

THE NINE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT: GALATIANS 5:22-23
(According to the English Standard Version)
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Below is a brief explanation of each “fruit of the Spirit.” The nine fruits (vv. 22-23) are placed in a stark contrast to the self-centered, self-assertive “works of the flesh” listed in verses 19-21.

Love: “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16). We know what love is by observing the self-sacrificing life of Jesus Christ for the salvation of others. We also know what love is by the fifteen descriptions of what love does and doesn’t do in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (see chapter 2 of *If You Bite & Devour One Another*). The remedy to the perverse self-centeredness of all works of the flesh is Spirit-produced love.

Joy: Regardless of the circumstances, we are to be people marked by Spirit-generated joy. Rejoicing in the Lord is our daily duty and delight (Phil. 4:4). Biting and devouring one another over doctrinal differences and disputable matters sours Christian relationships and robs us of our God-given joy.

Peace: Whereas the flesh produces “rivalries, dissensions, divisions,” according to Galatians 5:20, the Spirit seeks to bring people together in harmony and unity. Scripture teaches that “peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” are to be a guide to our relationships with brothers and sisters with whom we disagree over matters of conscience: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Let’s keep our priorities straight.

Patience: This word is better rendered as “forbearance” or “longsuffering.” More literally it means “long-tempered,” particularly in respect to personal injuries or wrongs suffered at the hands of others. In contrast, the flesh produces “fits of anger” (v. 20) and hostile provocations of one another (v. 26). Without the grace of longsuffering we likely would be in perpetual conflict.

Kindness: If longsuffering is the more passive response to wrongs suffered, “kindness” is the active expression of showing mercy and helpful service to others. “The Spirit not only empowers one to endure the hostility or unkindness of another; he also enables one to show kindness to such and actively to pursue their good.”¹

Goodness: Christians are to be “full of goodness” (Rom. 15:14). Prompted by the Spirit, believers seek to “do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Restoring fallen believers and bearing one another’s burdens is included in doing good (Gal. 5:22).

Faithfulness: Those characterized by “faithfulness” trust and obey God. They walk by faith in dependence on God’s Word and respond consistently to the guidance and restraint of the Holy Spirit. They are not easily sidetracked by problems or false teachers. Those who are faithful will handle conflict according to God’s instructions and trust God for the outcome. Those controlled by the flesh, in bold contrast, distrust God’s Word and are quick to desert.

¹Gordon D. Fee, *Galatians*, Pentecost Commentary (Blandford Forum, Dorset, UK: Deo, 2007), 222.

Gentleness: This term combines the ideas of humility and considerateness toward others. The Holy Spirit always leads believers to handle people and their problems with gentleness. Walking by the Spirit entails helping to “restore” a fellow believer who has fallen into sin “in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1). Even when confronting a false teacher, Christians are to exhibit “gentleness” (2 Tim. 2:24-26). By contrast, the flesh acts with arrogance and harshness. (See 1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:1; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 6:11; Titus 3:2)

Self-control: Mastery over one’s desires and passions is one of the most important qualities needed to deal with the strong feelings that conflict generates. In disagreements over religious issues, emotion can easily overthrow reason. Without Spirit-produced self-control the flesh casts off restraint and unleashes destructive anger, inflammatory speech, and bitter hostility.