Pursue Christlikeness.

Everyone wants to be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and have self-control. That’s what real spiritual growth sounds like. But what if we have been misinterpreting Paul’s famous message in Galatians about the fruit of the Spirit? In *A Fresh Look at the Fruit of the Spirit*, Constantine Campbell reminds us of the context of this familiar passage and offers an encouraging new perspective. This fresh look at the fruit of the Spirit will encourage and lead you into deeper trust and dependence on God.

**Constantine Campbell’s** doctorate is in ancient Greek language and linguistics from Macquarie University. He was a professor of New Testament studies for 14 years, having taught at Moore College in Sydney, Australia, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago.

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introduction

A Fresh Look at the Fruit of the Spirit

Harvest season is a time of reward. The countless hours of work, the perspiration, the constant watering, the diligent guarding against threats, and even the dirt under the fingernails all become worthwhile when our gardens, orchards, and vineyards produce their crops.

The lifecycle of the plants in our gardens ensures satisfying and delicious results. But growth in our Christian lives is rarely as
dependable and never as predictable as the fruit on our trees or the vegetables in our gardens. Despite the agonizing work and the hours spent trying to cultivate maturity, we often perceive only minor results—or failure.

Paul’s imagery of the fruit of the Spirit describes Christian maturity with a clarity and vividness that makes us want to harvest those sweet juicy fruits. But why does it always seem just out of reach? No matter how hard we try, we never seem to attain the patience we expect or the peace we so desperately want.

What if our effort is the problem? In the pages that follow Dr. Con Campbell offers us a fresh look at the fruit of the Spirit and helps us understand who is responsible for growing it. We hope these ideas encourage you in your pursuit of Christlikeness.

*Our Daily Bread Ministries*
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EDITORS: Tim Gustafson, J.R. Hudberg, Peggy Willison
COVER IMAGE: GoodStudio via Shutterstock.com
DESIGN: Steve Gier

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Some years ago when my children were younger, I took them to a concert featuring Australia’s favorite kids’ entertainer and country music star, Colin Buchanan. While we were waiting to get in, I overheard one mother encouraging her complaining young son, “Now remember, Johnny, patience is a fruit of the Spirit.”

I remember thinking how strange that sounded. I was so used to hearing, “patience is a virtue,” that “patience is a fruit of the Spirit” somehow seemed
the wrong thing to say. The more I thought about that phrase, the more uneasy I felt. Not with the woman’s statement—which of course is true—but with my reaction. I was starting to feel challenged, since her words seemed to reflect a more godly way of thinking than mine.

While there’s nothing wrong with *virtue*, it is not the same thing as fruit of the Spirit. Anyone can have virtue or many virtuous qualities. They are usually self-cultivated. A “virtuous person” is someone who has disciplined herself to be patient or brave or generous. On the other hand, “fruit of the Spirit” implies something quite different. Most obvious perhaps is that it’s the *Spirit’s* fruit, not ours. No amount of determination or discipline ripens the fruit of the Spirit. And because it is the Spirit’s fruit, it is a harvest that only those who have the Spirit of God in them can have.

Standing there with my kids, I wondered why it had never occurred to me to say, “patience is a fruit of the Spirit” when trying to calm them down. In the past I had probably asked them to *be* patient or to *be* self-controlled, but I wasn’t thinking in spiritual terms. So I was reminded of something that day: I needed to let the words of Scripture influence my parenting.

I’m grateful for that brief moment of encouragement. But the more I’ve thought about it, the more I’ve wondered whether it’s right to “apply” the fruit of the Spirit like this. Of course it’s
appropriate to encourage our kids in godly attitudes and behaviors. And it’s good to remind them of what the Bible says. Of course our kids should know that Scripture guides our attitudes and behaviors. So what exactly is the problem with encouraging someone by saying “patience is a fruit of the Spirit”?

The problem becomes a little clearer when we realize that when Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23, he did not intend it to be a set of instructions. It actually serves an entirely different purpose but still has implications for the way we live.

In order to get the idea of what Paul is saying, it may help to imagine a target. By starting small with Galatians 5 (the bull’s-eye) and moving out to the bigger rings—how the fruit of the Spirit connects to the message and purpose of the whole letter of Galatians, and the significance of the fruit of the Spirit in the unfolding plan of God revealed in the Bible—we can better understand what Paul is saying about the fruit of the Spirit. My hope and prayer is that the Spirit would encourage our hearts as we stop to wonder at the awesome love of God in Christ and the power of the Spirit in our lives. Let’s look now at Galatians 5.

“Fruit of the Spirit” and “acts of the flesh.”

When we read about the fruit of the Spirit, we often zoom in tightly to just two verses. While these are great verses, if we focus on them exclusively we can get a distorted picture of their meaning and
significance. We need to read about the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23 in its setting. That is the bull’s-eye.

The fruit of the Spirit is set in contrast to the acts of the flesh, listed immediately before in 5:19–21.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 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.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (emphasis added).

Those lists of attitudes and traits couldn’t be more different. They are almost polar opposites. But placing negatives and positives side by side like this is a common writing technique—one that Paul, the writer of Galatians, uses from time to time (e.g., Ephesians 4:25–32). Listing negatives and positives next to each other sharpens their meanings. White looks brightest against a black backdrop. The fruit of the Spirit stands in sharp contrast against the works of the flesh. The difference is night and day.

When Paul talks about the “flesh,” he is referring to the selfish and self-centered inclinations that drive us to sin. It can be largely understood as anything that is opposed to God’s works and character.
Comparing these lists, imagining people characterized by these traits, it becomes obvious that the second list is the better of the two. Those are the characteristics we want. But the contrast between the individual traits is not the most significant difference between these two lists. At the heart of the contrast are the different sources of the characteristics.

The first is a list of acts of the flesh. The list is a set of outcomes of the power of the flesh. The flesh is the driving force and origin of those characteristics. When the flesh is at work, this is the result. The flesh is good at what it does; its works are obvious, Paul says. If anyone is familiar at all with Picasso, it’s easy to spot his work. It is so distinct that it’s tough to mistake it for someone else’s work. So too, the acts of the flesh are easily recognizable.

Likewise, the fruit of the Spirit is produced by the Spirit. Fruit grows out of something—a tree or a vine—and the growth of the fruit is entirely powered by its host. Take a budding apple off the branch of an apple tree, and it will not grow any further. The tree is the essential source of nutrients for the apple. So too, the fruit of the Spirit is entirely dependent upon its

The Fruit of the Spirit stands in sharp contrast against the works of the flesh.
source—the Holy Spirit Himself. Just as the acts in verses 19–21 come from the flesh, the fruit is grown by the Spirit.

The first important thing to understand about the fruit of the Spirit is that it is the fruit of the Spirit. These famous verses have strong implications for the way we live, but whose fruit is it? They are the Spirit’s. We must understand that these characteristics are produced by the third person of the Trinity. He is the agent, the source, and the power that grows the fruit. And His power is contrasted to that of the flesh; they are two competing sources of our actions and attitudes.

**The fruit of the Spirit is indicative, not imperative.**

Indicative and imperative are ten-dollar words that simply mean the difference between an observation of the way things are (indicative) and a command or instruction to do something (imperative). Considering the previous point (that it’s the Spirit’s fruit), this makes sense. The significance of this shouldn’t be overlooked. This means that the fruit of the Spirit is not a to-do list. These verses do have implications for
how we live (and we’ll get to that), but Paul does not say, “live like this, like this, and like that” before he lists the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit grows from the Spirit. It’s not the result of our hard work or discipline, and it’s not a list to check off when we feel we’ve “got it down.” It’s not even a list to put on our wall to remind ourselves of things we need to work on. It’s not a list of imperatives—commands for us to follow. It’s a list of indicatives—it’s just the way things are.

If Galatians 5:22–23 was a list of commands, it would sound something like this:

You must love each other, have joy, be at peace with God and each other, and be patient with one another. You have to be kind and good and have faith; you need to be gentle and exercise self-control.

Let’s be honest, that may not be how we read those verses, but that is how many of us understand and apply them. But that’s not what the text says, is it? The list is indicative rather than imperative; it tells us what is. Paul writes, “The fruit of the Spirit is…” This is simply the way things are. Where the Spirit is, these fruits grow.

Now don’t misunderstand. Not all believers will necessarily exhibit all these characteristics. Even though Christians have the Spirit of God living in them, it doesn’t mean that everyone who has the Spirit will always be loving, joyful, patient, and so forth. What I mean is that these things are the fruit of the Spirit; they flow from Him, and He produces
them. So when they are present in a follower of Christ, it is evidence that the Spirit is in them. The Holy Spirit may choose to grow the fruit of peace in my life, joy and patience in you, and faithfulness and love in your neighbor. They are His fruits to grow as He sees fit—for the benefit of the believer, the church, and God’s kingdom.

**The list is not exhaustive.**

Another reason why we shouldn’t use Galatians 5:22–23 as a to-do list is that this may not be an exhaustive list of the fruit of the Spirit, and it would be a mistake to pursue these traits to the exclusion of some other character qualities. This may be a new idea to some. Let’s take a few moments to explore this possibility.

> There are many places in the Bible where different character qualities are mentioned. For example, the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 constitute a different list than the list in Galatians 5. And Jesus surely possessed more noble qualities than those listed in this passage: mercy, for instance.

Look again at the negative list, the works of the flesh in 5:19–21. That certainly does not seem like an exhaustive list, does it? Admittedly, it covers a lot. But it doesn’t include murder. Doesn’t it seem that murder could be described as a work of the flesh? And that is just one thing that isn’t listed. There are many more. By the same token, I’m sure many other positive qualities could rightly be called fruit
of the Spirit, like generosity, hospitality, and humility, just to mention a few.

It’s easy to puzzle over lists like this and wonder, 
*If there are more, why didn’t Paul include them? Why not mention generosity, hospitality, and humility?* I think that kind of question leads to a dead end. It’s not the point; and if we spend too much time thinking about it, we lose sight of the point that is being made. Lists like this are not intended to be exhaustive, and we shouldn’t read too much into the things they might omit. Rather, “vice and virtue” lists are intended to provide a sketch of common characteristics. They give the idea through broad brushstrokes. We get the gist of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit from these lists; we don’t get an exhaustive description.

**Will all believers have all the fruit in equal measure?**

It’s common to assume that the list of the Spirit’s fruit indicates what *every* Christian is supposed to look like,
in equal measure. Or, to put it another way, we might not expect the Spirit-filled believer to be lacking in, say, kindness or self-control. If the same Spirit is in all believers, then surely He will produce the same fruit in each one, right?

But is that assumption correct? This passage is descriptive. It sketches out some of the fruit the Spirit produces in the lives of believers. But some believers might be more joyful than others; some will be gentler than others; some will have greater self-control than others. In this way, the fruit of the Spirit could be understood in parallel to the gifts of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, Paul explicitly states that different gifts are given to different people. The Spirit distributes His gifts to each one, just as He determines. It is the same Spirit who lives in each believer, and yet not all have the same gifts of the Spirit.

We could think the same way about the fruit of the Spirit. He is the same Spirit in each of us and yet will produce different fruit in us in different ways. This means that someone who is hospitable and generous, but perhaps lacks a little in the joy department, displays the fruit of the Spirit just as much as someone who knows joy, but lacks hospitality. Of course, in an ideal world, we would all display all the fruit of the Spirit in equal measure—to the max!—but that’s just not the way it is.

Perhaps the fruit of the Spirit, like the gifts of the Spirit, are to be thought about in more corporate
terms. While no one person will have all the gifts of the Spirit, the church as a whole certainly will. Maybe we should think that way about the fruit of the Spirit. I’m sure most, if not all, congregations exhibit all the fruit of the Spirit collectively. Perhaps that is what Paul was implying. He was after all writing to the church in Galatia. Far too often we read the Bible overly individualistically, in this case leading us to think that each individual ought to show all the fruit of the Spirit. But Paul may have been thinking in more corporate terms. He may have been sketching a picture of a gathering of believers, who together exhibit the characteristics listed in Galatians 5:22–23.

What is the fruit of the Spirit?
We’ve spent the last few moments considering what the fruit of the Spirit is not. Now it’s time to consider what it is. The simplest description of the fruit listed in Galatians 5:22–23 is that they are characteristics. Notice that they are not abilities (though many of the gifts of the Spirit involve abilities). They are not doing words. They are being words. Someone is gentle; someone is loving; someone is self-controlled. And yet, while this is true, being always leads to doing. This is one way the fruit of the Spirit intersects with how we act.

If someone is gentle, it will be evident by gentle conduct and manner. If someone is loving, it will be expressed in acts of love. If someone is self-
controlled, it will be demonstrated in self-control. Perhaps that’s a subtle distinction, but it’s an important one. Being leads to doing. The Spirit isn’t interested in just changing certain behaviors—adding some and removing others; He is interested in changing who we are as people. Changed people do changed things. But the internal change has to come first. God doesn’t want us to be robots who always do the right thing but whose character is, well, robotic. God is after our hearts.

Something that is easy to overlook is the fact that most of the fruit mentioned is relational. Love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness are all about relating to others. What is love, if not extended toward others? I might say that I love jazz, which obviously is not a person. But that’s not the kind of love in view here. This love is relational, between two or more persons.

Peace is not about being in a peaceful Zen state in which nothing fazes us. The biblical notion of peace, or shalom, is a state of good relations between two or more parties.

Patience and kindness are obviously relational. Patience is primarily relational in that it has to do with tolerant forbearance of others. Kindness has to do with caring for others and looking out for their needs.

While goodness may be less clearly relational, true goodness is demonstrated in relationships. We might think of ourselves as a “good person,” but if we are
always mean-spirited or angry toward others, our “goodness” is rather thin.

Faithfulness is always relational. It involves loyalty and commitment to someone. In the Bible, faithfulness is never abstract, like being obedient to a list of rules. Instead, faithfulness is always about our relationship with God. If we are faithful to Him, we will follow His commands. But just obeying the rules is not the point; obedience is an expression of faithfulness.

Gentleness is relational. Our interaction with other people demonstrates our gentleness. We might think of ourselves as “gentle” because we’re pacifists and wouldn’t hurt a fly and are always careful with delicate things. But if we treat people harshly, our gentleness is not a fruit of the Spirit.

The only two characteristics that are not obviously relational are joy and self-control. These seem to be more inward in the sense that they are not necessarily expressed in relation to other people. We can have joy without anyone else around. We can show self-control in private. But even these characteristics have relational applications. Our joy can be shared with others. And self-control often involves respecting the dignity of others and not infringing on their well-being.

The fruit of the Spirit has significant implications for our relationships with each other. This is a core emphasis of the godly life in Christ Jesus; we all need to get along with each other, showing love, patience, and kindness in all our interactions.
So, what do we do about this?

I’ve been making the case that Galatians 5:22–23 is not a to-do list. It’s indicative, not imperative. But surely there are implications for the way we live, right? Well, certainly. First we need to understand how the fruit of the Spirit fits in the big picture of the Christian life.

Immediately after the list, Paul says, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). This verse relates to the “vice list” of 5:19–21. Notice that Paul does not say, “Don’t do these things.” Instead, he appeals to a deeper way of thinking. He appeals to a spiritual reality. If we belong to Christ Jesus, we have crucified the flesh. Now, remember that the vice list is introduced as the acts of the flesh. Flesh is the power that produces such practices.

But in 5:24 Paul says that the flesh has been crucified. It has been put to death with Christ. Because we belong to Christ Jesus, we are united with Him in His death. Spiritually, we have been put to death. We are no longer subject to the power of the flesh. This is so much more than a simple command to avoid certain behaviors. A radical change has taken place and we no longer belong to the realm of the flesh, enslaved by its passions and desires. We now belong to the realm of the Spirit.

In the following verse, Paul says, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (5:25).
We live by the Spirit. We no longer live by the flesh; the Spirit is the power in the Christian life. We are under His authority and control. And if we live by the Spirit, then we are to follow the Spirit. To follow the Spirit, or to keep in step with the Spirit, means that we live our lives in a way that is consistent with Him. We learn what the Spirit wants us to be like, and we seek to be like that. We align our will with the will of the Holy Spirit. We get in sync with Him. Ultimately, that means we will desire to be marked by the fruit of the Spirit. We will want to be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.

But how is that different from treating the fruit of the Spirit as a to-do list? I’ve already argued that it’s a list of indicatives, not imperatives, and that’s certainly true. But the imperative comes in verse 25: We are to follow or keep in step with the Spirit. That’s different from treating the fruit as imperatives, because our wills are to be aligned with the third person of the Trinity. We are to cooperate with Him. If we do, He will produce His fruit in us. If we do not, we will
remain immature believers, who look more fleshly than spiritual.

This means that the Spirit does not simply zap us to become the mature, godly believers He desires us to be. I suppose He could do that if He chose, but generally God chooses not to work like a microwave, but more like a slow-cook oven. As the Spirit slowly “cooks” us, it is our job to stay in the oven, as it were. We can’t cook ourselves, but we can allow God to do the cooking.

To understand more deeply what it means to keep in step with the Spirit, we need to think a little more broadly about Galatians as a whole. We turn to this now.
two

The Fruit of the Spirit in the Orchard of the Bible

The Spirit in Galatians

Paul writes the letter to the Galatians because the Christians there had started to believe a different gospel. They had begun to think that Gentile (anyone who was not Jewish) Christians must follow Jewish customs in order to be truly Christian. Paul wrote to remind them that faith alone in Jesus Christ, not works of the law, saved them.

Paul introduces the Spirit in chapter 3 by asking if the Galatians received the Spirit by obeying the laws of Moses or by believing what they heard about Jesus. He reminds them that Jesus redeemed them so they might be blessed by receiving the Spirit. God
adopted them and sent the Spirit into their hearts as a sign of that adoption. As sons and daughters, they are free, not slaves. And since they are free, they shouldn’t turn around and make themselves slaves again.

But, Paul warns, this new freedom that comes from our adoption by God and the coming of the Spirit should not to be used to indulge our own selfish desires. Instead, the newfound freedom should be used to serve each other in love. Walking by the Spirit would help the Galatians not to gratify the desires of the flesh. The works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit are both obvious. It is easy to tell if actions are selfish or motivated by the Spirit. Since the flesh no longer controls them, they should live by the Spirit.

This brief synopsis of Galatians shows how the Spirit fits into Paul’s explanation of the Christian life, and therefore how we should think about the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit is the sign of adoption into God’s family—He is the sign of freedom. Living by the Spirit is the answer to the problem that Paul set out to address. Do Gentile Christians need to live by Jewish customs? No! Followers of Jesus should live according to the Spirit.
Paul’s point in this part of Galatians is not to criticize Jewish practices. He does not say that Jews should abandon their customs. He is simply saying that following those customs is not a requirement to be a follower of Christ and that, regardless of ethnicity, followers of Jesus should live according to the Spirit.

Galatians in the Bible

What Galatians says about God and life for those who follow Christ intersects with some of the biggest themes of the Bible. The promises to Abraham (see Genesis 12:1–3) are fulfilled in Christ, since people of all nations are blessed through faith in Him. The justice demanded by the law of Moses is satisfied in Christ’s crucifixion. In the book of Galatians, life under the law is contrasted to the new life under the Spirit. This new life is the result of a promise given long ago. The promise that the Spirit of God would dwell within His people is first given by the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel.

The promise in Ezekiel 36:27 is especially interesting for understanding the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. In that passage the Lord says, “I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” We’ve already seen from Galatians that the presence of the Spirit is the sign of new life. Because of Christ’s death on the cross that paid the penalty for sin and our redemption through faith in Him, the presence of the Spirit in Christians’ hearts fulfills the first half
of Ezekiel 36:27. But it’s the second half of the verse that connects most directly to the fruit of the Spirit. The Lord says He will put His Spirit within you and move you to follow His decrees and laws. In other words, the Spirit of God will enable the people of God to live His way.

The second half of Ezekiel 36:27 is fulfilled in the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit brings forth love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in the lives of believers. And notice what Paul adds at the end of Galatians 5:23, “Against such things there is no law.” The point here is that if the Spirit is growing His fruit in your life, you will be living in line with the law of God. Christians are not bound by the law of Moses, but their lives will nonetheless live up to the moral standards set in the law. But this doesn’t happen through “law-keeping” or being good; rather, it will happen by keeping in step with the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is part of the grand plan of God to enable His people to live in a way that pleases Him—living by the power of the Spirit. As members of God’s family—adopted sons and daughters—God shapes us to be like Him, and to bear the characteristics that flow from His own character. The fruit of the Spirit is nothing less than the culmination of centuries of promise and expectation that finds fulfillment as the result of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. What a privilege to be Spirit-filled people!
We’ve explored what the fruit of the Spirit is (and what it isn’t) and why it matters. We turn now to consider how the fruit of the Spirit shapes Christian living.

It is wonderful to consider all that God has done for us in Christ and continues to do through the Holy Spirit. For all He has done, our responsibility is simple: Keep in step with the Spirit and resist the flesh. We are to cooperate with the work He is doing as we look forward to the day when the power of the flesh will be conquered.
One of the most important things the Spirit does is to point us to Christ. That means one way we can keep in step with the Spirit is to fix our eyes on Jesus. Let our daily thoughts and meditations return to Him time and time again. Let Him be the center of our thoughts, our imagination, and our desires. As we choose to follow Christ, to depend on Him, and to submit to Him, we will be keeping in step with the Spirit.

We can also reflect on who Jesus is. He is God the Son. He is our humble and gracious Savior, who gave up His place at the Father’s side to become a human being, to be despised and rejected, and to die in our place. As we reflect on Jesus’s character, not only do we learn how to be better people, we are drawn to emulate Him in our thoughts, speech, and actions. Jesus is merciful and kind. He treats others with respect and compassion. He is the very model of the fruit of the Spirit.

As we reflect on Jesus, we have opportunity to express our dependence on Him for all things, not least our salvation. He is the source of eternal life, and indeed of all life as the ruler and sustainer of the entire cosmos. Our prayerful dependence on Christ brings Him honor and is the right disposition of our hearts. All such reflection on Christ and expression of our dependence on Him is produced through the influence of the Spirit.

But we all know too well the reality that the Christian life is a struggle. While the Spirit does
indeed work powerfully within us, the Scriptures exhort us to resist living according to the flesh. This assumes that we can still give ourselves over to the power of the flesh. We are not given the option of being passive. And so, throughout the Christian life, there is an ongoing tension between living by the Spirit and giving in to our own selfish desires.

A good daily prayer is to ask God for the strength to remain engaged in the struggle. There are only two ways the struggle can stop feeling like a struggle. The first is to die and be with the Lord. The second is to give up the struggle and give in to the flesh. This is the option we must avoid! So we need to be on our guard against feelings of hopelessness that discourage us to remain in the fight.

Though it will sometimes feel like it, our battle against the flesh is not hopeless. There are two major reasons for this: We are no longer under the authority of sin, and the Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance. Let’s explore these in turn.

We are no longer under the authority of sin. Paul develops this point in greatest detail in Romans 6. If we have died with Christ, we have been set free from
Though it will sometimes feel like it, our battle against the flesh is not hopeless.

sin (Romans 6:7). What Paul means by “sin” in Romans 6 is sin as a power, or ruler. The point he is making is that, by dying with Christ, believers have been released from sin’s power; we now live under Christ’s authority. Yet Paul appeals to the Romans not to put themselves under sin again (6:12–13). While sin is no longer our master (6:14), the pull to go on “obeying” sin is real and powerful. But Paul wants us to realize that we don’t have to give in.

The famous Welsh preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones illustrated this struggle well. In 1865 the work of Abraham Lincoln and others to abolish slavery in the United States finally came to fruition. All slaves were declared free. Lloyd-Jones says to imagine you had grown up a slave in Alabama. One minute, you’re a slave. The next, you are free—legally, officially, and forever free. While you may now have your freedom, your internal grasp of that freedom may take some time to catch up to the reality. Imagine that one day you ran into your former slave-owner on the street, and he calls out to you, “Come here, boy!” At that moment, will you feel like a slave? I think you probably would. Your whole life, you’ve responded to him as your master. You’re
conditioned to obey that voice. Every muscle and fiber in your body is inclined to obey.

But the *reality* is that you are free. You are not a slave. Your former master has no authority over you at all. He cannot tell you what to do, and you have no obligation to obey him.

Our struggle with sin is just like this. Sin once ruled over us, and our bodies were conditioned to obey its demands. It’s the way we lived our entire lives until we were set free by Christ. Now that we know spiritual freedom, our comprehension of it can take a while to catch up. Occasionally, sin calls out, “Come here, boy!” and our initial impulse is to obey. But in Christ we are no longer slaves to sin. We do not need to obey its call. And yet we will feel its pull and even struggle with our first reaction to give in to its demands. Even though we are free, we can choose to do what it says, even though sin has no right to tell us what to do.

*Sin sometimes demands our attention and our obedience. However, sometimes sin whispers in our ear and seduces us. “Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14–15).*

And so, we live this life with an ongoing tension between the Spirit and our former rulers, sin and the flesh. We are to go on choosing the Spirit. We belong to Christ now, and His Spirit is powerful. Let us keep
in step with the Spirit, and deny the illegitimate call of the conquered powers of sin and the flesh.

The second major reason our battle against the flesh is not hopeless is that it will one day come to an end. As Paul says in Ephesians 1:13–14, the Spirit is a seal marking the fact that we belong to Christ. And He is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance, until He finally redeems us. This means that the Spirit is the proof of our future. As the sign of the new age, we know that Spirit-filled people will one day be fully transformed, with new resurrection bodies, and we will be, once and for all, totally free from sinning.

Paul puts this in a similar way in Romans 8:14–17. Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God, since He is the Spirit of adoption. In fact, the Spirit enables us to cry “Abba, Father,” and testifies that we are God’s children. The punch line comes in verse 17, “If we are children [of God], then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” While we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him. So we see that the presence of the Spirit in our lives points forward to a glorious future—a future
without sin, suffering, or shame as the glorified children of God.

The tension between the flesh and the Spirit goes on until that day. But as we continue to live according to the Spirit, as we strive to keep in step with Him, and as we resist the call of the flesh, the Spirit will continue to produce His fruit in us.

**Harvest time**

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, as well as other Christlike characteristics. The Spirit lives in us because new life has come in Christ, and we have been set free from slavery to the flesh, sin, and the law. He is the sign of the new age and is the seal of our membership in God’s family. The Spirit works in us to produce fruit that is in keeping with the family likeness, as we fix our eyes on Jesus, remain fully dependent upon Him, and seek to worship Him in all of life.

The fruit of the Spirit is not a to-do list to check off. The Spirit produces the fruit in us. Christianity is not a set of rules, nor is the Bible a manual for good living. Christianity is about a relationship with God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.
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