

RIDGECREST BAPTIST CHURCH

HOLY LIVING IN A HOSTILE WORLD

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (ROMANS 8:5-17 AND GALATIANS 5:16-26)

WEEK 1



PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

Because of Jesus' work on the cross, which made a way for us to be reconciled to God, we have the Holy Spirit living in us and bearing fruit in our lives. By the power of the Spirit, we are able to pursue holy living in a hostile world.

SUNDAY

READ ROMANS 8:5-8.

COMMENTARY

Rom. 8:5. Paul often contrasted ideas in order to clarify the point he was making. Here he contrasted two opposing ways of living: flesh and Spirit. The lower nature (flesh) is in constant rebellion against the higher nature (Spirit). To live according to the flesh means to think about the things of the flesh. Thinking precedes action. The mind determines the direction of the body. A sinful mind-set inevitably leads to sinful living. On the other hand, Christians are to live according to the Spirit. We can subject ourselves to the control of God's Spirit within us and then live in a way that reflects His presence. The great challenge is to continually concentrate on the Spirit.

Rom. 8:6. The contrast continues in this verse as Paul noted the difference between the consequences of living in these two ways. Death is the experience of someone who has the mind-set of the flesh. Notice Paul did not write death will come but rather death is the present experience of anyone apart from Christ. Separation from the source of life means death. The consequence for those of us who adopt the mind-set of the Spirit is completely different. Life is precisely what we expect and what we receive as a result of having the source of life within us. God sent Jesus to bring us back to life. The second benefit for those of us guided by the Spirit is peace. This refers primarily to the state of our relationship with God. We are no longer at odds with Him. Instead, we have a relationship through Christ in which we experience God's presence and love. Peace of mind, which we may normally associate with the word **peace**, comes from the more important and fundamental peace with God.

Rom. 8:7. Additionally, the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God. It is not willing to submit to God but insists on its own way. The original sin of Adam set a pattern for all sin. It is a basic mistrust of God and a selfish desire to resist God's way. For this reason this mind-set leads to the death described in the previous verse. In fact, the fleshly mind-set is unable **to submit . . . to God's law**. Hostility to God and to His requirement in the law sets a moral and spiritual course in life that makes submission to God increasingly impossible. Our sin creates an unbridgeable chasm that remains regardless of how many times we may attempt self-renovation. We must have help from outside of ourselves.

Rom. 8:8. This verse essentially repeats the substance of the previous verse but at the same time gives an important conclusion. To be in the flesh describes a life that is determined by the flesh in the same way the Spirit determines the lives of believers. Because life in the flesh is the precise opposite of life in the Spirit, it can never be pleasing to God. This point is vital. God, who is perfectly holy, wants to have us in fellowship with Him. Because He is holy, however, He cannot abide any degree of sin. That which is in fellowship with

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Him must be perfectly holy. This is why a “pretty good” life is simply not good enough. Our God is holy, not merely “pretty good.” He expects us to live holy lives, and this can only happen through life in the Spirit.

INTERACTING WITH GOD’S WORD

- Where does Paul say the battle for the control of your life is going to be fought and won or lost? How have you seen this to be true in your life lately?
- When unhealthy thoughts enter your mind, what have you found helpful in dealing with them?
- In what ways are you actively seeking to understand and live in the mind-set of the Spirit?

MONDAY

READ ROMANS 8:9-11.

COMMENTARY

Paul emphasized the importance of Christians’ awareness of their spiritual state. In Christ, we are bound no longer by the law of sin and death but live instead under the Spirit’s “law of life” (8:2).

Rom. 8:9. Although Christians are still “made out of flesh” (7:14), we are no longer in the flesh—that is, under the control of our fleshly (sinful) nature. We aren’t living in God-given spiritual freedom by our own strength and abilities. As Paul explained in chapter 7, we are woefully inadequate on our own to resist sin’s lingering power (see 7:18). However, as believers we are in the Spirit—that is, in the sphere or realm of the Holy Spirit and thus under His control. The Spirit of God resides in us and guarantees that we have sufficient power to overcome the temptations of our fleshly nature.

It follows logically that those who give evidence of the Spirit’s presence by hating sin and struggling against it are genuine believers. They are spiritual persons in a most profound way. Conversely, those who show no evidence of the Spirit’s work in them demonstrate they really do not belong to the Lord. They are still in spiritual darkness and are in bondage to the sinful nature. In other words, Paul taught that the Holy Spirit’s presence and power are foundational to the Christian life. This is one of Scripture’s clearest indications that the Holy Spirit enters the believer’s life fully and permanently at conversion (see also 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:5). As Christians, we’re not alone. We’re in the Spirit, and the Spirit lives in us!

Rom. 8:10-11. Thus as sinners who in Christ have been justified and set free from sin’s control, we believers can find strength in seeing our ongoing Christian experience in light of God’s ultimate goal for us. Our fleshly nature (the body) needed to die for sin’s control to be broken. This death occurred when by faith we

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were joined with Christ Jesus in His death on the cross (see Rom. 6:3,6). At that same moment of conversion, the Spirit entered us and brought life. He also sealed us with a guarantee that one day even our fleshly nature would be completely and eternally transformed. We will continue to struggle with the old nature in this life, but when these physical bodies at death return to the dust from which they were made, the One who raised Christ from the dead will also bring our mortal bodies to life through His Spirit living in us. Praise God, that's His ultimate plan for us!

INTERACTING WITH GOD'S WORD

- Who has the Holy Spirit's presence? What kind of work is the Spirit doing as He's present in you?
- In what ways have you recently been reminded of the Spirit's presence and power in your life?
- The Spirit of God lives in you. What emotions does that stir up in you? Why is knowing God's Spirit is always present with you a powerful deterrent to giving in to temptation?

TUESDAY

READ ROMANS 8:12-17.

COMMENTARY

Given that we as believers have the Spirit living in us, what are we to do? What are we now able to do with the Spirit's help?

Rom. 8:12-13. First, we can realize that we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh. We are not yet beyond the lingering, powerful tug of the fleshly nature. As Christians, we must not naively think that we're incapable of committing sins. We can and do falter at times (see 1 John 1:8-10). However, Paul here reminded believers that we're not obligated to sin. Our sinful nature doesn't rule over us as it does the unbeliever. We can and should say no to the temptations arising out of our fleshly nature. The stakes are high in this matter because the two ways have opposite destinies. Paul emphasized the contrast for clarity: live according to the flesh, you are going to die. On the other hand, put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. The stakes are life and death, but Christians have the "Difference-Maker" living in them. Believers are able to say no to the fleshly nature by the Spirit. Personal resolve isn't enough; we are weak, but He is strong. As we rely on the Spirit's guidance, we will live in victory over the fleshly nature (see Gal. 5:16).

Rom. 8:14-15. Second, not only are we able to say no to the fleshly nature by the Spirit but also we can live with assurance that we belong to God's family. Believers are to be led by God's Spirit. The Spirit doesn't live

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in us merely to extinguish flash fires of temptation. He is there to guide us in all dimensions of the Christian life.

Notice that in these two verses Paul compared Christian living to the themes dominant in the Israelites' experience of coming out of Egyptian bondage. God guided the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness by means of an ever-present, fiery cloud (see Num. 9:22). Despite the Lord's constant presence and protection, however, the Israelites at times considered going back to Egypt (see Num. 14:3-4). Likewise, God in Christ did not rescue believers from bondage to sin to then give them a spirit of slavery. Rather, He gave believers the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption.

This is an important picture of Christians' relationship with the Heavenly Father. Unbelievers have reason to live in fear because they are under God's wrath. Those who labor to be right with God by good works also live in fear—as Paul could testify regarding his former life under the law. The self-righteous can never be sure they've kept all the law perfectly all their lives. Christians, however, relate to God not as slaves but as God's sons. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us is the proof of our family identity and the Authority by which we are able to address God intimately as "Abba, Father!"

Rom. 8:16-17. Third, believers are able to confidently endure trials and suffering because the Holy Spirit is present to guide and help us. In verse 16, Paul might have been alluding to God's requirement in the law for multiple witnesses to verify truth claims (see Deut. 19:15). In any case, the apostle affirmed that part of the Spirit's work is to testify together with our spirit that we are God's children. In Paul's day as now, children who are legally adopted immediately become full heirs alongside any natural-born children. Paul applied this reality to the Christian life. Because the Spirit's presence in believers testifies to our adoption as God's children, we can live with confidence that we are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ. Take a moment and reflect on this astounding truth. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul summed up this reality by saying God has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens" (Eph. 1:3).

INTERACTING WITH GOD'S WORD

- What does it mean to you that you are not God's slave, but His child? What is the best part of being in the family of God?
- What changes in your actions or way of thinking reveal the presence of God's Spirit guiding you?
- Think about a challenging circumstance you'll be facing soon. How will you handle the situation if you are fully aware of the Spirit's guidance?

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WEDNESDAY

READ GALATIANS 5:16-18.

COMMENTARY

Gal. 5:16. The phrase **I say then** introduces a sharp contrast and signals the importance of what follows. Instead of biting and devouring one another (see 5:15), the Galatian Christians were to walk by the Spirit. The imperative **walk** is a Hebrew expression for “live” with the idea of conduct or lifestyle. Its tense conveys continuous action. The phrase **by the Spirit** can be rendered “in the Spirit”—in the sphere the Spirit governs. To keep on living in the Spirit is to continually live by His power—to go where He is going. Paul followed his command with a promise: Ordering our lives according to the Spirit’s guidance will prevent believers from ever carrying out the desire of the flesh. In the Greek text, **not** is a double negative: “certainly not.” The Greek word translated **carry out** means “to perform.” The Greek term for **desire** expresses intense emotion. It could have a positive or a negative meaning. Here it has the negative meaning of “lust” or “covet.” In the context of Galatians 5:16, the term flesh refers to people’s lower nature. Coupled with the word for “flesh,” the term for “desire” conveys the sense of craving what is evil. Consistently living in the Spirit would enable believers to overcome sin’s pull, which the law could not do.

Gal. 5:17. Every Christian is a walking civil war. Flesh and Spirit are in perpetual conflict; they are diametrically opposed to each other and vie for dominance in believers’ lives. What the flesh desires is antagonistic to what the Spirit desires for Christians. The language is that of unrelenting warfare for control of believers’ lives. One interpretation of the phrase **so that you don’t do what you want** is that the words indicate a standoff in the relentless contest. A second view is that the phrase applies primarily to the Spirit’s activity: He defeats the flesh’s tendencies. A contrasting approach is that the phrase stresses the lower nature’s opposition to the Spirit’s prompting. A fourth and preferable interpretation is that each opposing force’s purpose is to prevent the believer from doing what the other wants. In this view the phrase indicates purpose, not result. The Spirit strives to prevent believers from giving in to evil; the flesh tries to thwart the Spirit’s work.

Gal. 5:18. Paul emphasized that active cooperation with the Spirit and constant reliance on His power would enable the Galatian believers to experience freedom instead of bondage. If they consistently followed the Spirit’s leadership, they would not be under the law. Paul’s words indicate he was following up on his emphasis of not misusing Christian freedom and elaborating on how to use it properly (see vv. 13-15). The Judaizers contended that obeying the law enables people to overcome their base desires; yet Paul knew from experience that the law was powerless to suppress people’s lower nature (see Rom. 7:7-8,14-25). Paul maintained strongly that only following the Spirit’s guidance could enable people to overcome evil and experience the freedom of grace. The inner struggle between believers’ old nature and the Spirit would continue, but following the Spirit’s leading—walking behind Him—would empower them to be victorious. We are to let the Spirit guide our living. We must cooperate with Him. Each day presents temptations and challenges. The warfare between our old natures and the Spirit continues. We need to be sensitive to the Spirit’s prompting and to rely on His power to help us overcome persistent pulls to evil. Through His power we can avoid doing what displeases God.

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INTERACTING WITH GOD'S WORD

- How does Galatians 5:16-18 illustrate the stress that comes with not following the Spirit?
- What most often motivates you to live a good life?
- What temptations arising from your "sinful nature" have you faced recently? How does the Spirit help you overcome them?

THURSDAY

READ GALATIANS 5:19-21.

COMMENTARY

Gal. 5:19. Paul spelled out the results of acting on "the desires of the flesh" (v. 16). He cataloged the works of the flesh. The word **works** refers to what issues from living in the flesh—people's lower natures. Paul stated these works are apparent. Paul used 15 Greek words and one catchall term to present characteristic activities of people who are outside God's kingdom and devoid of the Spirit's leadership. All the impulses or drives Paul included are potentially good, but the base nature seeks to distort and pervert them.

Paul began listing what the flesh produces by naming three sexual sins. Sexual immorality was epidemic and commonly accepted in the Galatian believers' environment. They were bombarded with temptations to revert to their former immoral lifestyles. Paul emphasized that sexual sins issue from our sinful nature's aggression in its warfare with the Spirit. Paul listed moral impurity second. The Greek word first referred to material dirt, then to ceremonial defilement, and finally to moral uncleanness or lewdness. It is broader in scope than the word rendered sexual immorality. The adjective form of the word translated moral impurity means "unclean in thought and life." Promiscuity is a third sexual sin. The Greek term comes from a word that has the sense of unrestrained sexual desire, excess, and wantonness. It also carries the idea of shameless or insolent immoral behavior. Promiscuous people do not care what God and others think of their wanton behavior.

Gal. 5:20-21. Paul next addressed works of the flesh in the religious realm. The word **idolatry** referred primarily to worshipping pagan gods—false gods that people fashioned. Such worship often included sexual immorality. Broadly defined, idols are anything or anyone (including themselves) that people put in God's rightful place in their lives. Following the Spirit's leadership inspires life-giving, life-sustaining worship of God. Following the lower nature's impulses results in false, powerless religion. Paul's third category of the flesh's works related to people's interactions. Significantly, he listed sinful attitudes, equating them with

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sinful acts. Paul ended his catalog of the flesh's works with drunkenness and carousing. Drinking wine to the extent that it evolved into drunken revelry and taking part in drinking parties was common in that era and often occurred in honor of pagan deities. This kind of behavior issues from the lower nature's drive for self-gratification.

With the phrase **and anything similar**, Paul lumped other obvious works of the flesh with those he had listed. He again gave the Galatians advance warning: People with lifestyles characterized by the works of the flesh will not inherit God's kingdom. Inherit means "to share in." The kingdom of God is His rule, the sphere of His grace. The tense of the word **practice** conveys habitual performance. People who consistently perform the works of the flesh are not following the Spirit and indeed are not Christians. If we let the Spirit guide our living, we will avoid doing what displeases God. We will model sexual purity for a society in which moral guidelines are being erased swiftly. The Spirit will enable us to bear witness concerning authentic religion, will help us avoid destructive attitudes, and will help us reject consumption of alcoholic beverages.

INTERACTING WITH GOD'S WORD

- What is the biggest change that being a Christian has made in your life?
- Which of the sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21 causes the most trouble for you? Why do you think that is?
- Spend some time confessing that sin to God and repent of it. Ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance and strength as you turn away from that sin and back to God.

FRIDAY

READ GALATIANS 5:22-23.

COMMENTARY

Gal. 5:22-23. Paul contrasted the fruit of the Spirit to the works of the flesh. The word **fruit** refers to virtues only the Spirit can cultivate and bring to full growth in believers' lives. Human nature apart from God can perform works; only the Spirit can produce fruit. Note that the word fruit is singular. Genuine believers exhibit a cluster of virtues characteristic of living in the Spirit. For purposes of study, we can place the virtues in three groups: Christian, social, and personal conduct. The first three virtues in the cluster of the fruit of the Spirit show that only God can generate and maintain His desired harvest in the lives of believers.

The first virtue is **love**. The Greek language has three other words for love, but Christians chose to use agape because it does not carry the primary element of emotion or affection. Agape is God's kind of love: determined good will that acts for others' best interests. It is not given based on emotion in the giver or merit in the object. Agape is not easily discouraged and goes on offering itself to others at personal cost. Joy differs markedly from happiness.

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Happiness depends on favorable circumstances. **Joy** is a deep celebration of relationship with God no matter what the circumstances are. Believers can rejoice in the midst of difficulties and hardships because they know nothing can separate them from God's love (see Rom. 8:35-39). The gladness of being held securely in God's grace empowers believers to face life's challenges. **Peace** is much more than absence of conflict. The word has the idea of wholeness and well-being under God's rule that issues in spiritual calmness in the face of difficulties.

The second group of virtues in the cluster of Spirit-produced fruit pertains to believers' relationships with others—their social virtues. The Greek word rendered **long-suffering** means "patience." It conveys a slowness to become angry. We would say it is the capacity to "put up with a lot." **Kindness** is gentleness, thoughtfulness, and consideration in dealing with others. It is not sentimentality. It has the sense of being agreeable, obliging, or pleasant. **Goodness** is "moral excellence," but it is much more. The word carries the idea of active generosity and compassion toward others— of doing more than justice requires. We might define goodness as kindness in action.

The third group of virtues is made up of qualities that believers exhibit in personal conduct. The word **faithfulness** probably has the idea of trustworthiness or loyalty in relationships with others. It is the quality of reliability; people can count on believers. The Greek term translated **gentleness** conveys the sense of strength under control. It was used of animals that people tamed and disciplined to carry riders or pull loads. The Spirit enables Christians to exercise disciplined strength in relating to others. **Self-control** is mastery over emotions, especially over sensual desires. It is the spiritual strength to discipline self, to impose self-restraint. Self-discipline issues in moral purity.

One view of Paul's assertion, **Against such things there is no law**, is that he meant no law could forbid the virtues he listed. Furthermore, law could neither create nor could it destroy the fruit of the Spirit. A more likely interpretation is that where the fruit of the Spirit is present, no law is necessary. One purpose of the law was to prevent evil, but Spirit-empowered Christians not only fulfill the law in principle but go far beyond what it requires. The presence of the fruit of the Spirit removes the need for the law's restraints.

INTERACTING WITH GOD'S WORD

- Which virtues in the cluster of the fruit of the Spirit are most evident in your life? Which are underdeveloped?
- How can you and God's Spirit weed out the sinful nature and grow the fruit of the Spirit?
- How do you sense God calling you to change your lifestyle today?

SATURDAY

READ GALATIANS 5:24-26.

COMMENTARY

Gal. 5:24. At the time of conversion, genuine believers put to death (have crucified) the old nature by the Spirit's pow-

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er. Those who belong to Christ are people who have placed faith in Him. At conversion, the war with the flesh's passions and desires—evil prompting and cravings—has been won. Skirmishes between the old nature and the Spirit's leading continue, but believers' ultimate victory is assured.

Gal. 5:25. The phrase **if we live by the Spirit** does not express doubt. The Greek construction expresses certainty: "Because we live by the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the source of our new spiritual life, so we must also follow Him. The Greek word rendered **follow** means "to proceed in a row," "to go in order," thus "to walk" in another's steps. It has the further sense of moving toward a goal. Paul exhorted the Galatian believers to order their lives by relying daily on the Spirit's guidance. Doing so would result in a Christian lifestyle exhibiting exemplary attitudes and actions.

Gal. 5:26. Paul ended this section of his letter with an exhortation. Literally, he called on the Galatian Christians to stop some destructive attitudes. Evidently some believers were developing a groundless, high opinion of themselves—an empty pride that claimed undue honors. Paul used "flesh" in a spiritual sense to refer to an evil prompting in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit. Interpreters have suggested numerous definitions of the term: (1) all impulses or tendencies that issue in wrong conduct; (2) the old, sinful self; (3) the lower or base nature; (4) the corrupt human nature that is hostile to God and centered on self; (5) evil's dominion. Flesh and Spirit vie for leadership in believers' lives. Some were displaying a combative attitude—a hostile aggression—that called out others, challenging them to fight. Some were jealous of others, begrudging what others had. These attitudes were products of the flesh; they were not evidences of living by the Spirit.

If we let the Spirit guide how we live, we will exhibit characteristics that please God. The fruit of the Spirit will be evident in our inner spiritual lives, in our interactions with others, and in our conduct. We not only will avoid works of the flesh, but we also will advance toward the goal of spiritual maturity.

INTERACTING WITH GOD'S WORD

- Why is the fruit of the Spirit a good tool for evaluating who's in charge of our lives?
- Under what kinds of circumstances are you most tempted to follow the flesh rather than the Spirit?
- What steps can we take to more consistently display the fruit of the Spirit and avoid works of the flesh?
