaking of the law of God is sufficient to condemn us eternally, but our lives are full of lawlessness. But if we are walking by the Spirit, the Spirit produces in us that against which there is no law. The fruit of the Spirit is pleasing to God. In fact it displays the divine nature. The fruit produced by the Spirit is the character of God himself.

D. And next we come to see the contrast between the flesh and the Spirit as to their acts themselves. We have two lists. We have a list of vices and then a list of virtues. Paul provides specific examples of the kind of actions, attitudes, and states of mind that issue from the flesh and the Spirit. The works of the flesh include "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." So we note that this is not an exhaustive list. After all, human beings are inventors of evil and always coming up with new ways to carry out fleshly desires.

There is overlap in the list, but we can group these acts and attitudes into 4 basic categories. First, there are sexual vices or sexual sins—sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality. Together these words leave no stone unturned in the category of sexual sin. They cover illicit sexual relationships as well as sexual uncleanness in the imagination, in thoughts and words, as well as actions. The sense is that restraint is removed and one is governed by their sexual impulses and desires. People in Paul's day lived in the midst of a rampantly sexualized culture. It was woven even into the worship of pagan deities. The culture in which we live is no less committed to the pursuit of sexual pleasure without regard to restraint. I saw these statistics the other day just on one aspect of sexual sin:

According to one study, every second in the U.S.:

- \$3,075.64 is being spent on pornography
- 28,258 Internet users are viewing pornography
- 372 Internet users are typing adult search terms into search engines

And every 39 minutes, a new pornographic video is being created in the United States.

These statistics highlight the wanton level of the pursuit of sexual gratification that pervades our society. Christians are not immune from these fleshly sexual desires, and we must be reminded that society does not set the rules, the morals, and the guidelines. The world in which we live represents the works of the flesh not the will of God. God gave human beings the good gift of sexuality. It is given for holy expression within the context of a one-man-one-woman marriage. Outside of that relationship, sexual gratification is sinful and lawless. And we need to say so, because the flesh is all too ready to rationalize and downplay the wickedness of our sexual sins.

The sexual category of works of the flesh is followed by the category of false gods. Paul lists two such sins—idolatry and sorcery. The god of a person's life is whatever is most important to him or her. Greed is idolatry as well as worshipping a god you have made in your own image. If the center of your life is not the one true God who created the universe and sent his Son the Lord Jesus Christ to die for sinners, you are an idolater. Sorcery is the resorting to evil spiritual powers to try to manipulate the circumstances of one's life. As William Hendriksen says, "When faith in magic replaces trust in God, it is exposed as a form of idolatry" (220). But this is what the flesh wants to do. It wants a god that accords with its desires and it wants to manipulate the world to its own liking.

Category number three of the works of the flesh could be designated the adversarial category. In this category are acts and meditations of enmity, strife, jealousy, angry outbursts, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy. Here is the most widely-represented category. All of these sins are related to a person having a high opinion of themselves. Selfish ambition is the root. People who stand in the way of my pursuits are my enemies and strife will not be avoided. Angry outbursts will give full vent to one's displeasure when his desires and pursuits are not fulfilled. He is jealous— not wanting to share what he thinks he deserves with others and yet riddled with displeasure that others possess what he knows he deserves but does not possess. The result of such sins is division, rivalry, and dissension.

Again, we must give serious attention to this category. Maybe you are not an addict to sexual sin; maybe you don't worship an idol; and maybe you are not a drunkard. You may think yourself a good person. Such were the Pharisees of Jesus' day. And they were riven with adversarial sins—these of category number three. We are prone to think highly of ourselves, but these types of behaviors reveal the darkness of the flesh within. Not only are these sins evil, they are destructive to the ones who commit them. In an all-out effort to have what their souls desire, the self-centered, flesh-driven person can never know true joy or peace and they disturb the joy and peace of others as well.

The final category of the works of the flesh is debauchery. Debauchery refers to excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures. Two aspects of this category are mentioned—drunkenness and orgies. Both revolve around excessive consumption of intoxicants. Drunkenness is of course the state of intoxication. The word orgies here in the ESV is a reference not to group sex but to drunken revelry. Groups of people then and now join in drunken gatherings and processions through the streets letting loose all their inhibitions and giving full release to their flesh's inclinations whatever they might be. Drunkenness is sin against God. Giving in to it can lead to many other sins of various kinds. The lower one's inhibitions the more prone they are to go further and further. It is ungodly indulgence that throws restraint to the wind.

And these four categories are but a list of examples. Paul says there are things like these that fall in the overall category of works of the flesh. In contrast stand the actions, attitudes, and contemplations which result from a person's being led by the Spirit of God. The fruit of the Spirit is opposite in nature from the works of the flesh. The very things the flesh pursues—joy and peace—are experienced by those who instead experience the work of the Spirit of God producing love, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I am not going to elaborate on these this morning because I will be taking them one-by-one for careful study as we proceed in coming weeks. I will just say that love, which is the first aspect mentioned is the root of all the other aspects of the fruit. Love is completely absent in the works of the flesh. If you are walking in the flesh, you do not know what love is—not love as demonstrated by God worked in humans by the Spirit.

E. We come then to a fifth point of contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. The works of the flesh are marked by indulgence while the fruit of the Spirit is marked by restraint of the flesh. The works of the flesh give way to the desires of the flesh. Whenever one is not walking by the Spirit, he gratifies the desires of the flesh. The only limits on gratification are the limits of ability and the limits brought by the belief that one will more greatly be satisfied another way. But on the contrary, Paul says in verse 24, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

The life of a follower of Christ is a crucified life. The call of Jesus to those who would follow him is this: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The call to believe in Jesus is a call to forsake everyone and everything else—to trust in him and to walk in his ways, to turn one's back on the love of the world and the pleasures of the world for higher and greater pleasures, the pleasures reflected in the fruit of the Spirit. Why did Christ die? Why did he face such an awful and cruel death? Why did he become a curse for us? Because our sin, our fleshly indulgence, is an incomprehensible offense to holy God. Our forgiveness demands the price to be paid to soothe the wrath of God.

If we are believing in Christ, then we are united with him in that death. It was a death to sin. It was a crucifixion to sin. When we come to Christ, we share in his crucifixion. It is as Paul said back in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." Crucified with Christ, I have been crucified to the flesh and the flesh to me. On the one hand, the flesh no longer has power over me. On the other hand, I have resolved in coming to Christ that I will deny my fleshly desires and pursue Christ. I will pursue godly and greater pleasure.

The crucifixion of the flesh does not mean that those who follow Christ will not experience the pull of fleshly desires. No, the desires of the flesh are felt as are the desires of the Spirit. However, at the cross of Christ those who have turned to him in faith have taken a decisive step by faith. They have parted ways with the desires of the flesh and they have been freed from the tyranny of those desires. I like the way Tom Schreiner words it. "The passions and desires of the flesh are not absent, but they no longer rule and reign. Those who walk by the Spirit and who are led by the Spirit find themselves, even though imperfectly and partially, triumphing over the passions of the flesh that formerly dominated them" (351).

F. The final mark of distinction between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit pertains to the outcome on the day of final judgment. We have hell vs heaven. Paul has a stern and stark warning for the Galatians. It is a warning that he had given to them before. It is at the tail end of verse 21. He writes: "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Paul is speaking of the future when the kingdom of God is consummated. If you want to get technical you would call this the eschatological kingdom of God. It is speaking of the day of judgment when according to Jesus the sheep will be separated from the goats. Before Christ will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people one from another. He will place those who belong to him (the sheep) on his right, but those not belonging to him (the goats) on the left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Paul is saying that among those who are sent away into judgment, there will be those who may have thought themselves sheep, but they will be mistaken. These are ones who despite any profession of belonging to Christ have not crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Rather, they lived according to those passions. The practice of their lives was not doing the will of God but doing the works of the flesh.

Jesus gave this other picture of how it will be on that day. "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. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not do mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' It is a stern warning. It is a stark warning. It is a warning that calls for sober attention. If a person believes they are following Christ but continues to live according to the pattern of the desires of the flesh, practicing the works of the flesh, they WILL NOT inherit the kingdom of God. Instead they will face eternal judgment.

In contrast, those who belong to Christ—these are those who hear Christ say, "Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you"—these who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. They do not get into heaven by their works. They get into heaven by the work of Christ. Theirs is a righteousness from Christ received by them through faith in him. Their works do not get them into heaven. Their works are a demonstration that they not only have been justified by grace but also empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a transformed life, unshackled from the dominion of the desires of the flesh. Their lives bear this out. They are led by the Spirit. They walk by the Spirit. They do not carry out the desires of the flesh.

Is Paul saying that those who belong to Christ Jesus NEVER carry out ANY desires of the flesh? No. As James said, "we all stumble in many ways." But he is saying that the pattern of living in those who belong to him is marked by (it is generally characterized by) the fruit of the Spirit rather than the works of the flesh. As Schreiner said, "Those who walk by the Spirit and who are led by the Spirit find themselves, even though imperfectly and partially, triumphing over the passions of the flesh that formerly dominated them" (351).

Second, let's consider

## **II. The Vital Lessons**

(from the points of contrast)

A. If you are living according to the flesh, your hope for heaven is in doubt. It may well be a sign that you do not belong to Christ. It is possible that you are his, but if you are you will not stay where you are. You must repent. You must turn to Christ for forgiveness and for cleansing bringing with you your fleshly desires and handing them over to him. Deny yourself and take up your cross. Trust in Christ and follow him. You do not need to clean yourself up. He will take care of that. He will supply the person and power of the Holy Spirit for that. But you have to be willing to abandon the desires of the flesh for Christ himself.

B. All believers should carry away from this text a sense of the filth and repulsion of the works of the flesh. They are repugnant to God and result in corruption, division, pain and misery for others and for ourselves. They are the reason the wrath of God is coming. See your fleshly desires for what they are. Let us hate sin and mortify these desires through walking by the Spirit. Remember that is a walk of faith. It is trusting obedience.

C. Let us walk by the Spirit not only that we may not carry out the desires of the flesh but that the fruit of the Spirit may be produced in us in abundance. Let every follower of Christ reckon with Paul that we have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer we who live but Christ lives in us, and the life we live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and delivered himself up for us.

D. Those who belong to Christ will progress in all aspects of the fruit of the Spirit since it is a unity. It is not fruits but one fruit. If you have one or two aspects then it is not the fruit of the Spirit. He works to produce the whole. The Spirit does not bring about a merely superficial change in our appearance. Rather, he transforms us from the depths of our beings within. He becomes the root who through us produces fruit unto the glory of God.

## **Conclusion**

If you revert to law-keeping, you will be lost. Christ is of no use to you. If you do not crucify the flesh with its passions and desires, you do not belong to Christ. If you belong to Christ, it is by grace through faith by the power of the Spirit. And he will produce fruit in your life. Strive for it in his power.