

LIFE THROUGH THE SON

Galatians 2:20

This year we have been considering the theme of “bonding”, of developing our relationships with one another and with God. Our theme builds on the relational nature of God’s expectations (*cf. Matthew 22:34-40*) and seeks to cultivate within us a character that supports those relationships. This lesson furthers that goal by introducing a series examining “the fruit of the Spirit”¹ in Galatians 5:22-23. The Spirit-produced fruit Paul mentioned describe the relationship-oriented character of those who commit to following Jesus and into whose life God consequently sends the Spirit. We will therefore take the next ten weeks to consider the fruit of the Spirit and their place within our lives beginning with, in this lesson, a survey of Paul’s message in the book of Galatians and how it prepares us to understand the fruit of the Spirit.

“To the churches of Galatia”

Paul had an unusual role in the early church – Jesus appeared to him and commissioned him to be a leader among the Christians he was actively persecuting (*Acts 9:1-19*). His entrance into the church prepared people for the unexpected responsibility Jesus entrusted to him; Jesus appointed Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles and expected him to announce the new and radical unity God creates among people (*1 Corinthians 15:8-9; Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-19; Galatians 3:26-28*).

Because it unsettled assumptions about ethnic identities, some Jewish Christians rejected Paul’s message and challenged his authority (*Acts 15; Galatians 2:1-10*). Opponents of Paul argued that two ways of living existed – the Jewish way and the pagan way. That conviction resulted in a push to convince Gentile Christians that they had to adopt a Jewish way of living (*Galatians 2:1-11*). That Jewish-focused approach to Christianity gave an elevated place to things like circumcision, the symbol of God’s covenant with Abraham, and the Torah, the covenant laws God gave to Israel at Mount Sinai (*cf. Acts 15:1-5*).

Paul composed the letter to the churches in Galatia in response to those who tried to impose a Jewish way of living upon the Gentile Christians. Consider the things he argued for in his letter:

- To those seeking to persuade Gentile Christians that they had to obey the Torah, Paul asserted that faith, rather than law, has always been the way God expected people to establish a relationship with Him (*Galatians 2:15-16; Romans 3:20*).
- Paul demonstrated his point by noting the Galatian Christians received the Holy Spirit, not through obedience to the laws of Moses, but through faith in the message of Jesus (*Galatians 3:1-6*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- In what would have been a surprising conclusion to the Jews opposing him, Paul declared that the Galatians' faith in Jesus made them "sons of Abraham" and heirs of the blessing God promised to Abraham and his descendants (*Galatians 3:9, 29; Genesis 12:1-3*).
- God's promise to Abraham included sending the Holy Spirit to transform those to whom God sent him (*Galatians 3:14; cf. Acts 2:29-31; Ezekiel 36:22-28; 39:25-29; Joel 2:28-32; Ezekiel 11:17-20; Jeremiah 31:31-34*).
- The Holy Spirit, whose presence evidences a relationship with God, works within a one's life to transform their character (*Galatians 3:14; 5:16-25*).
- The transformation effected through the Holy Spirit led Paul to a surprising conclusion. The Gentiles God considered "sons of Abraham" did not become Jewish nor did they remain Gentile. Instead, Paul reasoned, they became "sons of God" through faith in Jesus and formed a new humanity (*Galatians 3:26-28; 6:15 cf. Ephesians 2:11-22*).
- The new identity given to the Galatian Christians, Paul wrote, also granted them freedom from the Torah and from peoples' demands (*Galatians 5:13, 1*).
- The freedom, however, carried a responsibility – they were to "walk by the Spirit" by intentionally embracing the character the Holy Spirit was creating within them (*Galatians 5:13-25*).

Applications

- Doctrine (what we believe) is important, but doctrine and behavior cannot be separated (*Galatians 5:25; James 2:14-19*).
- The Holy Spirit plays an important role in a Christian's life. We need to make room in our lives for him and we need to find ways of supporting the work he seeks to accomplish within us.
- Paul's description of a Spirit-transformed life in Galatians 5:22-23 reminds us that character counts (*cf. Matthew 23:27-28*).
- Spirit-transformed character evidences Christianity's claims (*cf. Galatians 5:16-25; James 2:14-26*) yet a tendency exists to point to different things as evidence for Christianity's truth; its proves easier to point to facts than to transform one's character.
- An untransformed character calls into question one's claim to be a follower of Jesus.

Jesus entrusted Paul to deliver an important message – he sends the Holy Spirit to transform the lives of those who dedicate themselves to following him. We need to consequently ask ourselves whether our lives display a character that reveals the Holy Spirit's presence within us.

