

February 26

Lesson 13

CHRIST CREATES

HOLY LIVING

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 6:1-11

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:18-6:10

GALATIANS 5:18-26

¹⁸

But
if
you
are
led
by
the



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Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

GALATIANS 6:1-10

¹ Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. ⁴ Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, ⁵ for each one should carry their own load. ⁶ Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

KEY VERSES

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.—Galatians 5:22, 23

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recite the key verses from memory.
2. Contrast the life reflecting God's grace with the life centered on serving self.
3. Identify the element of the fruit of the Spirit he or she models least and make a plan for change.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. The Portrait of God's Person
- B. Lesson Background

I. Charter of Life in the Spirit (Galatians 5:18)

Not the Letter, But ...

II. Details of the Self-Ruled Life (Galatians 5:19-21)

- A. Sexual Sin (v. 19)
- B. Occult Practices and Selfishness (v. 20)
- C. Self-Destruction (v. 21)

III. Details of the Spirit-Led Life (Galatians 5:22-24)

- A. Foundational Characteristics (v. 22a)
- B. Relational Characteristics (v. 22b)
- C. Devotional Characteristics (vv. 22c, 23)
- D. Victory in Life's Struggle (v. 24)

IV. Practicing the Spirit-Led Life (Galatians 5:25-6:10)

- A. In Community (5:25-6:6)
Forgiveness to Restoration
- B. With Persistence (vv. 7-10)

Conclusion

- A. Grace and Power
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Portrait of God's Person

If you happen to see a finely executed oil painting, not just a reproduction but the handiwork of an artist with a brush, look at it closely. From a distance, we see a singular image. But up close, we can see the many-layered colors that create the vivid image. The unity of a fine painting is the result of thousands of details.

So it is with lives transformed by the saving work of God. Such lives make a singular impression on us. They reflect how God saves undeserving sinners through faith in his Son. But that singular impression is the result of many fine details. God's grace reshapes every aspect of a saved sinner's life.

Our text provides an experience like close examination of a fine oil painting. In it Paul paints a word portrait of God's person. Closely examined, its details reveal a singular image of divine transformation.

B. Lesson Background

This is the final lesson of this unit's consideration of Paul's letter to the Galatians. At the risk of oversimplifying, *freedom* could be a one-word summary of Paul's emphasis up to the beginning of today's lesson. For former pagans, this meant freedom from slavery to falsehood. For those who came to faith in Christ from Judaism, it meant freedom from repeated failures to keep God's law.

But freedom can be a dangerous thing. Can we trust ourselves to do what is right if we are free from law or threat? That's the fundamental question Paul addressed as today's lesson picks up where the text of last week's concluded.

I. Charter of Life in the Spirit

(GALATIANS 5:18)

18. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The Law of Moses marked Israel as God's people. But in Christ, we are marked as God's people in that we are *led by the Spirit*. The Spirit's power transforms us to reflect God's own character, displaying in our lives the grace by which God brought us into his family.

This has important implications. Not being *under the law* sounds to some like a license to do as one pleases, as if "anything goes." But in this law-free life, God's Spirit leads people to become like God, not to become more entangled in their own selfishness. In fact, it is by being led by God's Spirit that we actually fulfill the teaching found in God's law.

NOT THE LETTER, BUT ...

In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio makes a deal with moneylender Shylock. If Antonio does not repay the debt, he will have to pay a literal "pound of flesh." When Antonio cannot repay, Shylock is ready to exact the punishment. But Portia, a wealthy heiress, appeals to Shylock to show mercy when she says, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd. ... It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

Shylock is not moved by this appeal. So Portia quibbles with him about the precise wording of the agreement. Exacting a pound of flesh will cost Antonio blood as well as flesh. Since Shylock's threat did not mention blood, the "letter of the law" means he cannot get his pound of flesh.

Paul's appeal to be led by the Spirit rather than the law has the force of directing us to what God intends to happen as we follow him. Paul's opponents were interested first and foremost in a strict obedience to the Law of Moses. Paul challenged them to see, here and elsewhere, that "those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God" (Romans 8:14).—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to help new Christians make the transition from life "under the law" to living the Spirit-led life?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In speech patterns
- In behavioral habits
- In relationships
- In attitude
- Other

II. Details of the Self-Ruled Life

(GALATIANS 5:19-21)

A. Sexual Sin (v. 19)

19. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

For purposes of contrast, Paul reminds readers what life in *the flesh*, the self-ruled life, is like. His list of vices falls into four groupings across three verses. The verse before us has the first group: terms for sexual sin.

Sexual immorality is any sexual activity other than that between one woman and one man who are married to each other. *Impurity* suggests both sexual acts outside the marriage context and the effect that such acts have on those engaged in them. Sexual sin affects deeply. It involves physical dangers, but even more it endangers heart and mind.

Debauchery shows the extent to which sexual sin takes a person. This term refers to behavior that is shocking to public decency. Even cultures far from godly standards uphold some standards of sexual propriety (1 Corinthians 5:1), but a life of selfishness will find a way to shock any society.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to demonstrate that a life faithful to God's design for sex is superior to any other?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In marriage
- In singleness
- In conversation
- Other

B. Occult Practices and Selfishness (v. 20)

20. idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

The two words at the beginning of this verse comprise the second group in Paul's list. *Idolatry* involves making gods in images chosen by humans ([Isaiah 2:8](#); etc.). *Witchcraft* is the attempt to use substances to manipulate the spirit world (compare [2 Chronicles 33:6](#)).

The seven that follow the first two constitute Paul's third group. *Hatred* is the opposite of God's gracious love and the sure result of a selfish perspective. *Discord* translates a term meaning disharmony among people. *Jealousy* is a strong passion that resents others' success. *Fits of rage* are strong expressions of anger and conflict. *Selfish ambition* is the forming of mutually hostile groups to advance one's own interests. *Dissensions* take that party spirit to higher conflict. *Factions* suggest not just false belief but persistent, destructive division.

C. Self-Destruction (v. 21)

21. and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The semicolon after the word *envy* indicates that it goes with the previous grouping of selfishness. It refers to the desire to deprive others of what they have.

Paul concludes with two terms that represent public displays of the self-destructiveness produced by sinful selfishness. *Drunkenness* (intoxication from alcohol) suggests individual self-destruction. Drunkenness is part of the wild-party atmosphere of *orgies*, which includes unrestrained immorality (contrast [Romans 13:13](#); [1 Peter 4:3](#)). Since those who persist on this path live outside God's kingdom in the present, they can hardly claim to belong to it in the future.

III. Details of the Spirit-Led Life

([GALATIANS 5:22-24](#))

A. Foundational Characteristics (v. 22a)

22a. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,

The list of acts of the flesh serves as a contrast to Paul's point: what the life controlled by the Holy Spirit produces. All the Spirit's work reflects God's character and actions. A hundred terms would not capture everything, but the short list that begins here provides a sketch that is more than adequate.

As with the previous list, this one groups similar characteristics. It begins with three foundational aspects of the Christ-follower's character: *love, joy, and peace*.

The kind of love Paul has in mind is not conditioned on how deserving of love the object is. Rather, the kind of love in view flows from grace that blesses the undeserving. It is the kind of love God demonstrates toward us ([John 3:16](#)). When God's Spirit creates the same kind of love in the heart of the Christian, we are impelled to love those who do not deserve it and can give nothing in return.

Joy is the outlook of celebration that flows from knowing what God has done. God's Spirit reminds us that God has triumphed through the work of Christ. This gives us reason to rejoice regardless of circumstances ([Philippians 4:4](#)).

Peace reminds us of Old Testament statements about the peace that God grants his people ([Numbers 6:26](#); [Psalm 29:11](#); [Isaiah 9:6, 7](#); [55:12](#); etc.). More than the end of hostility, such peace means positive goodwill and fellowship ([Luke 2:14](#)). As God has made whole our relationship with him, his Spirit empowers us to make relationships whole with others.

B. Relational Characteristics (v. 22b)

22b. forbearance, kindness, goodness,

The second grouping consists of characteristics that undergird relationships. *Forbearance* is patience regarding the failings of others. As God is patient with us, his Spirit empowers our patience toward others (compare [Romans 2:4](#); [3:25](#)).

Kindness names the attitude that seeks to do positive good to others in all circumstances. Again, because God treats his people in this way,

his Spirit enables them to treat others likewise ([Colossians 3:12](#)).

Goodness further develops the idea of kindness, putting the attitude into action. Those empowered by the Spirit do not simply want the good; they actually do good things for others ([Ephesians 5:9](#)).

C. Devotional Characteristics (vv. 22c, 23)

^{22c, 23} **faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**

The list concludes with three general characteristics that undergird all the believer's actions. *Faithfulness* in this context communicates a willingness to practice without fail what one believes. As God has been devoted and persistent to fulfill the promises he has made, so also his Spirit empowers us to be persistently devoted. We conduct ourselves just as faithfully as God has. We are dependably loyal to our Lord and to our fellow believers. We even dependably love our enemies.

A second general feature undergirding Spirit-filled action is *gentleness*. The gentle do not seek to assert rights or privileges. As Christ emptied himself of privilege in becoming human, so do those empowered by his Spirit (compare [Ephesians 4:2](#)).

Self-control is the ability to keep one's desires in check. This was a characteristic widely admired in Paul's time, but not widely practiced any more then than it is now. Coming at the end of Paul's list, this term reminds us that with the Spirit's many positive impulses, our desires no longer become the basis for selfish, destructive thoughts and actions (compare [2 Peter 1:5-7](#)).

Those who exhibit the characteristics listed can be trusted to fulfill God's purpose, as expressed in his Word, in any situation. The Spirit-led require no threats of punishment. We serve God with a joyous freedom that wants nothing more than for his salvation to transform our lives.

What Do You Think?

How far along are you in each area of fruit production? How will you speed the process?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Areas in the germination phase: just sprouting

Areas maturing: taking in nutrients

Areas in the pollination phase: your fruit is an example to others

D. Victory in Life's Struggle (v. 24)

²⁴ **Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

The fruit of the Spirit grows as the works of *the flesh* recede. That process has its decisive start at the beginning of the Christian life. Uniting with Christ in his death by faith at the time of baptism ([Colossians 2:12](#)), believers put to death the old, selfish life. What that life found attractive becomes repugnant in the new life. This does not imply instantaneous, complete victory over the old life. The struggle continues ([Galatians 5:17](#)), but Christ's victory at the cross assures our victory.

Be a fruit inspector.



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Page 6 Feedback

Lesson 13

Visual for Lesson 13. Point to this visual as you ask how the fruit of the Spirit relates to the need to be a fruit inspector ([Matthew 7:20](#)).

IV. Practicing the Spirit-Led Life

([GALATIANS 5:25-6:10](#))

A. In Community ([5:25-6:6](#))

²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

The Christian follows the Spirit's empowerment and lives by the reality of the cross. To *keep in step with the Spirit* is to put into routine practice the fruit of the Spirit. It means really living what we confess to be true about God's saving grace.

²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

To keep in step with the Spirit means seeking God's glory, not our own. We encourage and support one another in this. Since Christ died for our brothers and sisters, his Spirit does not permit us to act in rivalry with them.

^{6:1} Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

A person genuinely empowered *by the Spirit* cannot have a superior attitude toward one who sins. The empowered person can act only in gentleness, a fruit of the Spirit, not asserting one's own prestige. Spirit-led gentleness seeks what Christ sought: the restoration of the fallen, with constant awareness of one's own need for God's grace.

FORGIVENESS TO RESTORATION

Mary's 20-year-old son, Laramiun, was shot and killed in a fight at a party in 1993. The 16-year-old who pulled the trigger, Oshea Israel, was tried and convicted as an adult.

At the time, Mary called Oshea "an animal" that "deserved to be caged." But as a Christian, Mary finally decided that she had to forgive Oshea. She visited him in prison, and when he was released after 17 years, she asked her landlord to invite Oshea to live next door to her. She says, "Unforgiveness is like cancer; it will eat you from the inside out." In the attempt to restore Oshea, one result was that Mary herself was restored!

We may never be called on to exercise the kind of forgiveness-to-restoration Mary demonstrated. But don't we like to think we could?—C. R. B.

2. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

By helping to restore one another, we are fellow laborers who share one another's loads. Sometimes the only burden to be lifted is as simple as one of quenching thirst ([Matthew 10:42](#)). Restoring the fallen is, well, more burdensome. But Christ empowers us to do so. As we do, we join with Christ in fulfilling the purpose of the cross: forgiveness of sin.

What Do You Think?

What would a "mutual burden-bearing ministry" look like in a church? How will you help get one started?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of establishing connections

In terms of developing empathy

In terms of cultivating openness

Other

3. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.

The opposite of the Spirit-led life that helps the fallen is the flesh-led life that builds up self. Pursuing personal glory denies the most essential truth of our salvation: the grace of God. In that denial we deceive no one but ourselves.

4. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else,

Life in the Spirit produces not self-promotion but self-testing. The cross-oriented person asks, "Does my life reflect the grace of God?" That is not a question of comparing ourselves with others. Compared with others, we realize that we are all sinners in need of grace. Seeing the work of grace in our lives, we rejoice in the Lord who is at work within us.

5. for each one should carry their own load.

Paul speaks paradoxically. We bear one another's burdens, he says, when we seek to restore those fallen in sin ([v. 2](#)). But others' failures or successes form no basis for one's perspective on one's own life. That question belongs only to the individual. By the Spirit's empowerment we both help one another and accept full responsibility for self.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to help people bear their own burdens?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning financial issues

Concerning relationship issues

Concerning personalities that are chronically "needy"

Other

6. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

In standing fully responsible before God, we do not think of ourselves as self-made people. We rely on Christ, and we rely on those who have taught us the gospel. To communicate with such a person is to share tangibly from God's good gifts with those who have shared God's greatest gift with us.

B. With Persistence ([vv. 7-10](#))

7. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

The Galatian Christians have already discovered how easy it is to forsake the gospel for old-life distortion when they added circumcision to faith in Jesus ([Galatians 1:6-9](#)). The same could happen again, should they again follow something rooted in the old life rather than in the grace God shows in Christ. God does not allow those who sow abandonment of grace to harvest grace. He will not allow his grace to be treated with hypocritical contempt.

8. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Following the old life yields a death-like result: *destruction* is the decay of death. But the life led by *the Spirit* means the opposite: *eternal life*. Christians are to persist in the good news of Christ as heard in its pure truth. Doing so will enable us to put into practice (sow *to please the Spirit*) the grace of God that makes us his people forever.

9. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

The grace-based, Spirit-empowered life is a life of constant challenge. As Christ endured the cross to bring God's grace, his people endure hardships as they live by God's grace, looking forward to the victory of God yet to come.

What Do You Think?

How do you defeat weariness personally? How can you help others do so as well?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In understanding the relationship between physical and spiritual weariness

In terms of overcoming "compassion fatigue"

Considering the role of the Holy Spirit

Other

10. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

The grace-based life expresses God's grace by doing all kinds of good to all kinds of people. Our deepest kinship is with those who have received God's grace, our fellow Christians. To them we have first duty to express God's grace with our generous actions.

But we need never ask whether the call of grace stops at the doors of the church. Since Christ died for all and calls all to belong to him, then his people do good for all as well.

Conclusion

A. Grace and Power

Today's text sets forth key ideas. One is that God has a purpose for our existence. We are to be like him in his goodness, grace, and love. We find true satisfaction only when we fulfill that purpose.

A second key idea is that we fail to fulfill God's purpose when we pursue something that supplants God's grace. We too often prefer a life centered on selfishness instead of God's gracious love. Paul uses a single word to stand for this dark, universal tendency: *flesh*. By that he does not mean that our physical bodies or their desires are evil in and of themselves. Rather, he means that as a person lives by selfishness instead of God's grace, that person lives as if God were not in the picture. That person lives as if *flesh* is all that matters.

But there is an antidote to the life of the flesh: God's Holy Spirit. He empowers a person to overcome the old life that ignores God, adopting attitudes and behaviors that reflect what God has done. The Spirit's power is sure, but it requires our cooperation so that we fulfill God's purpose and reflect his grace.

Today's text gives us a huge task. But it gives us just as big a reason: the grace of God that grants eternal life by faith in Christ. And it gives us just as great a power: God's Holy Spirit, who enables us to overcome the old life to reflect God's grace.

B. Prayer

O God, may we always express your grace in who we are and what we do! We pray this in the name of the one who died for us. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Life in Christ is more than a change of behavior. It is a change in citizenship.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

On the board write this infamous quote:

When the president does it, that means that it's not illegal.—Richard Nixon to David Frost (April 1977 interview)

Ask, “What is meant by this statement? What was the context of the quote? Do you agree? Why or why not?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Diplomatic Immunity” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work on it in small groups.

After either activity, lead into Bible study saying, “Over the years, people in power have claimed to be above the law. In some cases, society has agreed that in order to do an important job, officials should not be required to answer to local laws. But this idea can certainly be misused.

“Today we will look at this question from a biblical perspective. As citizens of the kingdom of God, are believers somehow above the law in this world?”

Into the Word

Prepare 20 index cards on which you have written the first or second segments of the following 10 admonitions based on today’s text, one segment per card: (1) “If one is led by the Spirit” / “he is not under the law”; (2) “The one who does the works of the flesh” / “will not inherit the kingdom of God”; (3) “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering” / “gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance”; (4) “Those who belong to Christ” / “have crucified the flesh”; (5) “If we live in the Spirit” / “let us walk in the Spirit”; (6) “We must not desire self-glory” / “provoking one another in envy”; (7) “If a brother or sister is caught in a sin” / “those living in the Spirit should restore him or her in great meekness” (8) “If you carry one another’s burdens” / “you will be fulfilling the law of Christ to love one another”; (9) “If a person thinks he is more than he really is” / “he is deceiving himself”; (10) “As we have opportunity, let us” / “do good to all, especially to fellow believers.”

Shuffle the cards. Put these 20 cards, blank sides up, on a table. Say, “Today’s text offers a challenging list of desirable attitudes and actions for the one who would follow Christ. I have on these 20 cards 10 verse ideas from today’s text. Each idea is divided into two segments and on two cards. Find the matching pairs.”

Have one learner turn over two cards and read them aloud. If the two cards do not complete one of the statements, they should be turned facedown again. Continue with other learners until all 10 statements are completed. At the end of the game, read the 10 statements aloud.

Into Life

The message of our lesson today is that we can choose to submit to the rule of the Holy Spirit or we can live as our own person, being ruled by our own wants.

Challenge students to look at the content of today’s Bible lesson and create a pledge of allegiance to the kingdom of the Spirit. A sample pledge may read:

I pledge allegiance to the leading of the Spirit, rejecting the leading of my flesh. I choose love over lust, peace over conflict, and a life of service over a life of self-gratification.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Citizenship Test” activity from the reproducible page. Allow time for students to work on it in class or take it home to complete later.



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