



*Worldwide Church of God
Camberwell*

Living and sharing the Gospel

June 2009

Dear Church Family,

Over the past few weeks we have been considering the role of the Holy Spirit so that we could gain a better understanding of Him and cultivate a closer relationship with our helper and comforter.

But now what?

It's all well and good to have a theoretical knowledge about the Spirit but what should our next step be?

Paul gives us the answer in Galatians 5:25,

'Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit'.

"Live by the Spirit" means do what you do each day by the Spirit; live your life in all its details from waking up in the morning until going to sleep at night by the enabling power of the Spirit.

But what does that mean, practically speaking?

The phrase "live by the Spirit" occurs not only in verse 25 but also in verse 16,

'So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature'.

Here we see what the opposite of living by the Spirit is, namely, giving into the desires of the sinful nature. When we "live by the Spirit," we are not controlled by those drives.

This is what verse 17 means: the sinful nature produces one kind of desires, and the Spirit produces another kind, and they are opposed to each other.

Living by the Spirit is what we do when the desires produced by the Spirit are stronger than the desires produced by the flesh.

This means that "living by the Spirit" is not something we do in order to get the Spirit's help, but rather it is something we do by the empowerment of the Spirit.

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit gives all the good inclinations or preferences or desires that we have.

Live by the Spirit – Bear Fruit

In verse 18 Paul shifts from the phrase "living by the Spirit" to "*being led by the Spirit*". That phrase makes even more explicit the initiative of the Spirit in the life of a Christian. We don't lead him; he leads us.

We are being led by Him through the stronger desires He awakens within us.

"Living by the Spirit" and "being led by the Spirit" refer to the same thing. "Being led by the Spirit," stresses the Spirit's initiative and empowerment. "Living by the Spirit" stresses our resulting behaviour. The Spirit leads us by creating desires to obey God, and we walk by fulfilling those desires in action.

Now, if we look at verses 19-24, we find one more expression about the Spirit that confirms and expands what it means to "live by the Spirit." In these verses Paul contrasts the "sinful nature" (V.19-21) with the "fruit of the Spirit" (V. 22-23).

The opposite of doing the acts of the "sinful nature" is bearing "the fruit of the Spirit."

This is exactly the same contrast we saw in verse 16:

'...live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.'

The acts of the sinful nature are what we do when we gratify the desires of the sinful nature. The "fruit of the Spirit" is what appears in our life when we live by the Spirit.

But why does Paul refer to the "*fruit* of the Spirit" instead of the "acts or works of the Spirit" to match "acts or works of the sinful nature"?

Well Paul wants to avoid giving any impression that what the Spirit produces is our work, our acts, lest we become conceited or envy one another (V. 25). It is not our work; it is His fruit.

What we do when we live by the Spirit is simply fulfil the desires produced by the Spirit.

Now if we are to:

- Live by the Spirit;
- Be led by the Spirit;
- Bear the fruit of the Spirit; and
- Keep in step with the Spirit

what does this mean for the way we live our Christian lives?

Again Paul gives us the answer,

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...' (V 22-23)

Our Christian lives are to be underpinned by one kind of behaviour – Love that manifests itself through joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Live by the Spirit – Bear Fruit

It is critical for us as Christians to,

‘... serve one another in love’ (V.13) because,

‘The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself".’ (V. 14)

This, of course, is easier said than done. Indeed it is impossible without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. But thankfully,

‘...God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us’. (Romans 5:5)

This is the background for our next series of sermons entitled *‘Live by the Spirit – Bear Fruit’* in which we will look at the church as God’s fruitful community, bearing the fruit of the spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23.

As we explore this topic together here are some practical points to reflect upon in preparation for the series:

1. Acknowledge

We must acknowledge from our hearts that we are helpless to do good apart from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As Paul says,

*‘I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out’.
(Romans 7:18)*

To which Jesus adds,

‘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.’ (John 15:5)

So, the first step of living by the Spirit and bearing fruit is admit this fact and let it have its devastating effect on our pride. We cannot do anything pleasing to God without the constant empowerment of the Spirit.

Live by the Spirit – Bear Fruit

2. Pray

Let us pray like Paul did in 1 Thessalonians 3:10, 12-13,

'Night and day we pray most earnestly that...the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones'.

And let's pray like the writer to the Hebrews did in Hebrews 13:20-21,

'May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen'.

If it is God alone who works in us what is pleasing in His sight, then above all, we must pray.

3. Trust

We must believe that since we have come under the gracious sway of God's Spirit, sin shall no longer be our master (Romans 6:14).

We have to trust that the Spirit who made us alive when we were dead in sin wills our holiness and has the power to achieve what he wills. The reason we can have this trust is that we know that God will cause his children to be led by the Spirit.

As Paul says in Romans 8:8-17

'Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory'.

If you are a child of God, you have a solid and unshakable promise that God will give you victory over those powerful desires of the flesh.

Live by the Spirit – Bear Fruit

4. Act

After you have acknowledged your helplessness without him, prayed for his empowerment, and trusted in his deliverance, we have to act the way we know is right.

Now this is not our first step for if it were all our actions would be our works, not the fruit of the Spirit.

Only after we have appealed for the Spirit's empowerment and thrown ourselves confidently on his promise to work in us, do we now work with all our might.

Only when we act with that spiritual preparation, will we be able to say with Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10,

'But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me'.

Or in Galatians 2:20,

'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'.

A person who has acknowledged his helplessness, prayed for God's empowerment to do right, and yielded himself confidently to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit has this astonishing incentive to do right, and the awareness that, whatever righteous act he does, it is God who is at work in him giving him the will and the power to do it.

It should be a great incentive that all our effort to do what is right is the work of God within us. At least for me, I am greatly encouraged when the going gets tough that any effort I make to do right is a sign of God's grace at work in me. As Peter says,

'...If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen'. (1 Peter 4:11)

5. Thankfulness

As we live by the Spirit and bear fruit, we must be thankful to God for any virtue attained or any good deed performed.

If without the Spirit we can do no right, then we must not only ask his empowerment for it but also thank him whenever we do it.

Take just one example from 2 Corinthians 8:16 where Paul says,

'I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you'.

Live by the Spirit – Bear Fruit

Titus loved the Corinthians, but where did that come from?

God put it in his heart - It was a fruit of the Spirit.

So what does Paul do? He thanks God.

And we should too when God puts love in our hearts!

So as we prepare for this upcoming series, *'Live by the Spirit – Bear Fruit'* let us,

- Acknowledge from our heart that we are unable to please God without the Spirit's constant empowerment;
- Pray for that empowerment;
- Trust confidently in the Spirit's desire and promise to give that empowerment;
- Then let us do what we know is right;
- And having done it, let us turn and say, "Not I, but the Spirit of Christ within me. Thanks be to God! To *him* be glory for ever and ever! Amen".

May God bless you as we study His word together,

Barry

Barry Robinson
Pastor

Sermons on 'Live by the Spirit – Bear Fruit'

The scheduled dates for each sermon will be issued monthly.

1. A Fruitful Community
2. The Fruit of the Spirit is Love
3. The Fruit of the Spirit is Joy
4. The Fruit of the Spirit is Peace
5. The Fruit of the Spirit is Patience
6. The Fruit of the Spirit is Kindness
7. The Fruit of the Spirit is Goodness
8. The Fruit of the Spirit is Faithfulness
9. The Fruit of the Spirit is Gentleness
10. The Fruit of the Spirit is Self-Control