

# A MORE **PERFECT** YOU

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THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION IN CHRIST

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# 1. Perfection is the Absolute Standard

There is something wrong with the title of this book, can you spot it? Here it is: You cannot have a "more" perfect something or someone. You are perfect or you are not. Once something is perfect (without blemish or error) you cannot improve on it. This title, by the way, comes from the book *"God's Way to a More Perfect You: Living by the Fruit of the Spirit"* by Leroy Lawson. The point that Lawson makes at the beginning of his book is that the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is what each strives to attain in regard to perfection.

For example, since atheists and humanists claim that there is no such thing as "perfection," they have few options when it comes to self-improvement or self-fulfillment. Two of the more popular approaches they use to this end could be summarized in the following way:

- **"Be the best that you can be."** Maximize your potential using your best skills. You can never be perfect; maybe you will not even be the best; but if you are the best that you can be, you have reached the only goal available to you in this regard.
- **"I'm ok, you're ok."** I am good enough the way I am, you are good enough the way you are. There is no striving to be the best or better, no competition with others or self. The goal is accepting yourself as you are and accepting others in the same way.

There are also different ideas about perfection among the major non-Christian religious groups in the world. For example, the desire for perfection for those who follow Eastern religions is different than those who do not believe in God or any spiritual life beyond the material world. The quest for improvement by these people comes at the cost of denying themselves any imprint of their existence in this world. The religions of the East lead their followers through various levels of training and self-denial to reach a point where they are no longer affected by the world around them in any significant way. When this happens, they say that the goal of their religious practice, referred to as either wholeness, nirvana, moksha or enlightenment (depending on the religion), begins to take place.

In the Jewish and Muslim religions, perfection is more a corporate than a personal experience. Their perfection is tied to the success of their theocratic aspirations. The geopolitical and religious destinies of these people are intertwined so that the achieving of political goals is believed to be a fulfillment (perfection) of their religious goals as well.

And then there are those who worship idols or various forces in nature. They share the common belief with atheists that perfection does not exist. The goal for these people is to stay alive and not anger the gods. Self-development is measured by how well one exploits nature without disturbing (or manipulating through magic) the unseen spirits that control the physical world.

## **CHRISTIANITY AND PERFECTION**

Christians, on the other hand, are people who not only believe that perfection exists, but are called upon by God to strive for it in their personal lives as well. Unlike the atheist, humanist, follower of Eastern religion or worshipper of nature gods, the Christian has been given a model for perfection in Jesus Christ. Christians (and I include myself in this group), therefore, can know what a perfect life looks like because Jesus' life, works and words have been recorded and preserved in the Bible by credible eyewitnesses.

When, however, we begin to compare ourselves to Christ in this effort to be perfect, two things become painfully clear:

1. We realize how far from the perfection of Christ we really are.
2. We learn that no amount of human effort can make us perfect as Christ is perfect.

The dilemma for us as Christians, therefore, becomes the following, "How do we obtain the perfection we are commanded to strive for while inhabiting a body incapable of achieving this perfection?"

I will try to answer this question in the following pages of this book.

## **PERFECTION IS THE ABSOLUTE STANDARD OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

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Atheists deny it and various religions change its meaning to acquire it on their own terms, but Christians actually strive for and embrace perfection in its purest form because they are called to it by Christ.

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- Matthew 5:48

For those of us who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, perfection is the standard by which we judge our lives despite the knowledge that we are, at present, imperfect and unable to attain this state by human means. We continue, nevertheless, to strive for this perfection because in doing so we demonstrate our sincere faith in Jesus. Because of this faith, therefore, God considers us perfect in His eyes now, while we await our final transformation at Jesus' coming. At that time, we will actually possess the perfection that the Lord currently imputes to us by faith (I Corinthians 1:30; 15:50-58; II Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:8).

## PERFECTION IS A CHOICE

Choosing to strive for perfection is not something that one simply decides to do one day. It is the new way of living given to those who are freed from sin through the blood of Christ. People who live without Christ either take the, "I'm ok, you're ok" route or follow the "personal best" way of life, but they rarely choose to seek after perfection because they believe that it is either unattainable or nonexistent. However, when a person comes to know Jesus Christ, that person comes into contact with godly perfection in human form. This experience has several effects on believers:

- It confirms the reality of their own imperfection. No matter what they may have thought about themselves before, they now know for certain that they fall terribly short of perfection.
- It also gives them a vision of what actual perfection looks and sounds like in human form, something they could not know before having faith in Christ.
- It provides an accurate measure of progress in the process of improving oneself. For example, if I can see what human perfection is like and compare it to my actual condition, I can then determine the progress I am making in my efforts to improve myself to this end.
- It offers a choice. Seeing perfection and imperfection side by side helps a person make a choice to either reinforce the behavior that leads to perfection or continue with the decisions and actions that lead to eventual destruction.

The verse of Scripture upon which this book is based, Galatians 5:13-25, outlines this choice and the consequences that follow. In this passage Paul explains that those who choose the path of continued imperfection (expressed in immoral acts and a life of disbelief) will perish, and the people who strive after perfection will ultimately achieve it. It is interesting to note that the Apostle does not describe Christian perfection by using absolute terms like "the most, the greatest, the purest, or without any mistake or blemish." Instead of using words that



describe perfection as a type of measurement reference, he says that perfection is expressed in virtues such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This, of course, is not an exhaustive list, but a sampling of what perfection is supposed to "look like" in a Christian.

The Apostle Peter, in II Peter 1:5-7, also describes this process of seeking after perfection but he names other virtues that reveal Christian perfection in the believer. His list includes words like faith, moral excellence, knowledge, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, etc. I suppose if we had to, we could go through the New Testament and create a list of character virtues and actions that would fully describe the perfect person, but it is easier to summarize all of these virtues and qualities in the single word, "Christlikeness."

At the start of this chapter I said that after being saved from sin, condemnation and death, we have a choice to make, a choice that Paul explains in Galatians 5:13-25. We can choose to maintain a state of imperfection which characterized our old life and thinking, or we can choose to strive after the perfection seen in Christ and described in the Bible by the Apostles and others. If we choose to pursue perfection, we will need to understand some of the ground rules in order to avoid confusion and discouragement. The first of these is that there are two kinds of "Perfection."

### **Conditional Perfection**

Conditional perfection is the state we find ourselves in when we are saved. When we are baptized, all of our sins are washed away and, in God's eyes, we are considered His perfect sons and daughters (Galatians 3:26-27). Our "perfect" condition is bestowed upon us as a gift from God based on our faith in Jesus (expressed in repentance and baptism). Every Christian, therefore, has conditional perfection conferred upon them through God's grace at baptism. This is what gives each Christian the confidence to come before God in prayer, confidence to try and serve God, and confidence to face death without fear. The awareness of our imperfection would undermine us in each of these situations if it were

not for the state of conditional perfection that God bestows upon us through faith in Christ.

## **Actual Perfection**

Actual perfection is the concrete and visible progress we make in our lives as we pursue "Christlikeness." It is the measurable improvement we make as we are transformed through our submission to God's Word, and the working of the Holy Spirit within us (Acts 2:38) into the new image of Christ (Christlikeness) in our lives. Actual perfection is visible. For example, when we overcome bad habits, when we grow in biblical knowledge, when we learn to truly forgive, when we develop our ministry skills and bear spiritual fruit that glorifies God; the actual perfection being produced in us is seen and experienced by ourselves and witnessed by others.

The confusion occurs when people try to achieve **conditional** perfection by striving for **actual** perfection. We are saved because God considers us perfect in Christ based on our faith, not because we have achieved actual perfection. This confusion often leads to an attempt at salvation by works which cannot succeed (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The natural question arises, "If I am considered perfect in Christ, why bother seeking actual perfection?" If we went straight to heaven at the moment of our baptism there would be no need to strive for actual perfection, but the majority of us have a certain amount of time to spend on this earth within this imperfect body of flesh before we meet Christ to be with Him in the air forever (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). This brings us back to our original passage in Galatians 5:13-25 where Paul asks his readers how they plan to spend the rest of their lives: repeating acts of imperfection leading to destruction, or pursuing perfection in Christ (Christlikeness) which will lead to actual perfection!

If we choose to seek perfection we will also accomplish the following:

- We will be expressing our faith in the perfect One, Jesus Christ.
- We will provide a witness for the truth and a light leading to Christ for those who inhabit a dark world.

- We will experience, to a degree, the perfect life of Christ and the joy that comes from this.
- We will create the tone and texture of the communal life in the church here that will exist in perfection when the church is brought to heaven.
- We will guard our souls from the continual pull of this imperfect world.
- We will be doing the most perfect thing that we can do, and in doing so answer the question, "What should I do with my life?"
- We will attain the greatest tangible rewards available here on earth as well as those awaiting us in the world to come.

## 2. Conditional or Actual Perfection?

For believers, becoming more perfect in Christ is the essence of life. Of course, this only makes sense if you understand that there are two aspects of perfection in the Christian's understanding:

### CONDITIONAL PERFECTION

My term for this is the perfect state one enters into when obeying the gospel (obeying the gospel = believe and confess that Christ is the Son of God, repent, baptism). The Bible refers to this (conditional perfection) in various ways throughout the New Testament:

1. **Saved** - Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-40
2. **Born Again** - John 3:3
3. **Justified** - Romans 3:24
4. **Washed** - I Corinthians 6:11
5. **Redeemed** - I Peter 1:18
6. **Righteous** - I Corinthians 1:30

These are all ways of expressing the results of receiving forgiveness and reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus Christ, His Son. His death pays our moral debt for sin. In receiving Him through faith, expressed in

repentance and baptism, we are purified of all sin, blame and spiritual imperfection. Because of our faith in Christ, we are considered perfect in God's eyes (or as the Bible says, saved, justified, etc.). This conditional perfection has absolutely nothing to do with our performance, our actions or efforts. It is given to us freely as a covering to guarantee our entry into heaven when the time comes. This means that when the time comes for us to face God's judgment, we will be judged in light of this conditional perfection. When God looks at us as the judge of all mankind, He will see the covering of our conditional perfection, not the degree of actual perfection we have obtained. This is why Paul can say in Romans 3:27-28:

27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

This is where the other type of perfection enters the picture.

## **ACTUAL PERFECTION**

Actual perfection (again, my term) is the actual progress that we make in spiritual development while we are still in this imperfect body, living in this fallen world. Christ is actually the perfect human ideal, and being like Him is the Christian's spiritual goal. When we are saved/justified/born again, etc., God bestows on us the state of perfection which Jesus already has. Jesus achieved this perfect state because He obeyed the Law perfectly and obeyed the Father perfectly.

Jesus earned the state of perfection by His actions and life. We, on the other hand, are given this status because of God's grace. We receive the status of perfection because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Through faith we are considered as perfect as Jesus is (not in our own eyes or men's eyes) but in the eyes of God.

The problem, as I have mentioned before, is that we (the ones considered perfect by God) live imperfect lives here in this imperfect world while we await the end of our lives. What will we do with the time? Go back to doing the sinful and ungodly things that led us to

condemnation in the first place? How can we, who are considered perfect by God in Christ before all the angels in heaven, how can we dishonor our God and Savior with such actions and attitudes? Or as Paul says:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?  
- Romans 6:1

The answer is, "No!" How can we, who are considered perfect by God, continue to pursue imperfection as a way of life anymore? So what, then, is the alternative? The alternative is to pursue the perfection that has been revealed to me in Jesus Christ. This, then, is what I refer to as actual perfection. It is the day-to-day effort that Christians make to imitate the perfect Christ.

The Bible refers to this exercise in various ways:

1. **Sanctification** - Romans 6:19
2. **Faithfulness** - III John 1:5
3. **Perseverance** - Ephesians 6:18
4. **Holiness** - Colossians 3:12

As those who are considered perfect in Christ, we choose to pursue actual perfection through Christ. We do this because Christ calls us to this exercise of pursuing perfection as a way of life.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.  
- Romans 12:1-2

To follow after actual perfection consciously is important because if we refuse or neglect to do so, the pull of our imperfect past will draw us back into the life that will ultimately destroy our faith and the conditional perfection it produces.

And so, we have the two:

1. Conditional perfection, freely given to us based on our faith in Christ and protecting us against condemnation at judgment.
2. Actual perfection which is the spiritual exercise we pursue in order to confirm our faith before God and man.

The "more perfect you" that the title refers to is the "you" who is constantly striving to draw closer to the perfection of Christ while in this human form. In other words, the "conditionally perfect you" striving each day to achieve actual perfection as both a witness of faith before men and a declaration of faith before God.

Christians have no other options. Putting off the pursuit of actual perfection in every aspect of life is either a sign of weak faith, a compromise with the world, a lack of gratitude for Christ, or a show of love for sins great and small. Seeking the virtues that Paul lists in Galatians 5, on the other hand, proves that God's Word and Spirit are firmly in control and leading one to the actual perfection seen and desired in Christ.

# 3.

## The Holy Spirit and Perfection

So far in our study we have examined two concepts of perfection and how they are related to each other:

### Conditional Perfection

Conditional perfection is referred to as justification, salvation, righteousness or holiness to name just a few ways this idea is expressed in the Bible. This state of perfection is given to us by God based on our faith in Christ. It is a perfection that is the same in quality as the perfection Christ attained through His perfect obedience (I Peter 2:22). It is the standard we will be judged by. God, in judgment, will look at our conditional perfection and accept us because of it. It is the status that enables us to now approach God with confidence in prayer and worship. It is the status that gives us the courage to serve and please God despite the sinful flesh we inhabit. His promise in Christ is that one day we will shed our outer garment of imperfection and will actually become what we are only considered to be at the moment.

### Actual Perfection

Conditional perfection is a status that we are given by God; a status that God sees when He views us; a status we will be judged by. Actual perfection is what we and others see in ourselves. Actual perfection is the status of perfection we achieve through the help of the Holy Spirit,



the Word of God, the church and our own submission to these tutors and enablers. Actual perfection is the way of life we choose to pursue when we become Christians.

We are considered perfect based on our faith in Christ, and this guarantees our salvation and hope of heaven. Being this way prompts us to pursue actual perfection as a lifestyle. It would be ridiculous and foolish for the one who receives this conditional perfection (at baptism) to then go back to the imperfect lifestyle that originally condemned him. The only option available to the one considered perfect by God is to pursue actual perfection before men as a witness of faith and as an offering of thanks to God.

For a non-Christian to do this would be frustrating and hypocritical because perfection through human effort is impossible. But for the Christian, the conditionally perfect one, this is a valid lifestyle choice because it affords him an opportunity to achieve two goals:

1. The pursuit of actual perfection is a powerful witness to those without Christ because it sets Christians apart from all others.
2. It is a wonderful instrument of praise because the effort involved in this pursuit honors God.

Therein lies the difference and purpose of these two ideas. Let us now look at how the Holy Spirit works in creating these states of conditional and actual perfection.

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PERFECTION**

Much of the religious programming produced by charismatic groups actually perverts the work of the Holy Spirit. The use of Hollywood style production values using lights, sensual music, manipulative staging, emotional appeals, etc. is done to create a "spiritual" experience which these groups claim is proof that the Holy Spirit is working and present in their ministries and assemblies.

Many churches are being affected by this because they want to have exciting worship; they want people who attend their services to feel something; they want to prove that they also have the Holy Spirit in some recognizable way. Of course, there is nothing wrong with being excited or feeling something because of one's faith. These are legitimate spiritual desires and needs. The problem arises when churches try to manufacture these experiences through human, fleshly ways rather than through spiritual, biblical ways.

The many efforts to change traditional worship styles stem from the false notion that if we can create some kind of "feeling" at worship (due to the music, the presentation, the introduction of new elements like drama or soloists or worship teams, etc.) then somehow, we will be more spiritual and thus more satisfied. The true results of this kind of manufactured approach to heightened spirituality is twofold:

## **Elitism**

People who manipulate spirituality in this way become spiritual snobs. They begin to see their value as Christians rise because they have a superior spiritual level produced by their "different" worship style. This, of course, leads to division because anyone who does not use their approach is somehow inferior spiritually.

We see this kind of thing happening in the Corinthian church where the brethren were misusing legitimate spiritual gifts and, as a result, were creating disorder that Paul had to address in his first letter to them (I Corinthians 1:12; 3:4-6). No matter, whenever spirituality is falsely characterized or misused, division ensues. We see this happening in our own brotherhood today where labels like "progressive" and "traditional" are being attached to different congregations. When this happens, it is only a matter of one or more generations before there will be a visible separation between those who ascribe to one view or the other. It is a shame, because both sides are right in a way and wrong in a way.

## **The Progressives**

Those who see themselves as religious progressives are correct in that there needs to be a constant effort to make the faith relative to each new generation. They are wrong, however, in thinking that superficial changes (and in some cases unbiblical ones) will address the need of the modern culture to know and experience God in Christ at a deeper level. This is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit, not stage techniques or multimedia shows, and certainly not by compromising God's Word to increase attendance numbers.

## **The Traditionalists**

These brethren are correct in holding that any change that compromises Scripture is dangerous and not worth the short-term gains that might be produced. They are wrong, however, in thinking that the way that they have culturally adapted New Testament worship and practice is the only way that these things can be done. I have seen many different groups (Asians, Africans, Caribbeans, etc.) adapt the practice of New Testament Christianity in ways that we (North Americans) would think strange but are perfectly within biblical guidelines. Rigid traditionalism does not represent the Spirit's presence any more than progressive emotionalism does.

And so, manufactured spirituality leads to a kind of "Christian elitism" which is most visible in our brotherhood in the progressive/traditional lines of division being drawn these days.

Another result of manufactured spirituality is...

## **LOSS OF FAITH**

Faith comes by hearing the words of Christ, Paul says in Romans 10:17. If this spiritual principle is applied and extended, we can also say that loss of faith comes from hearing words that do not come from Christ. It is sad to note that those who pursue manufactured spirituality and create the elitism that seems to come with it, also produce a lot of burned-out souls.

Case in point, the International Churches of Christ (also known as the Boston Movement) whose spiritual elitism based on their narrow focus of "personal discipling" created an incredible number of baptisms as well as fast growing assemblies for which they took great pride. However, their manufactured spirituality also created the most serious division among Churches of Christ in the last century.

At the height of their success in baptizing new members, one statistic rarely mentioned was the high drop-out rate of their members. Some estimates put the number as high as fifty to sixty percent. This meant that to sustain their rapid growth they had to baptize ten people in order to keep three or four, and those who dropped out were not simply people who quit because they loved sin and went back to worldly living; they were people (in the most part) who loved God but were so emotionally scarred by their experience with these groups/cults that in many cases it required special counseling and the passing of many years to heal their sense of guilt and anger.

Manufactured spirituality is dangerous because it has power but lacks many of the edifying qualities of true spirituality.

The phenomena that take place in many denominational charismatic churches will begin to creep into the "progressive" churches in our brotherhood as well. Charismatic churches experience a constant drive for greater stimulation in order to get the spiritual "fix" that everyone wants. As a result, services get longer and more numerous. Worship becomes more elaborate, even outlandish in some cases (e.g. bands, plays, pageants, parades, etc.). Eventually the ones caught up in this cycle have nowhere else to go "emotionally."

It is no wonder that so many blues, jazz and pop singers learn to perform in churches. These people eventually leave because they realize that they are providing a form of non-paying entertainment, and they could do the very same thing in true show-business but get paid for their efforts and talents. Unfortunately, non-performing members leave also, but for them it is because they are burned out emotionally. The manufactured spirit can bring them no higher, so they quit.

Congregations in our brotherhood who think they are innovative because of their progressive brand of worship do not realize that others have blazed this trail before them and found that it was a dead end spiritually. If the spiritual experience you crave or are having has not been created by the Holy Spirit, then your religious feeling is illegitimate and can lead you to pride or loss of faith.

In the Bible, the purpose of worship to God was not simply to create a feeling in the worshipper. Feelings (gratitude, relief, awe, remorse, etc.) were byproducts of the worship, not the purpose of it. People who come to worship should be coming to offer praise, thanksgiving, and to unburden themselves of the worry and anguish caused by their own failings and the difficulty of living as Christians in a fallen world. Simply looking for a pleasant experience or stimulation is looking for the wrong things. All of this is not to say that there are no feelings and experiences that result from worship, but simply to emphasize the fact that this is not the reason we worship and not the goal for those who plan and organize public worship for their church.

You may think I have wandered off here, but I have not. The original point of this chapter was to demonstrate the relationship between the Holy Spirit and perfection. Here, then, is the point: legitimate spiritual feelings and experiences within the Christian are generated by the Holy Spirit as he or she receives conditional perfection and pursues actual perfection. In other words, being considered perfect by God in Christ; the knowledge, contemplation and sharing of this priceless gift is what gives rise to the experience of gratitude, the feeling of peace and the emotion of happiness.

These are the legitimate feelings of the truly spiritual person and are produced by the knowledge of and response to the gospel of Christ which is spread by the power and agency of the Holy Spirit. No music, lights, group, show, spectacle or huge crowd can create within me the feelings legitimately produced when I respond in faith to the cross of Christ. From the very beginning of time the Holy Spirit has worked in concert with the Father and the Son to not only bring the cross to bear, but also to guarantee that the good news of the cross is spread throughout the world.

The spiritual experience awakened in me by the cross of Jesus is timeless and limitless. Its effect humbles rather than puffs me up. It joins, not separates, me to all other believers. The cross offers my spirit an endless capacity for joy, thankfulness, and pleasure, and renews my faith with every reminder of it.

In addition to this, pursuing actual perfection as my personal spiritual goal brings harmony into my life. Harmony between myself and God as I strive to please Him. Harmony between my conscience and myself since I know that I *am* right before God (because of conditional perfection) and I *do* what is right as I pursue actual perfection.

I now consciously seek harmony with others and myself because I now seek for peace, I now bring the good news, I now am salt and light and no longer walk in the darkness. This pursuit of actual perfection creates a harmony that results in what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit: things about me that are a cause for joy, peace, love and other good things that not only I experience, but others can see and experience also.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit helping to produce these things in me I become a channel of God's blessings for others, a conduit for "spiritual feelings" that others can experience. This is the way that Christians begin to experience God and share that experience with others. Worship, true worship, takes place when individual Christians who experience God legitimately in this way, come together and infuse their singing, their praying, their fellowship, their communion, their preaching, their giving, and their service, with the spiritual feelings that the seeking for perfection in Christ has produced in them.

When this happens, there are no more progressives or traditionalists, all are one in the Spirit and there is no pride, no division, no loss of faith, but rather the building up of the body in love. This is the relationship between the Holy Spirit, perfection, and our experience as a church.

# 4.

## Paul's Teaching on Perfection

So far in our study I have explained the ideas of conditional and actual perfection and how these relate to each other. Very briefly then:

- **Conditional perfection** is that state of being righteous or justified before God that we receive through faith in Christ (expressed in repentance and baptism). We are considered perfect, considered as perfect as Christ is, and at judgment it is this conditional perfection that God will see in order to let us share eternity and joy with Him.
- **Actual perfection** is the ideal of Christ we pursue in everyday life through the help of the Holy Spirit. We do this, not to accomplish conditional perfection, but as a way of glorifying God and providing a witness to others about the Lord Jesus Christ. What others see is the degree of actual perfection created in us through the work of the Spirit (this is what Paul describes in Galatians 5). What God sees in us is the conditional perfection which is complete and satisfying to Him.

When we describe Christ, we are really describing what God sees in us when He looks at us in judgment. Conditional perfection, therefore, uses words like righteous, glorious, powerful, transcendent, eternal, heavenly, victorious, spiritual, and godly. These are the type of adjectives that explain our conditional perfection in Christ. They are

words that describe something that is other-worldly without being bizarre or frightening.

In Galatians 5:13-25 however, Paul uses the words that describe the state of actual perfection, a measure of which we seek to attain while in our natural bodies. These words describe a state that can be attained, experienced and observed while one is in a physical and sinful body. Love, joy, peace, etc., these things do not earn me heaven, but they do provide comfort until then, and witness to others that even though I am still in a sinful physical body, there is something definitely heavenly or Christ-like about my person.

And so, with these thoughts in mind let us examine the words and ideas that Paul lays before us in Galatians 5 as he describes the actual perfection Christians can achieve through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **GALATIANS BACKGROUND**

The letter to the Galatians was a letter written by Paul to a group of churches that he had established in Asia Minor during his missionary journeys. It seems that certain individuals had begun to instruct these brethren that they were not truly saved (conditional perfection) without adherence to certain teachings that included compulsory circumcision. In addition to this, these teachers were attacking Paul's credibility as an Apostle and leader. Apparently, some in the church were shaken by these new doctrines and were considering a change in their belief and practice.

In response to these events Paul writes this letter where he establishes seven important points:

### **1. Those Who Pervert the Gospel will be Condemned**

<sup>6</sup>I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; <sup>7</sup> which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we,



or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

- Galatians 1:6-8

This, of course, was a judgment against the false teachers who were, in essence, saying that in order to receive conditional perfection (salvation) you had to adhere to their combination of teachings and laws. Chief among these was the command that the Galatians be circumcised and follow certain rules about foods and other religious practices. This was a form of salvation by works (earning your conditional perfection rather than receiving it by faith) which was contrary to what the gospel taught. Paul warns that those who brought another form of the gospel should be and would be cursed (condemned).

## 2. Paul was a Legitimate Apostle

<sup>11</sup> For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

- Galatians 1:11-12

Paul's doctrine was not man-made, as was that of the false teachers, but received from God through a revelation of Christ. Only the gospel has God's ordained way to be saved (conditional perfection) and Paul was the messenger of that good news.

## 3. Paul was Ready to Defend this Gospel to Anyone

<sup>11</sup> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas

was carried away by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

<sup>15</sup> "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; <sup>16</sup> nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

- Galatians 2:11-16

The maintaining of the purity of the teaching of the gospel (how one becomes conditionally perfect) was so important that Paul had challenged both Peter (who had great influence in the church) and Barnabas (his former teacher and mentor) in defending the truth. No position or relationship was more important than maintaining the integrity of the gospel.

#### **4. Paul Reviewed Once Again the Manner in Which a Person Received Conditional Perfection**

<sup>26</sup> For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

- Galatians 3:26-27

Paul uses another image or analogy to describe conditional perfection. He refers to it as, "putting on Christ." We put on the perfect nature and essence of Christ when we believe in Him. Paul even reminds them of the moment that this transformation from imperfect, weak and condemned to perfect, powerful, and pure took place: in the waters of baptism.

Paul has said in the verses leading up to this one that conditional perfection is not attained through a system of rules, laws, restrictions,

and rituals overseen by men. Salvation (conditional perfection) is freely bestowed on those people who believe in Jesus Christ and who respond to Him in faithful obedience (repentance and baptism).

One might ask, "But these are still things people do in their response of faith. Is this not a kind of work?" (This is the most common argument used when denying the necessity of baptism in the process of salvation.) The answer is yes, these are actual concrete things that people do when they come to Christ (e.g. they listen to the gospel, decide to believe it, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Christ, are baptized and choose to remain faithful). These are all things we do, but they are not works of Law. Here is why:

1. These are all things we can actually do, but we cannot keep the Law perfectly no matter how hard we try.
2. These things are given to us by God as a response of faith to Him. Keeping the Law, obeying rules, performing man-made rituals, these things were not given by God as the response of faith in Christ.
3. These things are effective. Faith expressed in these ways do grant us conditional perfection and lead us to actual perfection. Law-keeping leads to pride, discouragement, and division (what was happening in the Galatian church because of these false teachings).

And so, Paul aggressively defends the gospel and its teaching that conditional perfection is received through faith expressed in obedience to God's Word, and in no other way.

## 5. Paul Points Out What is at Stake Here

<sup>3</sup> So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, <sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those

who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.<sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"<sup>7</sup> Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

- Galatians 4:3-7

In chapter 4 Paul looks at the matter from the perspective of the teachers and what their motivation might be, and he reveals the true reasons for teaching what they do: power. By introducing this new teaching and discrediting him as an Apostle, these men were trying to control the churches. Paul responds boldly that the gospel has the power to free them from slavery to uninspired ideas about the world and their place in it; free them from their own sinfulness and the condemnation caused by their imperfection.

The revelation of God (the gospel) accomplished by Jesus (the cross) is what leads them to conditional perfection and frees them from all of this. They know about themselves and who God is. They have dealt with their sinfulness through the cross of Christ. Now that they have conditional perfection, they no longer fear death and condemnation.

As a matter of fact, Paul says that their conditional perfection (here he calls it sonship) enables them to call on God as their "Daddy," an intimate term reserved for only the closest of relationships between father and child. Following the way of the false teachers will not only imprison them but will cost them this special bond with God.

## 6. Paul Warns the Christians

<sup>2</sup> Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. <sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. <sup>4</sup> You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

- Galatians 5:2-4

Before, Paul warned and condemned the false teachers and their motives: "Teach false doctrine and you will not only fail to achieve your goals, you will also be condemned." In this chapter he warns the Christians who are being seduced by this teaching: "Receive and follow false teaching and you will not achieve your goal (actual perfection) and you will be condemned as well."

One question that may arise is this, "What was it that was so alluring about the false teachers and teachings in the first place?"

Answer: Adherence to a set of laws, rules and rituals is appealing for three reasons:

### **It is Easier**

It is easier to walk by sight than by faith. You cannot see conditional perfection; you have to accept God's promise that He sees you this way. All you actually see is imperfection, failure, two steps forward and one back. It is easier to base our confidence in things done, rituals performed, marks on our bodies, severe language, good works, or self-denial. These are things we can see, count, measure, compare and consequently grow in our confidence. It is much harder to accept by faith that you are perfect while all you see around you is imperfection.

### **It Appeals to Our Pride**

Each person struggles with a measure of pride, and a system that saves you while leaving your pride intact is very desirable. If faith requires the death of self, then a promise of salvation that allows self to live, to thrive, becomes seductive. In a "works" salvation you can compare your status with others. Comparison breeds pride (this is what competition is all about), pride breeds blindness and blindness breeds excess. Salvation (conditional perfection) based on faith leaves no room for self (Christ earns the perfection on the cross for us) and leaves no room for comparison (everyone is equally perfect in Christ). Salvation (conditional perfection) by faith in Christ humbles the heart and opens the eyes.

## **It Offers Power Over Others**

A human system requires humans to oversee it, and religious power is every bit as enjoyable to wield as worldly power. Salvation by faith, on the other hand, recognizes that power is in God's hands, and that He empowers people for service and witness, not for spiritual dictatorship over others. There is power in Christianity, but it resides in the Word of God and is exercised to build others up, not control them.

Paul warns the Galatians not to be seduced by the powerful temptation to try to achieve and maintain a state of conditional perfection through a system of Law and works. This method was doomed to failure and they would suffer the loss of their standing before God as perfect through faith in Christ.

## **7. He Encourages Them to Pursue Actual Perfection**

<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

- Galatians 5:13-16

These brethren were facing the dilemma that I have tried to explain in the last three chapters of this book:

If I am perfect in God's sight through faith in Christ, what do I do with the imperfection of my present life, the evidence of which is painfully before me every day? The false teachers had their answer: maintain that conditional perfection by keeping a series of rules, laws and rituals, chief of which was circumcision. Let us be your leaders and teachers (not the Apostle Paul). This, of course, had led to division and discouragement.

Paul's response was to encourage them to, "walk in the Spirit" (pursue actual perfection). This was not law-keeping, but a way of life that continually reinforced their belief that they were perfected through faith in Christ. Walking in the Spirit (pursuing actual perfection) would transform them in such a way that their lives would become a witness to others of the truth that perfection by faith was the only way to go.

We read that Paul, in the last part of his epistle, will describe the nature of the change that takes place in one whose heart is fully convinced that he is, through faith, perfect in Christ and pursues actual perfection through the Holy Spirit to confirm this fact.

## **SUMMARY**

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Let us summarize what we have covered in this chapter.

Paul is responding to Christians who are being seduced into thinking that they can maintain their conditional perfection before God in some other way than by continued faith in Christ. The teachers he opposes are promoting the idea that obeying laws, rules and customs will guarantee their perfect status before God. Paul refutes and condemns these teachers and their teachings.

He reminds the Galatians of the manner in which they were saved (Christ's death for their sins), the message that revealed this to them (the gospel), the messenger who brought the news (he, Paul the Apostle), the status they are in (conditionally perfect), the way they access and remain in this condition (faith in Christ), and finally, the lifestyle that confirms this faith (walking by the Spirit).

The next step in Paul's teaching will be to examine this Spirit filled life (walking by the Spirit), an experience he will describe as the "fruit of the Spirit."

# 5.

## Actual Perfection

The "more perfect you" mentioned in the title of this book is a reference to the Actual perfection Christians diligently seek through the Holy Spirit. In other words, the (conditionally) perfect ones are seeking more perfection (Actual perfection) by living according to the influence (fruit) of the Holy Spirit. In this way the perfect (saved) seek perfection (spiritual maturity).

The key passage that this book is based on comes at a point near the end of the epistle of Paul to the Galatians (5:13-25). In this letter Paul was refuting false teachers who were attacking the principle that Christians were considered perfect in God's eyes by faith. Their teaching proposed that Conditional perfection could be kept only if the Galatians adhered to certain rules about food, certain laws based in the Jewish Old Testament, and the keeping of certain rituals, the most important of which was circumcision. What they proposed, in reality, was the pursuing of Conditional perfection by the keeping of the Law. Paul responded by denouncing these teachers and their doctrine and reassuring the Galatians that their perfect standing with God (salvation) was securely anchored in their faith in Jesus Christ.

As for the practice of their lives, he encourages them not to pursue "Law-keeping" but rather "walking by the Spirit" as the defining mark of their Conditional perfection. The point here is that God is the only One who sees Conditional perfection. Man can only see Actual perfection



which serves as the witness that what is unseen (Conditional perfection) actually exists.

## **THE LOOK OF IMPERFECTION - GALATIANS 5:16-18**

Our study has discussed the idea of perfection and its various forms. In order to contrast these, Paul will begin to describe what the imperfect looks like using the terms "flesh" and "fleshly."

**16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

This is a summary reference to what he has talked about so far concerning the false teachers, what they were trying to teach, and what this was leading to: division, pride, strife, etc. The desire of the flesh, therefore, is imperfection. He says that if one desired the things of the Spirit (e.g. Actual perfection), even if it was not achieved perfectly, the thing desired was perfect nevertheless.

Paul tells them that the act of desiring the things of the Spirit will eliminate the imperfect things being created and promoted within themselves. James refers to this same idea in James 3:13-18 when he talks about the wisdom from above versus the wisdom from below and what each produced in one's life. It is a decision every Christian must make because even though we are perfect in Christ, a condition we have received by choosing to believe and obey Jesus, we can still reject the Lord by choosing to pursue imperfection (the flesh) instead of perfection (the Spirit). Paul's point, as well as mine here, is that we choose to believe in order to be saved. We must then continue to choose walking in the Spirit in order to remain saved.

This is where many theologians disagree. Some believe that once you have Conditional perfection there is nothing you can do or no choice you can make that can change this. In response to this idea, I submit that what Paul says here in Galatians speaks directly to this issue. He is speaking to Christians, who are obviously saved, and thus have Conditional perfection. He then warns them to walk by the Spirit and not the flesh in order to avoid suffering negative consequences. The logical

conclusion to Paul's teaching here is that once we have salvation, we can (by our choices) still reject this and lose what was freely given.

This is why this passage is so important. It is not simply a suggestion or a helpful hint, it is the continuation of our response to God's offer of salvation. At first, we choose to believe in Christ and receive Conditional perfection for doing so. Next, we choose to walk in the Spirit in order to witness and maintain that Conditional perfection. Now, some could argue that this was simply another form of law-keeping similar to what the false teachers were proposing to the Galatians. They taught that you had to follow rituals, rules, and laws to obtain and maintain salvation. Was Paul not simply replacing these with the striving after character traits and moral habits in order to maintain salvation as well? This could be a valid argument except for the following three reasons:

## **1. The Things Pursued Were Perfect**

The false teachers offered ideas of men, imperfect ways to achieve spiritual perfection. Paul tells them that what they are called upon to pursue is perfect, spiritual, from above and, therefore, worthy of their effort.

## **2. The Things Pursued Were from God**

The idea that law-keeping was the way to attain perfection or to maintain it was a human idea and thus an imperfect method that would not work. The teaching that Conditional perfection was bestowed as a gift from God and received by faith was from God. The teaching that Conditional perfection was maintained by pursuing Actual perfection (walking in the Spirit) was also from God and therefore could achieve its desired results.

If God said that salvation was by faith and was maintained by "walking in the Spirit," then that is how it worked. Paul, therefore, was not proposing another form of law-keeping but, in fact, was revealing the very will of God concerning one's salvation.

### **3. Walking by the Spirit (Actual Perfection) is Not a Form of Law-Keeping**

Law-keeping says that if you abide by these rules, you receive the prize. Walking by the Spirit, however, is not law-keeping because it is the Spirit that does the work in you, not you yourself. The part that you contribute to gaining Actual perfection is the same part you contribute to receive Conditional perfection. Receiving Conditional perfection meant that you believed, you submitted, and you expressed your faith, but it was Christ who earned and bestowed that perfection on you, you didn't earn it through law-keeping efforts.

In the case of Actual perfection: you believe, you submit to the Holy Spirit, you continue to express your faith (worship, service, fellowship, learning, sharing your faith) but it is the Holy Spirit who creates in you the character of Christ. If walking in the Spirit were a form of law-keeping, then you yourself, through self-will, practice, self-denial and human effort would be producing the spiritual characteristics Paul describes later on.

To be sure, in the world there are many methods, systems and experts who promise a form of these things. This is the imperfect, fleshly, law-keeping method to self-improvement. But walking by the Spirit is not about you, it is about the Spirit creating in His own time and way, in your believing and submitted heart, the person and character of Christ as a witness to yourself and others that you are indeed one of the perfect ones. How else and what else could explain the change and character you end up having in Christ?

Knowing these things helps us understand the following two verses where Paul talks about the dynamics of the imperfect and perfect at work in the same person.

<sup>17</sup> For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

The possession and knowledge of our Conditional perfection moves us to draw nearer to God and to godly things. I am perfect, therefore I want to live and breathe the perfect air that my salvation brings. The Holy Spirit rebuilds the imperfect man into the image of Christ as a response to this desire triggered by the knowledge and possession of salvation. But men still continue, while trapped in an imperfect flesh, to reside in an imperfect world. The willingness is there as is the Spiritual agent to do the work but the imperfection of the flesh is also there resisting perfection. This is why I call what is being accomplished "Actual perfection" because it is the degree of perfection you actually attain in the flesh, not the completed perfection already given and seen by God in heaven. These two will merge into one at resurrection where the flesh as well as its sin and resistance will melt away never to interfere with perfection again.

Paul explains that the Spirit's work is limited by the material He is working with the human flesh and man's fallen nature. Imperfection does not reign supreme, but neither is "perfection" perfected in the flesh, this will happen later. The result, therefore, is that those who walk by the Spirit (choose to pursue Actual perfection) are no longer judged by a system of Law nor is their pursuit a form of Law-keeping.

Why is this important? If walking by the Spirit were another form of law-keeping, the measure for success would be perfection. This would mean that in order to succeed (walk by the Spirit in an acceptable way) one would have to walk by the Spirit perfectly, without error, without ever falling back, always completely enlightened, and devoted. Since we are imperfect to begin with, this would be impossible.

But those who are led by the Spirit are not under Law and have two advantages because of this:

1. They are not judged at all, because through faith in Christ they have already been judged according to the Law and have been found perfect since they have Conditional perfection.
2. They are no longer pursuing earthly, fleshly things which can be measured, judged and condemned. They are now pursuing

heavenly things, spiritual things, perfect things, and led by God's Spirit in the process.

Those who are Conditionally perfect through Christ and pursuing Actual perfection through the Holy Spirit are no longer subject to the Law and are beyond judgment because these have been put in place to judge and condemn the imperfect, not the perfect.

## SUMMARY

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1. The desire and product of the flesh is imperfection.
2. Those who desire imperfection are evident by their imperfect works which Paul describes in Galatians 5:19.
3. Law-keeping does not and cannot produce perfection. As a matter of fact, when one pursues perfection through Law-keeping the results are pride of life, envy, division, and strife.
4. The Law was given to reveal, judge and condemn imperfection.
5. God's gift through Christ is perfection received by faith. God helps us, though the Holy Spirit, to experience a taste of that perfection through our efforts at faithful living, or what the Bible refers to as "walking by the Spirit," or what I describe as the pursuit of "Actual perfection."

# 6.

## The Opposite of Perfection

We are reviewing the passage in Galatians 5:16-18 where Paul is refuting and rebuking false teachers who are disturbing the church with their teachings.

Basically, they were promoting the idea that in order to maintain one's Conditional perfection before God, a person had to adhere to a combination of rules and rituals which they themselves taught, and of which circumcision was the key. Of course, what they were teaching was a salvation obtained and maintained by a system of works or law-keeping. This was in contrast to what Paul had taught the Galatians concerning the gospel: that their perfect condition before God was purchased by Christ on the cross and freely given to them based on faith.

In answer to their false notion that to remain perfect before God they had to keep the laws and rituals prescribed by these men, Paul encourages the Galatians to, "walk by the Spirit." We are saved and considered perfect in God's eyes by faith in Jesus Christ, and we maintain that condition by walking and living according to His Spirit, not by living up to man-made rules that may look holy and pious but have no real spiritual power. For those who are saved, walking by the Spirit (or pursuing Actual perfection) is the natural next step in the transformation from lost to saved, imperfect to perfect, physical to spiritual, and from children of darkness to children of light.

In order to describe what the actual experience of walking in the Spirit is like, Paul begins by exposing what the polar opposite to this resembles. Again, this is not a complete list of possible sins or worldly activities, it is a sampling of the type of things that you will find in the life of one who follows or who "walks in the flesh" (a life where the flesh rules). Paul's point here is that as a saved person these type of things no longer identify your character, your experience or your activity.

## **THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH - GALATIANS 5:19-21**

Paul separates his sampling of fleshly activities that describe the worldly, unspiritual person into four groups of sins, activities and attitudes.

### **Group #1 - Sexual Sins**

Since sexuality is a common trait that crosses every boundary of race, economic background, education, etc., it is a good indicator of a person's condition. Everyone has sexual feelings, and how they are dealt with identifies one's spirituality or lack of it. Paul says that the deeds of the flesh are easily spotted and the most evident are the ways that people handle their sexuality.

Sexual deeds are of the flesh when they produce the following:

#### **Immorality**

Different Bible versions translate this word in various ways. Some say sexual immorality, others say adultery. The confusion can be cleared up when we see that in the King James Version the translators use two separate words (adultery/fornication) to translate the two Greek words that are here, and the New American Standard translates the two Greek words with a single word (immorality). Paul is referring to the practice of unfaithfulness in marriage as well as the wider variety of sexual sins that include incest, homosexuality, and sexual lust. These types of activities are definitely a sign that a worldly or fleshly nature dominates the individual.

## **Impurity**

The original word was "uncleanness." It referred to things that were dirty, impure, coarse, or vulgar. For example, using sex in a degrading and unclean way, usually in words, actions, and attitudes.

## **Sensuality**

Some Bibles use the word lasciviousness. This word is similar to unclean but with an element of aggressiveness. Another English word that helps to understand this one is to be "wanton," to have no boundaries or restraints sexually. One who is open and ready to promote any type of sexual perversion without holding back.

Paul says that this type of sexual activity, from simple infidelity to unrestrained sexual perversion, is the mark of the fleshly person.

## **Group #2 - Spiritual Blindness**

Note that Paul does not include the false teachers here because they knew about Christ and salvation. They were wrong and causing harm, but not completely without having some things right. They were trying to please the true God but were doing it in the wrong way. Paul refers to those who are completely blind with the two sins he mentions.

## **Idolatry**

Idolatry is worshipping something or someone other than the true God. In those days idolatry included the worship of nature gods (stars, mountains, rivers, etc.), the state (Emperor worship), Greek/Roman deities (Zeus, Apollos, etc.), mystical heavenly beings (Diana, Ephesus), as well as thousands of local gods and idols (Baal). Today, idolatry includes the worship of nature itself (the environment is revered), the state (relying on it for everything), money (materialism), movements, philosophies and false religions that have taken the place of God. People adore things like sports and other types of entertainment where they invest more emotional energy, time, and money on these than in the service, worship and the development of a relationship with God. Idolatry is the same now as it was in Paul's day, anything, or anyone that



we put before God or instead of God is idolatry and a definite mark of the fleshly person.

### **Sorcery**

Paul uses this one word as a catchphrase for all forms of occult practice. Sorcery, witchcraft, mediums, magic, etc. are all an attempt to manipulate the spiritual world by doing something here in the physical world. These black arts or occult practices are wrong because they are an effort to circumvent God's sovereignty and power through the use of man-made means.

Prayer is our legitimate avenue to God and our conscious effort to appeal for change, strength, wisdom, and blessings. When we pray, we know that it is God who is in control. With the occult it is the person, who through some secret or dark means, attempts to obtain control and power, the spiritual power that rightfully belongs to God. Anyone who practices such things, no matter how innocently these things are marketed, is not doing it by the power of God's Spirit and is definitely not walking by the Spirit either.

### **Group #3 - Divisive Spirit**

The first two groups of sins are usually spotted and rejected quickly by Christians, but this next group of actions that identify the fleshly man are not usually seen as dangerous as they really are. The divisive spirit is the mark of the fleshly person just as surely as the practice of sorcery and sexual immorality are. The only difference is that we tolerate this more in the church than we do the others.

### **Enmities**

Some Bibles say hatred. The dictionary defines hatred as extreme dislike, opposition to or hostility. The question here is, "What has happened to allow you to actually get to this point?" enmity / hatred / fierce opposition is of the world because it is the final result of a feeling or attitude that should have been dealt with long before but has been allowed to grow. Certainly not a quality of the spiritual person.

## **Strife**

Some Bibles have the term "variance," the only time this word is used. It means to quarrel, to be at odds, to wrangle and wrestle over things. The fleshly person is quarrelsome, ready, and willing to argue at variance with others.

## **Jealousy**

Jealousy is a feeling of anger and disappointment at someone else's success or good fortune. Fleshly people do not want anyone else to get ahead or acquire what they have or more than what they have. Jealousy is based in fear, insecurity, and lack of trust. Jealous people tend to forget that God can provide, and He does. They see themselves as the source and provider of their own needs, so when they or what they have is threatened or surpassed they feel the sick anger of jealousy. Jealousy is dangerous because its goal is to tear down, to destroy and to bring self up at any expense.

## **Outbursts of Anger**

This term is self-explanatory. The real danger here is that people are not honest or open with those who are like this for fear of an outburst. People with hot tempers create anxiety, stress and depression in others because of the constant anticipation of some ugly and hurtful scene.

In many instances this trait is consciously used to manipulate others to surrender their will ("Do it my way or I will get ugly"). This is definitely not in the image and conduct of the One who suffered the indignities of the cross without complaint or angry words.

## **Disputes**

Some Bibles use the word "strife" here, but there is a subtle difference between the previous word "strife" and this word "dispute." The word strife refers to the one who is quarrelsome and always ready to fight. The word "dispute" refers to the one who actually provokes the strife, division, and quarrels. Some do this through gossip or an unkind word. Others do it because of their pride, foolishness, or lack of sensitivity.

"Disputes" refers to that person who causes the division with their words or actions.

### **Dissension**

Again, some Bibles use the word "sedition." This word refers to an uprising against the government or causing division by resisting authority. Some people provoke arguments, others promote the resistance and denouncing of leadership. In totalitarian governments led by cruel and godless people, this may be an acceptable way to change the status quo. In the Lord's church overseen by godly elders, it is not.

### **Factions**

In the Galatian churches there were "parties" forming where each sided with one or the other. The Bible teaches that the church is one body (Ephesians 4:4), to cause people to split into different camps in order to argue over various issues is wrong. The polarization of groups so they can be in opposition to one another is a trait of the fleshly man, not the spiritual one. We are called to unity, not party spirit. This may work in politics, but it is not a feature of the kingdom of God.

### **Envy**

The King James Version uses the word "heresies." We normally understand the word heresies to mean false doctrines, but the Greek word has another sense here which is "to choose." The feeling that one is better than another and a choice must be made. The promotion of one thing over another thus causing envy in some who do not have, or do not belong to the right or better thing or group. Envy of position or possessions is very much a worldly phenomenon. In the church we all share Christ and His promises equally. There is no reason or room, therefore, for envy or separateness from the others. We are all the same. The natural outcome of all these attitudes is violence/murder, which is mentioned in the King James Version but not in the New American Standard.

One of God's primary goals in sending Jesus to earth was to create a unity among all, something Paul talks about in Galatians 3:26-28.

<sup>26</sup> For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- Galatians 3:26-28

A divisive spirit expressed in these varied ways was a sure sign that the individual was still very much in the flesh and in the world, regardless of what he or she said about their spirituality.

## **Group #4 - Insobriety**

Paul mentions two last marks in his sampling of activities and traits that identify the worldly person. These two refer to a person's clear mindedness and self-control.

### **Drunkenness**

This is a pretty straight forward word meaning an addiction to alcohol. It is not mangling Scripture to apply it today as not being addicted to anything. The key is not the alcohol, the key is the addiction. Addictions begin by destroying our credibility and finish by destroying us. One who loves a self-damaging substance more than loving himself does not love God or others as well. Addictions are a sign of worldliness, not spirituality.

### **Carousing**

The other Bibles say "revelings." The original word refers to a letting loose. In context with drunkenness, Paul refers to drunken parties and rioting. These types of gatherings often serve to practice and let loose immoral tendencies. Such declines in sobriety, self-control and personal behavior are signs that one identifies with the world. There are any number of situations that encourage and applaud this type of activity in the world, but not in the spiritual kingdom of God.

## THE WARNING

After having given a description of the four types of activities that define the person devoid of the Spirit (various forms of sexual sins, spiritual blindness, divisive nature, lack of sobriety), Paul will issue a clear decisive warning.

<sup>19</sup> Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- Galatians 5:19-21

Note his reference to the list as a sampling because he adds, "... and things like these." Similar activities and attitudes that reflect worldliness rather than spirituality.

His warning is twofold:

1. These type of activities and attitudes in your lives reveal worldliness in you, a walk after the flesh. No matter what you say, if these are the type of things that are in your life, you are of the world and you walk in the flesh. You may consider this an Apostolic "reality check."
2. If this is what you practice (a normal part of your life rather than what you revert to when tempted or weak) then you are not in, nor will you enter into the kingdom of God. Inheriting the kingdom simply means going to heaven. For the purpose of this book we could say that a person pursuing these kinds of things is not pursuing Actual perfection.

In the next verse Paul will describe the characteristics of a person who is pursuing Actual perfection (or as Paul says, "walking by the Spirit"). The results, we will see, are very different.

# 7.

## The Fruit of the Spirit

### PART 1

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is dealing with false teachers who are perverting the gospel. They were trying to teach that in order to maintain one's perfect status with God, it was necessary to submit to a mix of rules and rituals that they imposed, the main one being circumcision.

In his reply, Paul reaffirms to the church that their perfect state granted through God's grace and received by faith in Christ is maintained by walking in the Spirit, not by following the made-up religion of the false teachers. In order to identify the life and experience of walking in the Spirit, Paul describes what the opposite experience is like.

In the previous chapter we reviewed four types of conduct that are the result of walking, not by the Spirit, but walking by the flesh. The four types are:

1. Sexual Sins
2. Spiritual Blindness
3. Divisive Spirit
4. Insobriety

Paul provides examples of actions and attitudes in these four groups that define the unspiritual person. I also said that this was not an exhaustive list of worldly and fleshly activities, only a sampling. The Apostle tells them that participation in these things is an indicator that no matter what people say, they are not really walking by the Spirit. Once he has given the negative side, Paul will go on to describe another sampling, this time for those things seen in one who is actually walking in the Spirit.

## **THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS...**

Before we talk about the characteristics of one who walks in the Spirit, let us consider for a moment the first part of this sentence, "The fruit of the Spirit." It is important to realize that it is the fruit that comes from the Spirit, His fruit, something He produces in the Christian that is being referred to here. Otherwise, we begin to describe in detail the virtues of love, joy, peace, etc. and people think that they have homework to do in achieving these things on their own, and go about trying to produce them through self-will, as if these things are a diet of some kind and all that is needed for success is better self-discipline.

Paul does not explain it here in detail, but how does the Holy Spirit produce the fruit of the Spirit in someone? How do these spiritual characteristics become a natural part of our character? This happens in proportion to the degree that we submit our will to His will. In verse 16, Paul says that those who walk by the Spirit will not carry out the desires of the flesh. Walking by the Spirit, being in the Spirit, submitting to the Spirit are all terms referring to the same thing: that we are living according to the Spirit's will.

The virtues that Paul describes are the net result of continually submitting our will to the will of the Holy Spirit, but how do we actually accomplish this submission?

### **1. We Submit to the Word of the Spirit**

God's Word was given to man through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- II Peter 1:21

And so, when we submit to or obey God's Word, we are, in effect, submitting to the Holy Spirit who gives us that Word. Submitting to the Holy Spirit/Word requires us to do certain concrete acts that include:

### **Reading the Word Regularly**

Acts 17:11, the Bereans searched the Scriptures daily as a first step in knowing God's true will. This is why cultivating a regular Bible reading habit is so important for the developing Christian.

### **Thinking and Meditating on God's Word**

My eyes anticipate the night watches,  
That I may meditate on Your word.

- Psalms 119:148

Have we ever thought of focusing our minds on God's Word during our quiet moments instead of reviewing past mistakes or worrying about tomorrow's problems? We wonder why we do not know what God wants or why we keep making the same mistakes or why we are emotionally and spiritually exhausted. Could it be that it is because we rarely allow our minds the opportunity to rest and simply contemplate His presence and His person by focusing on a portion of His Word?

It is truly an exercise in submission when we stop the traffic of our minds and redirect this energy towards Him. Since God reveals Himself in his Word, the focusing of our thoughts on the Scriptures leads us to contemplate Him and thus, lay our hearts open to the Holy Spirit. Turn off the TV, put down your tablet and silence your phone. Go to your private place and open your mind towards His Word, and in doing so you will assume the proper position of humility that constitutes a submissive spirit.

Another thing that we can do to submit to the Holy Spirit is...



## Receive Instruction from His Word

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- Acts 2:42

How can we submit, truly submit to someone if we do not know them or what they want? The only way to truly walk in the Spirit is to know the way the Spirit walks, and the only way to know this is to know His Word. The grace of God in Christ not only saves us but gives us a hunger to do what God wants us to do. What God wants us to do is submit to/walk in the Spirit and the only way to begin satisfying that hunger and His will is to grow in our understanding of the Spirit's way of living.

That knowledge is acquired in the same way that most knowledge is acquired, through instruction. Every time we attend Bible classes on Sunday or throughout the week, participate in a religious retreat or seminar, we are expanding our ability to walk by the Spirit. It is no secret that those who are more careful and committed to Bible class as a top priority reap the benefits of a closer walk with the Spirit as an end result.

And the most obvious response of all in submitting to the Spirit...

## Actually Do What the Holy Spirit Tells Us to Do and Refrain from Doing What He Forbids

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

- Matthew 7:21

In this passage Jesus acknowledges that there will be many who have read, understood and profess to believe the Word of the Spirit, but fall short because they do not do it. In that group fall those who know what they should be doing but for some reason or other put it off to some

other time (e.g. I should be more involved; I should give up this sin; I should be more faithful; I should be growing, etc.).

True submission does not take place unless our will (which is reflected in our actions, not our intentions) is submitted/is in obedience to the will of the Spirit (which will ultimately produce the fruit of the Spirit in us).

So, to go back to our main point here, how do we go about submitting, walking in the Spirit? The first way is by submitting to His Word and we accomplish this by reading it, meditating on it, learning it and doing what it says.

These next two ways to submit to the holy Spirit are not easily explained or accomplished, however, we submit to the Spirit when...

## **2. We Submit to the Power of the Holy Spirit**

When examining the Bible as a whole we see that each member of the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) are at the same time equal but distinct divine beings in one God. I believe that this difference is clearly seen by tracing out the role each plays in accomplishing the salvation of mankind. All are in concert but visible to us in separate ways. In very general terms we can describe the participation of each in the following way:

### **The Father is the Establisher**

The world is established by His command. He establishes what is right, wrong, permitted or forbidden (Law). He established the method and the person who would bring salvation and the conditions upon which it would be received. He established the nation through whom it would come. He established the time for the beginning and the time for the end of the world. In the beginning, it was God the Father who willed the world into being and, in the end, Jesus will subject all things back into His hands (I Corinthians 15:28).

## **The Son is the Embodiment**

The Father willed and the Son embodied that will in bringing forth the universe and mankind (John 1:10; Colossians 1:16). After men fell into sin the Father promised a redeemer and the redeemer was embodied in the person of Christ, the Son of God. The Son embodies the perfect will of God the Father, the perfect accomplishment of His Word, the perfection of His church at the end of time, and the perfect integration between His heavenly kingdom and the Godhead when all is fulfilled.

Paul says that, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Every perfect thing established by the Father has its perfect essential form in Christ. For example, we see the universe but the Son is the essence of God's will in establishing it; we see the prophecies, the Law and the gospel but the Son is the essence of God's will in speaking it; we see Jesus of Nazareth but the Son is the essence of God's will in sending the Messiah; we see the church but the Son is the essence of God's will in establishing an earthly kingdom; we see the promise of heaven after death but the Son is the essence of God's will for the consummation of the ages in eternity. The Son is God's link to the human dimension. We see Him in and through and over everything. God sees only the Son.

## **The Holy Spirit is the Enabler**

When the world was established by the Father through the embodiment of His Word in the Son, it was the Holy Spirit who "moved" or hovered over the void, the emptiness (Genesis 1:2). The Holy Spirit translated God's Word and command into the physical action that brought forth the creation, and it is He that sustains the universe. It is through the work of the Spirit that God's Word is actually carried out. When we speak of the "Providence" of God, we are speaking of the Holy Spirit. Miracles are carried out by His power; prophets speak according to His leading; Mary became pregnant by His agency. In addition to these, Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that same Holy Spirit will also raise us from the dead as well (Romans 8:11). It is the Holy Spirit that bestows gifts on the church and comforts the saints when in need (I Corinthians 12:4).

In Romans 8:28 Paul says, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose." We have mangled this verse to mean that if we win the domino tournament, God was on our side working things out for our good. The "good" here is the salvation and preservation of our souls. God works in our lives with the purpose of bringing us to Christ and maintaining our faith, as well as the spreading of that faith.

For example, in Acts 16:7 Luke writes that Paul wanted to travel towards the east (Asia) and preach to the people located there but the Bible says that the Spirit of Christ prevented him. The Spirit of Christ is the Holy Spirit. How did he prevent Paul? Was there a swollen river or broken bridge? Did they run out of money, guides, or were they ill and not able to go? The Spirit wanted Paul to go west, not east, because this was in line with His plan for good. The Holy Spirit works events and forces in this world to pursue His goal of spreading the gospel, protecting the church and preparing for the return of Christ.

This means that we should be sensitive to the circumstances of our lives, for there are two powers working: one is the influence of Satan and the other is the power of the Holy Spirit. We can tell the difference between these two when we observe the direction, events, opportunities and circumstances in our lives that are moving us. If they lead us further into the world and further from Christ, they are not of Christ. If they open doors of opportunity for service, for growth, for knowledge, then know that the Holy Spirit is working in and around you for good. Submit to the working of the Holy Spirit in your life and the product of the Spirit will be seen in you.

Walking by the Spirit requires us to submit to the Word, submit to the power, and...

### **3. Submit to the Discipline of the Holy Spirit**

<sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; <sup>5</sup> and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not

regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him;

<sup>6</sup> For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.”

<sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

- Hebrews 12:4-7

God disciplines us through the work of the Holy Spirit in engineering the following things for our good:

- It could be through various trials (James 1:2-4).
- It could be through the correction of the church in some way (Matthew 18; I Corinthians 5).
- It could be through a period of spiritual dryness we encounter (Matthew 4 - Jesus in the desert).
- It could be an overwhelming amount of discouragement in ministry (Act 23:11 - Paul was encouraged by the Lord as he stood trial before the Jews).

This is not to say that God creates bad things and then sends the Holy Spirit to insert them into our lives. God does not sin, nor does He tempt anyone to sin or towards evil (James 1:13). Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, however, God does allow us to suffer trials and setbacks, discouragement, and arrows of temptation in order to teach and strengthen us. The Holy Spirit is the One who sees us through these things, monitors our progress, and comforts our anxieties and doubts. He even brings our groaning and supplications to heaven before God in an acceptable manner of prayer (Romans 8:26-27).

Some people fight Him in this. They refuse to acknowledge Him or accept the situation that they are in without searching for or gaining any spiritual insight. Some simply bear down and endure without any reference to God and in so doing affirm their disbelief and

independence. They refuse to make the changes or change the course that the situation requires. In doing so they reinforce the cycle to nowhere in their lives: no change, no repentance, no submission, no fruit.

And yet, when we do submit to the discipline of God administered by the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves more in line with the Spirit's will and purpose for our lives and then begin producing the fruit that Paul talks about in Galatians 5.

## SUMMARY

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Before we examine the nature of the "fruit" that comes from walking in the Spirit, we must first identify what walking in the Spirit consists of. If we know how to walk in the Spirit, then the product of that experience will come forth freely, because we cannot produce spiritual fruit through human wisdom or will.

We walk in or by the Spirit in three ways:

1. Submit to the Word of the Spirit: Read, think, study, obey the Word.
2. Submit to the Power of the Spirit: Allow the Spirit to guide our way.
3. Submit to the Discipline of the Spirit: Subject ourselves to His correction and building up.

Most people are not fully aware of what a great thing is taking place in the waters of baptism. The Jews of Jesus' day were familiar with baptism and its use as a purifying symbol so that the idea of baptism to remove sins was not a new concept for them. However, that each would personally receive the Holy Spirit at baptism, this was news, this was fantastic because this blessing had only been reserved for prophets and kings in the past.

It is the same today as it was then. Those who are baptized in the name of Christ receive forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Through the Spirit's power in our Christian lives we grow in the knowledge of God's Word and His will. His will is that we walk in the Spirit and in doing so He promises that the Spirit will produce the kind of spiritual fruit that will bless our lives and guarantee our transport into the heavenly realm.

# 8.

## The Fruit of the Spirit

### PART 2

In the last few chapters I have emphasized the fact that Paul used the device of contrast in highlighting the difference between one who walked in the flesh and one who walked by the Spirit. Paul was doing this in order to respond to teachers who insisted that maintaining one's perfection before God required adherence to man-made religious rules and prohibitions. He taught them that to remain perfect before God they had to walk in the Spirit, not keep man-made rules.

He began explaining this idea by describing the life or walk of the unspiritual person, and gave examples of the things that this kind of life would produce. Next, Paul described the virtues and qualities in the life of one who followed after the Spirit. In the previous chapter I explained that the fruit of the Spirit was produced by the Spirit as we submitted our will to Him. I also said that we practice this submission when we submit to His word, submit to His power and submit to His ministry. Our active bending and submission to the Holy Spirit's will in these ways would produce the Spirit's fruit in our lives as a natural outcome.

In verse 22, Paul briefly refers to some of the results or fruit that submission to, or walking by the Spirit, will produce:



## **THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: LOVE**

In Galatians, Paul only gives us a sampling of the things that the Holy Spirit creates in us, but we must go elsewhere to understand the nature of these things. As far as love is concerned, this first fruit of the Spirit is described in detail in another of Paul's letters, I Corinthians 13. In order to explain what Paul means by love as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, therefore, we need to examine I Corinthians.

In chapters 1-12 of I Corinthians, Paul provides a series of instructions in response to the many problems present in the Corinthian church. From issues of unity and sexual immorality to instructions on marriage, the proper use of Christian liberty and proper order in worship. He finishes discussing the correct function and use of spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and ends this chapter with the statement that in order to deal effectively with their many problems, they should follow a more excellent way, the way of love.

Paul is not suggesting that the following description of love was something in itself to be pursued to the exclusion of other things like unity among the leaders and teachers, sexual purity, peace in marriage, enlightened Christian living, proper worship and use of spiritual gifts. His point in directing them to a more excellent way was to encourage them to pursue these things with the character of love that he will so eloquently describe in chapter 13.

In Galatians he explains that the only way to cultivate love is to walk by/submit to the Holy Spirit. In Corinthians he actually describes in detail the nature of this fruit the Holy Spirit creates in us. Also, in Corinthians Paul describes the character of Christian love and how different it is in comparison to other types of affection and affinity that humans experience.

## **THE CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN LOVE - I CORINTHIANS 13:1-12**

In describing the character of love Paul reveals three important elements about love that make it the excellent way a Christian should pursue in all matters.

## 1. In Christianity, Love is Essential

You can have the trappings of religion and even display the dynamic signs, but if you do not have love, you are missing the essence of what Christianity is all about. For example, a car with a lovely interior, flashy colors, lots of controls and buttons on the dash, but no motor, is essentially useless. He uses three examples to demonstrate that love is essential in Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Even if one displays miraculous signs but does not love, his signs point to nothing and are useless. Signs are used to verify that God is near, but without love the signs are meaningless because God is not where love is not. Jesus rebuked those who taught that their ability to perform signs was enough.

<sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

- Matthew 7:22-23

If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

- I Corinthians 13:2

Knowledge, the ability to preach or prophecy, or a strong faith is no substitute for love. Paul says that the object of teaching, the result of knowledge, the fruit of one's faith is, "love from a pure heart" (I Timothy 1:5). All of the teaching we receive is to create love in our hearts, and if we do not love, we have obviously not put what we have learned into practice.

<sup>3</sup> And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Even zeal and generosity are misguided if not motivated by love. People will die for ideals, donate millions to causes that help others, but if they do it because of pride or misguided loyalty, their sacrifice is useless. Only the giving out of love is honored by God. God looks into a person's heart and if its power, knowledge and works are not grounded in love, they have no value in His sight. Love is the essential ingredient in all matters as far as God is concerned.

## 2. In Christianity, Love is Visible

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup> does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

There are some things like power, faith and works which are legitimate if based on unseen love within a person's heart. There are also visible attributes that are unmistakable signs that a person has love, and Paul gives examples of these. Christian love is visible because it is...

1. Patient: A willingness to bear with other people's meanness, weakness and offenses without losing a loving attitude.
2. Kind: The doing and saying of good.
3. Is not jealous: Envious of another's blessings, fearful of losing one's own blessings.
4. Does not brag/arrogant: Boastful, haughty, proud.
5. Does not act unbecomingly: To be thoughtless, uncaring.

6. Does not seek its own: Selfishness.
7. Is not provoked: Bad temper, over-sensitive.
8. Is not counting wrongs: Vengeful, a "get even" attitude.
9. Does rejoice in right: Loves to see right done, not wrong.
10. Does bear all things: Capacity to suffer much without complaint (everybody suffers, some complain more).
11. Does believe all things: Not suspicious (not a gullible person, but not overly suspicious either).
12. Does hope all things: Not pessimistic or negative, puts matters into God's hands.
13. Does endure all things: A willingness to bear with injury, inconvenience and hardship without losing a loving attitude.

When we see these things in people, what we see is the character of Christian love. Note that these signs are not based on emotion, how one feels about something, sexual attraction and love, mutual interest and service, or the love between friends and family. The love that Paul describes here is Christian love and it is based on a decision, not a feeling. We decide that this is going to be the nature of our character, and through the power of the Holy Spirit directed by the word of God, the Lord creates this love in our hearts a little at a time as each day goes by. We are not born with this kind of love, we cultivate it through prayer, practice and perseverance in the trials that we experience. This is one of the reasons why God allows us to suffer trials, so we can cultivate Christian love.

### **3. In Christianity, Love is Eternal**

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we

prophecy in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

This passage raises many questions as to the meaning and reference of the word "perfect" in verse 10. Some say this refers to the completion of the New Testament canon. Others say this refers to Christ and His return. When we focus on this particular verse alone and exclude the passage as a whole, however, we lose the sense of what Paul is saying here. Paul has been describing the character of Christian love, and in this final section he makes the point that love is eternal, and this is its most important feature.

- "Love never fails." (verse 8a)
- Love never "falls away" or "is always present." This is another way of translating this passage.

Of course, the reason for this is that love is from God and represents His essential nature, this is why it will always exist.

The Corinthians had been focusing their attention on the temporary things, those things that would pass away in time. They had put the emphasis on the means rather than on the end or goal. Their spiritual gifts and abilities were there only to enable them to get started in the faith, they were not a goal in themselves. Paul urged them to grow up and recognize the true objective of their Christian walk which was the development of the character of love that he has been describing. Their true maturation would come when they recognized that love was the objective, and it was the objective because it was the essence of their experience with God. He wanted them to realize that love would be the everlasting experience of Christianity, not the temporary gifts of prophecy, tongues and the like. He then finishes the passage with an extraordinary statement concerning faith, hope and love.

## THE GREATNESS OF LOVE - I CORINTHIANS 13:13

<sup>13</sup> But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

After describing the character of love, Paul places this virtue and experience at the pinnacle of spiritual values. This is his conclusion after stating the various qualities of love, but Paul does not answer the question, "why?" Why is love the greatest, how is it greater than faith or hope? What is it about love that exalts it above these other qualities necessary for Christian life?

In Galatians, Paul mentions that love is the first result that comes from walking in the Spirit. In Corinthians he goes one step further by exalting Christian love above the already precious attributes of faith and hope.

### WHY LOVE IS THE GREATEST

There are three basic reasons why Paul would claim that Christian love is greater than Christian faith or hope.

#### 1. Love is Eternal

Faith and hope are necessary to bring us to salvation and maintain our spiritual lives while we are here on earth. For example, obedient faith puts us into Christ (Galatians 3:26), and constant hope maintains our faith (Galatians 5:5). Once we reach heaven, however, faith and hope will no longer be necessary because we will see God face to face (Revelation 22:4). There will be no need to believe as true, we will actually be in His presence. We will also experience the glorified body, the one without sin or death. We will, therefore, no longer hope for it, we will actually have it. In heaven, only love will remain to be experienced perfectly and forever.

In heaven we will love God perfectly because we will know Him and do His will perfectly. We will also love ourselves perfectly because we will be sinless, and thus not experience shame, regret and the other negative

feelings associated with sin. Finally, we will love others perfectly too because Satan will no longer divide us. We will all be together in Christ, perfectly suited and united in perfect peace and love.

Love, therefore, is the greatest because there will be nothing left to respond to in faith, nothing left to hope for, only love will remain to experience and rejoice in forever.

Love is the greatest because...

## **2. God is love**

John did not say, "God is faith" or "God is hope" he said, "God is love" (I John 4:8). The essence of God's character is love. Love is what motivates His actions and defines His being. Love is the greatest virtue because to love is to know God ultimately and do His ultimate will. Faith believes what God says, hope expects what God promises, but love does what God does.

Faith and hope are the best characteristics of the human heart, but when people love they have become spiritual people and the true children of God (I John 4:16). All religious people believe and hope, only godly people love as God loves. Love is the greatest because it is the defining characteristic of a Spirit-filled person. The true faith and a genuine hope are expressed in Christian love. Without love, faith and hope are worthless.

Love is the greatest because...

## **3. Love is the Power of Life**

It is not our faith that has the power to save us, it is God's love that saves us. Faith is our response to that love.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.  
- John 3:16

Love is what motivated God to set the entire plan of salvation into motion. It is not our faith or hope that draws people to Christ, it is the love of Christ we show them that brings them to faith and hope, and eventually to their own love of Christ for others. The disciples had favor with all the people (Acts 2:47) largely due to the love that they witnessed among Jesus' followers. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have..." faith? Hope? No, "If you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

There would be no faith or hope if it was not for love. Love was there first, and love will be there last and forever.

- Love was the power that created us.
- Love was the power that saved us.
- Love is the power that sustains us.
- Love is the power that identifies us.
- Love will be the power that resurrects, glorifies and exalts us to the right hand of God forever.

To summarize: the Holy Spirit creates love within us in the following ways:

1. He reveals God's love for us in the gospel, and this engenders our faith which naturally leads to our salvation.
2. He maintains our hope of heaven through His loving ministry to us each day.
3. He creates the loving image and character of Christ in us as we submit to His word, His will and His way throughout our Christian lives.



4. He will complete the perfect work of Christ in us when He separates us from our sinful flesh at death and equips us with a glorified body at the resurrection.

Walking by the Spirit begins the process of creating perfect love in us, and resurrection will complete it.

# 9.

## Three Sets of Spiritual Fruit

I would like to complete our study by reviewing some of the concepts Paul has developed in the fifth chapter of Galatians, and then finish with his summary description of the life lived by walking in the Spirit.

### REVIEW

Paul is defending against false teachers who are threatening the spiritual stability of this church. They were promoting the idea that in order to retain one's perfect and sanctified standing before God, a person had to adhere to their mix of religious and philosophical teachings and practices, the chief one being mandatory circumcision. Paul refutes their claims and explains to the Galatians that their perfect and sinless status before God is maintained, not by obeying man-made religious practice, but by submission to the Holy Spirit motivated by their faith in Christ. He goes on to show that the best protection against falling back into the world and its sinful lifestyle is to aggressively walk with or in the Spirit.

Based on Paul's teaching, I explained that Christians submit, walk or are "in the Spirit" when they:

- Submit to the Holy Spirit's word (read and obey the Bible).

- Submit to the Holy Spirit's power (follow the direction in which the Holy Spirit leads us).
- Submit to the Holy Spirit's ministry (allow the Spirit to work in our lives through trials, the influence of the church and the development of our prayer life).

We do not produce the fruit of the Spirit through self-will or positive thinking. The Holy Spirit creates these things in us as we submit to Him in the ways I have just described. The deeper and fuller our submission, the greater our spiritual development in Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is the goal, submission to the Holy Spirit is the means.

We finish with the remaining spiritual fruit mentioned by Paul in Galatians 5.

## **THREE SETS OF SPIRITUAL FRUIT - GALATIANS 5:22-24**

When Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit he mentions three groups of similar experiences and virtues:

### **LOVE - JOY - PEACE**

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#### **Love**

The willful desire to treat others as God has treated us in Christ. The crowning virtue of the Christian religion.

#### **Joy**

The happiness we experience when we recognize and accept the grace that is ours because of God's love for us in Christ. Joy is not the transient happiness that we experience as a result of the blessings we have in life (family, health, success, etc.). Joy is the natural experience that comes from contemplating our salvation and the blessings that stem from it.

## **Peace**

Peace is the same as assurance. The quietness of the soul (as C. H. Lenski calls it) that is unmoved despite the trials and tribulations here on earth. It is an experience of the soul that transcends suffering, fear, and death. It is a spiritual balance that we attain as we walk in submission to the Holy Spirit.

Note that these three (love, joy and peace) refer to the inner experiences that those who follow the Spirit enjoy. The Spirit fashions these experiences in us primarily through our increased knowledge of God and our increased understanding of the revelation of Christ contained in the gospel. Knowing of God's mercy and salvation in Christ, and having this truth pressed into our minds and hearts engenders our own God-like love, provokes joy, and establishes within us a peace that goes beyond human understanding.

Love, joy and peace are the initial fruit produced in the soul of one saved by Christ and led by the Spirit. We make all kinds of litmus tests for finding out who are the legitimate disciples of Christ. Sometimes we resolve tricky religious judgments by saying, "Well, only God can see a person's heart" (meaning, only God knows who are the real Christians). However, when God looks into a person's heart and finds no love, joy or peace created by faith in Christ, it does not matter what other credentials that person may have (religious training, Bible knowledge, position in the church, etc.), that person does not pass the legitimacy test. You are not "in the Spirit" if the fruit of the Spirit is not in you to the degree that not only you are aware of it, but others are as well.

## **PATIENCE - KINDNESS - GOODNESS**

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### **Patience (Long-suffering)**

Patience is that quality of being where the mind holds out before giving way to action. Patience is the willingness to bear under trial, inconvenience, unkindness, and other forms of personal provocation without losing one's composure in Christ. There can be all kinds of

provocation of one who is patient, but the spirit of that person holds out firmly and quietly.

Our two eldest children, tell me numerous stories about their training in the Marine Corps and how the worst failure was to lose what they referred to as their "bearing." They were provoked mercilessly by their drill instructors for months in an effort to teach them how to endure all kinds of psychological and physical attacks without losing their bearing or composure. They said that at times their drill instructor would humiliate one of the recruits in order to get the others in that group to react in some way, but even their laughter was considered a loss of bearing and thus a failure on their part. Of course, this training would become crucial in actual combat where each soldier would have to maintain their composure when surrounded by casualties and chaos. Keeping one's bearing could mean the difference between life and death, victory or defeat.

The same is true when it comes to spiritual warfare. Keeping one's spirit in check is often the difference between spiritual life or a fall into deadly sinfulness, and the pain and sorrow that comes with it.

### **Kindness**

Kindness refers to an attitude that is well disposed, sweet and gracious. A synonym for kindness is the word "benign" (something that harbors no danger or disease). Kindness is a disposition of character that is best seen in generosity. Kind people are generous in all things. It is the opposite of being mean-spirited, cheap, legalistic or narrow-minded. The kind person is first aware of what God has done for him and is moved to largesse. Kindness is open and generous with time, affection, reward and encouragement. A kind person has no problem giving in various ways because he realizes that everything has been given to him by God to begin with.

### **Goodness**

The third virtue listed in the second group is very similar to kindness. The main difference is that "goodness" refers to what a person actually

does rather than the level of moral excellence they have achieved. Goodness wants good for others, is interested in the plight of others, does good things for the good of others. Kindness is about attitude, goodness is more about acts.

Patience, kindness and goodness are less about how a person feels and more about one's relationship with other people. Of course, one who experiences love, joy and peace will soon cultivate patience, kindness and goodness because one set of virtues stem from the other set. Love, joy and peace are manifestations of God's love stirring our souls; patience, kindness and goodness are manifestations of God's love affecting our dealings with other people. The Holy Spirit provides the revelation of the gospel to produce the first group, and then provides the opportunities, teaching and discipline that produce the second group.

## **FAITHFULNESS - GENTLENESS - SELF-CONTROL**

### **Faithfulness**

In the Bible the words faith and faithfulness can describe various things. For example, faith can refer to doctrine (The Faith) or trust and belief, or being a trustworthy person (loyal). In this passage it means that one is faithful or true to God, His word, His will, as well as faithful to human obligations and relationships (e.g. a faithful friend, a faithful Christian, a faithful spouse). In this world of lies and broken promises, a person who is faithful stands out and is especially fruitful if his faithfulness is to Christ and His word.

### **Gentleness (Meekness)**

This term refers to one who is not preoccupied with self. It describes an individual who is not bent on having his will done at all costs. Jesus' meekness was evident when He accepted God's will over His own in going to the cross.

Meekness is not weakness. This virtue is rooted in strength and the knowledge that one has access to power. For example, martial arts

masters rarely use their skill and power, knowing that their superior fighting abilities are what give them the strength to walk away from confrontation.

A meek person will not seek his own will for its own sake. He will, however, submit his own will to God in the pursuit of what is best for the other person or the group. Gentle people are not about winning the war, debate, argument, point or issue; they are about winning the peace and winning the favor of God.

### **Self-Control**

Self-control is the key ingredient in a person's relationship with himself. The virtue of self-control determines the rate of a person's growth in Christ and the quality of his or her self-image. It is the ability to maintain the boundaries set for us by God in our thoughts, words, and deeds. It is the inner strength created by the repeated exercise of obedience to God's will and the Spirit's leading. Without self-control we cannot love ourselves or love others because love requires that we keep our selfish and sinful impulses in check.

When looked at in total, these three sets of virtues address different needs in our pursuit of effective spiritual living. Love, joy and peace describe the experience we have as the Holy Spirit leads us to deeper levels of truth contained in the gospel of Christ. Patience, kindness, and goodness describe the outward manifestation of the life motivated by the grace of Christ shed in our hearts by the Spirit. Faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are those virtues cultivated through the discipline of the Spirit which enable the Christian to maintain salvation and demonstrate the impact of God's grace in a believer's life.

Taken together, these virtues produce a dramatic witness that the perfection one has before God through faith in Christ is actually being felt, seen and acted out in one's daily experience as a Christian. In other words, the "actual perfection" or "fruit of the Spirit" being created in us by the Holy Spirit proves that the "conditional perfection" we have already attained in Christ through faith is truly present in our daily lives.

The false teachers were trying to convince the church that their human methods of ritual and law would guarantee the Galatian's perfection before God. In his response, Paul showed that these false doctrines and ideas paled in comparison to what the Spirit actually accomplished in those who submitted to Him. In still other words, a peaceful heart, a gentle spirit and a faithful life were a much greater witness of one's salvation than a mark in one's flesh like circumcision or adherence to restrictive food laws. In addition to this, Paul said that the things produced by the Holy Spirit were in perfect harmony with God's Law and did not diminish or misrepresent it in any way (unlike the false teachers who had twisted the Law and the Scriptures in order to give their teachings a measure of credibility).

## **SUMMARY**

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In Galatians 5:24-25; 6:1-ff, Paul will go on in his description of a life lived by the Spirit, showing that the few things mentioned were not the complete list of spiritual fruit that could and needed to be developed in the Christian.

However, having completed our study, I will stop here and leave you with three final thoughts:

### **1. We are Perfect in Christ**

The purpose of this book has been to point out that Christ is perfect, and we attain His perfection based on our faith in Him expressed in repentance and baptism. Whether we are rich, poor, sick, young, old, mature, struggling, knocked back, feeling down or feeling great; the only thing that has any bearing on our perfect standing before God is our relationship with Christ in faith.

### **2. Satan's Great Weapon is Doubt**

The false teachers in the first century tried to make the saints doubt the gospel and suggested that there was another way to be saved. Today we have religious teachers trying to convince us that knowing and using



God's name properly, or following their own personal prophet, or practicing certain rituals accurately, are the true way to achieve perfection before God. These methods, however, cannot replace the original teaching given to us in the New Testament that being and remaining in Christ through faith is the only way to be perfect before God and thus, permitted entry into the eternal heavens.

### **3. True Faith is Expressed by Being Baptized; True Repentance is Expressed by Walking in the Spirit**

Do not ever think that God's grace is upon you simply because you have received some form of baptism. This is "sacramentalism" where the blessing of God is tied to the proper performance of a ritual by an appointed clergyman.

God's grace, however, is upon those who express their faith in baptism, and act out their repentance by turning away from the deeds of the flesh to a life of submission to the Spirit. The sincerity of our faith will be seen in the sincerity of our repentance, and our repentance will be evident in the fruit we bear through submission to the Spirit.

It is in this way that you successfully pursue and attain the perfection that you see in Christ in order to become, "The More Perfect You."



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