

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

In **Galatians 5:22-23**, we have a list of words that describe the “fruit of the Spirit.” Paul had just finished listing many of the “works of the flesh” in **verses 19-21**. This is a contrast between flesh and spirit commonly found in the New Testament.

By using these two lists, Paul is saying that those who were troubling and disturbing the Christians with the idea that they have to be circumcised and keep the law to be saved were actually violating the law by emphasizing the flesh and were guilty of the works of the flesh. The list of sins in the works of the flesh is by no means exhaustive. For example, lying and stealing are not included in this list. Half of the list was specifically targeting the false teachers’ attitudes, behaviors, and/or results of their doctrine: “*hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies.*” (**v.20**)

Paul went on to say that the false teachers were not acting according to the Spirit, since the fruit of the Spirit is described as the opposite of what the false teachers were doing and producing. It is obvious that Paul has them in mind when he finishes **verse 23** by saying that against the fruit of the Spirit there is no law. In other words, the Gentile Christians who were following the gospel without following the law were not violating the law. The irony is that the teachers who tried to impose the law on Gentiles were violating the law.

In this list, we have a guide that will help us examine ourselves to see if we are sowing to the Spirit so that we produce the fruit of the Spirit and reap everlasting life (**Gal. 6:7**).

Love Since so much has been written on this recently, I will not belabor the point. It is the greatest command (**Matthew 22:36-39**), so it cannot be overemphasized. The kind of love listed here is the love described in **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**, where you will see some of the other words on this list. Love is not a feeling, but a commitment to help others regardless of cost, difficulty, or the worthiness of the recipient.

Joy Joy is often connected with the Spirit of God (**Luke 10:21; Romans 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6**). It is the primary emotion we are to have, because we have faith and knowledge of God. We have hope. This attitude should be our general disposition. Other emotions, such as fear, anger, or sadness, should be the exception.

Peace “Peace” is the Jewish greeting even today. The Greek word carries with it the idea of wishing the best for someone. It was more than the absence of conflict, though conflict would not exist where peace is. Peace is a fruit of righteousness (**James 3:16-18**).

Longsuffering This is often necessary in order to produce peace. When others offend us or do us wrong, we need to have the strength to forbear and forgive. It is good to remember how we have mistreated others in the past and show mercy as we would like to be shown mercy. Forgive as God has forgiven us.

Kindness Here is the idea of usefulness once again. If we will have the servant concept of being a Christian, we will serve others with love (**5:13**).

Goodness God is good. Those who obey the law are considered those who do well (**1 Peter 2:14**). Goodness is a generic word that covers many righteous and many merciful applications. This word, along with righteousness and truth, is also used in **Ephesians 5:9** to describe the fruit of the Spirit.

Faithfulness There is some debate over the original intention of this word. Does this refer to religious faithfulness and belief in God, or does it refer to faithfulness, reliability, keeping our word which we give to others? I believe the context leans toward the second idea (faithfulness) as it is translated in the New King James. Jesus said for our communication to be, “Yes, yes” and “No, no.” (**Matthew 5:37**) In other words, we should mean what we say. We should keep our commitments, even if it requires painful sacrifice on our part (**Psalms 15:4**).

Gentleness This interesting Greek word refers to wild animals that have been tamed. Just because “meekness” rhymes with “weakness” in the English language does not make them synonyms. We once we wild, living the way we wanted. But then, the Spirit of God tamed us by the gospel of Jesus dying for our sins because of God’s great love. We have learned to love Him, and we want to become like Him. Jesus invites us to come to Him because He is “meek and lowly in heart.” (**Matthew 11:28-30**).

Self-control This is a perfect companion to meekness or gentleness. Self-control means that my body and its lusts are not controlling my mind; rather, my mind is controlling my body. Gentleness or meekness is my mind controlled by God. Self-control is discussed in depth in **1 Corinthians 6:12-20** and **9:24-27**. Let God regulate our minds by meditating on His word (**Philippians 4:8**) and our minds control our emotions, words and actions.

We must bear fruit (**John 15:1-8**). Would your brethren, friends, neighbors, and family members say that these words describe you?