

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: PART 2 (Pete Greig)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Galatians 5:16-25

¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the 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.

Here Paul addresses the question 'How can we change?' That is, 'How can we become better people – inwardly more beautiful versions of ourselves?' In a world where the self-help industry is worth \$13.2 billion a year, supplements in The Times tell you 'How to Improve Your Life' and there are Apps to make you nicer, there is a hunger for transformation. However, many doubt that any sort of redemption is possible. In his 1994 book, 'Life After God', Douglas Coupland writes, "And then I felt sad because I realized that once people are broken in certain ways, they can't ever be fixed, and this is something nobody ever tells you when you are young and it never fails to surprise you as you grow older as you see the people in your life break one by one. You wonder when your turn is going to be, or if it's already happened."

Paul affirms that change is possible, not through self-help, for it is the Spirit who transforms us. This is not to take a path of passivity, for 'the desires of the flesh' are ever with us. Rather we must choose to 'live by the Spirit' (v.16), be 'led by the Spirit' (v.18), 'keep in step with the Spirit'. This requires the use of 'means of grace'. Two practical steps we can take are 1. Meditation, and 2. Fellowship.

Meditation: **Romans 8:5-6** '*...The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.*' **Philippians 4:8** '*...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*' Just as the brains of London cabbies are shaped by acquiring The Knowledge, so our minds and neural pathways are changed by the way we think. What do you fill your mind with? The pure, lovely, and praiseworthy, or pornography, screen violence, horror, and the influence of 'psychotoxic' people. Also be aware of the need to process unresolved trauma.

Fellowship: The importance of making healthy attachments – 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (Bowlby). Studies have shown that if the process of forming healthy attachments to a primary caregiver in infancy is broken it can lead to negative behaviour in later life. One study¹ noted nine adult marks of broken childhood attachment as: Isolation, Depression, Violence, Anger, Narcissism, Criminality, Divorce, Aggression, and Addiction. These, remarkably, correspond to the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22**: Isolation→Love, Depression→Joy, Violence→Peace, Anger→Forbearance, Narcissism→Kindness, Criminality→Goodness, Divorce→Faithfulness, Aggression→Gentleness, Addiction→Self-control. Here a contemporary psychological truth mirrors a 2,000 year old theological truth. Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:7**, 'You must be born again' ('born from above'). Our broken attachments can be restored through a relationship with The Father – the one Jesus named *Abba*, who is revealed by the Spirit, and in a healing community.

- *One question... What must I do now? What is the Spirit challenging me to do in response to this message?*

¹ Cited by Pete, although it has not been possible to verify either title or author(s) of a this paper from at least 20 years ago.