

Led by the Spirit / "The Traits of Spirit"

As part of my preparation for a memorial service, I customarily visit with families and friends of the one who has passed away. Among other things, I usually ask them to give me some **character traits** of their loved one. I rarely hear anything negative, but on one occasion the only reply was a blank expression_ a long pause_ and then, *"I don't know what you're looking for_ but the only thing I can think of is my mom was pretty stubborn."* Pretty sad_ but I put a positive spin on that in the eulogy, saying that she was *"a woman of firm resolve."*

In **Galatians 5:16-25** we have a list of some **character traits** people possess. That's page #1815 in the pew Bibles. Reading from **verse 16**: **"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."** ¹⁷ **For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.** ¹⁸ **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.** ¹⁹ **The acts of the sinful nature 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'd say those are some pretty undesirable **attributes**, wouldn't you? They certainly shouldn't describe children of God.

My guess is that, you probably didn't even flinch at the words **"idolatry and witchcraft"** - for they seem pretty foreign to us. But, I have known some Christians who place many things before God and many others whose lives are guided more by silly superstitions than by sincere faith in Jesus. They are more worried when a black cat crosses their path than when they stray from the path God has laid out for them. They'll cross the street to avoid walking under a ladder, but won't go a step out of their way to follow Jesus. They carry crosses and prayer coins like they would a rabbits foot_ as if they are some sort of talisman to protect them from bad things.

Some of the other traits we may readily condemn in others, but secretly embody. **"Sexual sin, impurity, debauchery, drunkenness, and orgies"**_ sure, these are all wrong_ but a little once in awhile is normal, right? Normal for some, yes. But immoral for God's kids. And as far as the rest of the stuff Paul mentions, **"hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy"** - well, surely God doesn't expect us to be totally free from such attitudes and behaviors_ does He? Well, Paul closes this section with this caution: **"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."** So, it may seem to those who are controlled by the flesh that these traits must certainly be as prevalent among God's people as with those in the world_ but anyone led by the Spirit will know better. Though we all fall short of God's glory, if these things are seen it should be apparent to all those who know us that they are out of character for us. Actually, if it should be reported that we'd produced such fruit, our friends and neighbors would have a hard time believing those reports. *"I can't imagine so-in-so behaving that way."*

In fact, reading on from **verse 22**, Paul speaks of the stark contrast between disciples of Jesus and those who reject Him. **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ²³ **gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law."** The fruit of the Spirit are the traits of the followers of Jesus_ and it is the fruit that should be characteristic of them.

I've noticed that fruit like apples, oranges, grapefruit, lemons, limes, tangerines, pears, plums, pomegranates, dates, figs, apricots, and peaches grow on trees. But, other fruits like grapes, kiwi, cantaloupe, and watermelon grow on vines.

And strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries_, and even pineapples grow on bushes. There is quite a variety of plants that bear fruit. So what's my point? The fruit of the Spirit may be produced in a variety of people. Believers of all races, both men and women of any age, can bear fruit in God's vineyard,

So why don't we see more love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control in the world or in our city? In our workplaces or in our schools? In our homes_ or in our churches? Paul may give us the clue in **verse 24** where he says: **"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."**

Jesus had this to say in **Luke 6:43-44**: ⁴³ **"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars."** Hear that. If you are not bearing the fruit of the Spirit, it's a pretty good indication that you either don't have the Spirit_ or you are not being nourished by the Spirit. You've got be fed by the Spirit to be led by the Spirit.

Then Jesus says this in **John 15:1-8**: **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."**

In other words, before a tree, bush, or vine can produce good fruit it needs to be properly rooted - and then it needs to be periodically pruned. Both of these processes are passive. That's why I must remind you that **"The Leading of the Spirit"** involves surrender. So, I am hesitant to add anything to that. However, Paul's urging **Galatians 5:16** uses the word *"perepeto"* to instruct us to **"live by the Spirit."** That term carries the idea of *"walking around freely."* It's as if he is saying we have a responsibility to produce the fruit God's Spirit empowers us to. In **Galatians 5:25** we find what appears to be the same wording: ²⁵ **Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."** Yet, here Paul uses the word *"stoicheo"*, which means to *"step precisely,"* or to *"go in procession."* Think of marching. So the directive to live by the Spirit has a double emphasis.

Imagine that even though Nina has a new knee and has been given excellent physical therapy, she refused to get up and walk. People might question her surgeon. Maybe he didn't do a good job. Or maybe the knee he gave her is defective. Or maybe those who trained her failed in their responsibility. Or maybe all if the above,

Now, what might people think of Jesus if you don't walk as He intends? What might they say about the Spirit He caused to dwell inside you? What might they say about me or any of the other teachers you have had? Do you not see that you have been empowered, equipped, and are being trained through the Spirit? So why don't you **start walking**?