



09

SESSION NINE

Once Works, Now Fruit

SESSION SUMMARY

This session helps us dig into Paul's teaching on grace, works, and personal transformation to obedience in the light of the gospel. We will see that what we do certainly matters, but the reasons and motives behind our actions matter more.

SCRIPTURE

Galatians 5:16-26

THE POINT

Change in behavior comes from a heart transformed by the Spirit.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

There is a typical scene in many houses today where a father or mother instructs his or her son or daughter to clean up their rooms. Not a “clean it up this weekend” or “pick it up after dinner,” but a “clean it up now!” The piles of clothes have reached a breaking point for Mom, and the odor floating down the upstairs hallway is enough for Dad to demand it be picked up immediately.

While we can sometimes manipulate or even force someone to do something we want them to do, it isn't as meaningful or fulfilling as if they did it because they wanted to. This is the key difference between behavior modification and heart change—changing our actions verses changing the motivations underneath our actions.

- **What are some ways you feel loved and valued by others? Is it the action itself that matters, or the heart behind the action?**

Option 2

Place students in pairs. Once students have gathered with their partners, instruct them to share about two different situations. The first situation they describe should be one in which they were told to behave a certain way and either obeyed or disobeyed that command (ex: being quiet while Dad was on the phone). The second situation should be one in which they were able to do something nice for someone without being asked or told to do so (ex: noticing a sibling struggling with homework and helping while Mom was at work). In their pairs, students should answer the following:

- **Which situation brought you more joy in doing something nice/helpful? Would you be more likely to do that again? Explain.**
- **What was different about your response in these situations? What about the people you helped?**

Now, instruct the students to come up with at least two people they can help and specific actions or gifts that would be meaningful to those people. Doing things because our hearts are willing is much more meaningful than doing something because we've been asked or commanded. Thankfully, God sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within us; He changes us from the inside out, the motives to the actions. The Holy Spirit produces fruit in our lives, inward changes that result in outward changes that people see. Pray that God would use those changes to lead others to Him.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Change in behavior comes from a heart transformed by the Spirit.

CHARACTERS

- **Paul:** former persecutor who became a Christ-follower and apostle to the Gentiles

PLOT

Behavior modification, or changing behaviors, versus heart change is exactly the kind of dynamic at play in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul addressed this briefly when he confronted Peter and highlighted that justification comes by faith, not by works. However, in this passage, Paul explained more in depth the concept of personal works (behaviors changed) versus works done as a result of walking in the Spirit (heart changed).

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

*Works of the flesh
versus the fruit of
the Spirit*

**SPIRITUAL
WARFARE**

*Standing firm with the
armor of God*

GENEROUS LIVING

*A model and motivation
for generosity*

WALK BY THE SPIRIT, NOT BY THE FLESH

When we continue in sin without repenting or measure ourselves or others by how well we keep God’s commands, we live according to an old reality. This old reality has been overturned, canceled, and even crucified. Paul said it this way:

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal. 5:16-18)

Paul wrote because he was concerned about the Galatian church and how they were teetering on the edge of self-righteousness. They had been influenced by false teachers (the Judaizers) who insisted that justification comes by the gospel plus some work on our part (in this case, circumcision). This is what it means to “fall from grace”—we don’t have to fall into some terrible sin, but we can divert our thinking from justification by faith to justification by works. Paul was essentially saying, “If you were born again by the Spirit, you ought to walk according to that Spirit.”

Then, what does it mean to walk by the Spirit? The word translated “walk” here doesn’t simply mean to move using your legs and feet, but can carry the idea of walking in a certain direction or following after someone. Walking by the Spirit means following Him or moving in the direction He indicates. When we walk by the Spirit, we go where He goes, or more accurately, we live how He directs us to live.

Some Christians struggle with this, not because they don’t want to follow the Spirit’s guidance, but because they don’t know how to recognize it. If we are to walk by the Spirit, we need to spend time being quiet, praying, and listening to Him. We also need to remember that the primary way for determining His will is by reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word.

We follow the Spirit when we walk by the Spirit. When we walk by the Spirit, how we live will change. The desires of the flesh and walking by the Spirit take us in completely opposite directions—so change is inevitable. So, let’s walk by the Spirit, since the Spirit has indwelt us and is bearing fruit in us that glorifies Christ.

- **Why do you think it’s so important to be still, pray, and read God’s Word in order to understand where the Holy Spirit is leading you?**
(p. 66, PSG)

CAST OFF THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

It's certainly easier to diagnose the sins in others than in ourselves. It's also easier to highlight more obvious and glaring failings in others rather than to deal with the little character issues that chip away at our witness in incremental measures. Paul didn't tolerate ranking sins, though. In his list of "the works of the flesh," he left no room for "big" sins versus "little" sins or culturally "acceptable" sins versus "unacceptable" sins. All sin is unfitting in the cause of Christ; it's all about indulging in the appetites of the flesh instead of walking by the Spirit. Paul wrote:

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

Notice how little Paul left out. Even in this relatively short list, hatred was listed alongside promiscuity, divisiveness along with drunkenness. Paul mentioned sins that often happen outside the church and sins that often occur inside the church. Paul noted sins that are obvious (carousing, sorcery) and sins that can be deceptive and subtle (envy, selfish ambition). Nobody was left out of this indictment. Every person's scorecard was stained here, and Paul's list is far from exhaustive.

The scariest part of all is Paul's note that those who practice these sins will not inherit God's kingdom. Why? Well, because the kingdom is for those who have repented of living according to the flesh and who have committed to living according to the Spirit.

Does this mean that Christians don't sin any more? It can seem that way, can't it? There's no getting around how serious Paul made the life of sin sound in this passage. Disobedience to God is a heavy and terrible thing. But Paul's use of the phrase "those who practice such things" is helpful. Obviously Christians, this side of glory, still struggle with sin. But that is exactly the point—they struggle! When Paul says "people who practice" he is referring to people who either do not feel convicted about committing these sins (indicating the absence of the Holy Spirit in their lives) or who do not seek repentance (indicating their lack of submission to the Holy Spirit). "Practice" in this context refers to a commitment to a lifestyle of sin, not simply to an occurrence of sin.

Doing flows from being. In other words, who or what you believe yourself to be will direct how you live. Being crucified with Christ means to doing away with our fleshly passions and desires and following the Spirit.

- **What are some things that make it difficult to always follow the Spirit?**
(p. 67, PSG)

DISPLAY THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Doing flows from being. We behave according to who or what we think we are at any given moment, whether we see ourselves correctly or not. You can't get away from this concept in the pages of Scripture. Biblically speaking, this means that when we embrace our identity in Christ, His power enables us to live accordingly.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:22-26)

The first thing to notice is how this list of spiritual fruit differs from the previous list of “works of the flesh” (5:19-21). Notice that the works of the flesh are generally just that—works. However, the list of fruit of the Spirit mostly consists of qualities or conditions.

There are plenty of people who don't have sex outside of marriage, don't get drunk, and don't watch R-rated movies, but they are also loveless, joyless, impatient, unkind, and ungentle. This is one of the major problems with so many approaches to Christian discipleship today—they are focused more on *doing* different rather than *becoming* different.

By calling these qualities and characteristics the “fruit of the Spirit,” Paul showed that the Spirit produces these things. We aren't passive in demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, but we aren't the prime cause of them either. If we have repented of our sin and placed our faith in Jesus Christ—decisions also empowered by the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit goes to work bearing the fruit of these things in us.

As the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control within us, we will also see that our external lives will change. A person who is loving will act in loving ways. A person who is joyful will act joyfully before others. Being leads to doing. And in this case, when we are changed to be more like God on the inside, we will live more like Him on the outside.

- **Which spiritual fruit do you find yourself growing more in? Which do you need to grow more in? How do you know? (p. 68, PSG)**

If you're a Christian, then you will obey because you want to obey, not because you have to! The Spirit of God living inside of us ensures that we will bear good fruit. Producing good fruit doesn't make us sinless, but it does make us sure of spiritual growth, and more conscious and convicted of our sin.

TIMELINE

THE HALL OF FAITH

Examples of living by faith

** Beginning Summer 2018*

THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL

Jews organized a conspiracy to kill Paul.

PAUL BEFORE EARTHLY KINGS

Paul testifies before earthly rulers.

This gospel-driven way of living means that we ourselves are a project, always being developed and shaped by the gospel. It also means that we are always acknowledging that the changes in us have not come through our own efforts, but through the Spirit of Christ working in us. We don't get the glory—He does.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Sanctification (p. 67, PSG)

After we are justified by faith—declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ—we undergo a lifetime of sanctification, meaning we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole person, transforming the heart, mind, and character to reflect Jesus.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In contrasting the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, Paul showed the Galatian church what it looks like to belong to Christ Jesus. Being crucified with Christ means to put away our fleshly passions and desires and to follow the Spirit.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Do you agree that Christians tend to focus more on the sins of the world than the sins of the church? Why or why not?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Why is it so much easier to see the sin in others than the sin in ourselves?** *Pride causes us to think of ourselves as better than others, which is why we try to look for their flaws and mistakes. We also don't spend much time examining our own lives, considering the areas we might need to be more vigilant in prayer and fighting against sin, and so on.*
- **If Jesus died, in part, to kill sin, what does our choice to consistently engage in sin say about our understanding of His death?** *When believers choose to sin, it seems as if we care more about indulging our flesh than honoring Jesus' worth and sacrifice and what He did for us.*
- **What stood out to you in Paul's description of sins and the fruits of the Spirit in believers' lives?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Paul's list of diverse sins are presented as equally serious. Jealousy is just as serious as sexual immorality. Anger just as serious as idolatry. Selfishness the same as sorcery. Paul was intent on putting an end to the thinking that some sins are more serious than others or that some sins are not as serious as others. While sins have different consequences, they all share the same legal impact—condemnation before a holy God.

- **Why do you think people tend to view their sins in a hierarchy?** *Viewing sins in levels may be an easier way to judge sins against the sins of others. We have a tendency to think the best of ourselves, which means if we can place ourselves at the bottom level of a hierarchy, then we surely must not be as bad as those at the top.*
- **What other sins would you add to Paul's list?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

There's one other thing to notice. Some of the works of the flesh Paul mentioned can be seen by others because they are external in nature, such as drunkenness and outbursts of anger. However, some are internal. For example, no one can physically see hatred, jealousy, selfish ambition, or envy. Still, these postures of the heart need to be discarded as well. While they may not show themselves immediately, they will work themselves out of us in some way. All works of the flesh—internal and external—need to be cast off by Christ-followers. We cannot walk by the Spirit and practice these sins.

- **How can internal sins actually be more dangerous to us than external sins?** *Internal sins are the root cause of external sins. In other words, every external sin originates in the heart. If try to build the willpower to fix the external display of a sin but fail to recognize its point of internal origin, then we could easily overlook the need for our hearts to be transformed by Christ.*
- **What are some ways we can be on the lookout for internal sins?** *Answers will vary.*



HANDS

Casting off the works of the flesh is just part of new life in Christ. However, if we truly want to demonstrate that the old self has died and now no longer lives, but Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20), then we have to “put on” the new self. This means we live life according to the Spirit and allow His fruit to become evident in our hearts and our actions.

- **What are some evidences you can point to in your life that indicate you are walking by the Spirit?** *Answers may include the fruit of the Spirit, love for others, love for God, and so on.*
- **What are some fruits of the Spirit you can be praying for this week in your own life?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #3, which contains an informational poster on the Book of Galatians.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject