

TWO DIFFERENT RESULTS:

THE NATURE OF THE FLESH AND THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT



Galatians 5:19-26

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The doctrine of the Holy Spirit
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction to the passage

In our last study Paul began to apply the theological teaching he has been giving in the first four chapters. He has been showing the Galatian believers how the false teachers were perverting the gospel message that he had brought to them. They had believed the good news they heard from Paul. The false teachers had been persuading the Galatian converts to follow the practices of Judaism. Paul, himself an expert in the system of Judaism, knew that it was a religion that was based upon man-made rules and that it was a gross misinterpretation of Old Testament teaching. Having set out a number of arguments to make the Galatians see what they were being asked to do, Paul now illustrates how it all works out in practice. In verse 13 Paul urged the believers to strengthen their fellowship by serving one another in love. Easier said than done! Why? Because within the Christian believer dwells the new Spirit, who is in conflict with the old sinful nature. In verses 19-21 Paul lists all the characteristics of the sinful nature. These we find common in the society in which we live. The effect of the sinful nature destroys fellowship and therefore must not be present among believers in the church. Verses 22-23 set out the results of a Spirit-led life. The contrast could not be greater. One is the product of the man-centred approach (i.e. by

obeying the law) whilst the other occurs when there is a total submission to Christ alone. Pick the wrong one and you will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. That is how crucial it is.

What these verses mean

Verse 19

The acts of the sinful nature

For the meaning of sinful nature (or “flesh” in some translations) see note on verse 16 in Study 22.

are obvious:

The detailed description of the sinful nature is well known. Nobody has to be instructed in these matters; even unbelievers realise these things are bad! The list can be divided into four groups of sins, those of a sexual nature, religious, social and sins of excess. It is important to remember that there are no new sins that 21st-century human beings have invented. Our modern societies like to think that they have made huge improvements compared with previous generations. However human nature has not changed and continues to be plagued by the same problems that have always beset people since the fall of Adam.

Group 1: Sexual sins

sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

Sexual sins are probably the most common. It is not sex that is sinful but its misuse. This group covers any kind of sexual behaviour outside the biblical standards of marriage. It is not just the physical act but covers any impurity in deed, thought or word. Any act that shocks public decency is included, though the standards of decency in a society can change easily. However, whilst there may be growing segments of our society who will want to lower the standard of acceptable decency, there is an in-built mechanism in the core of people that sees certain sexual behaviour as indecent. We must not forget that we are people made in the image of God and therefore part of us knows deep down when things are not right.

Verse 20

Group 2: Religious sins

idolatry and witchcraft;

Idolatry is the worship of anything other than the true God. This can take many forms and will differ from society to society. In affluent communities possessions can become the things that people worship. Hobbies and sport are a great danger as they take over people's lives. There is danger for Christian believers as they could idolise a leader or preacher. Witch-

craft is the use of the powers of evil spirits. There is just as much interest in meddling with the evil spirits today as there ever was.

Group 3: Social sins

hatred,

Any hostile act or thought.

discord,

A quarrelsome spirit.

jealousy,

This refers to a selfish jealousy. There is a zeal or jealousy that is good when it desires the good of others. (See 2 Corinthians 11:2.)

fits of rage,

This is in the plural and means outbursts of undisciplined rage.

selfish ambition,

Pursuing position, power or wealth for oneself. The concern for others is not the motivation but to satisfy a personal craving. Such a spirit will produce a ruthless attitude, which will remove anything or anyone that stands in the way.

dissensions, factions

Dissension is the introduction of divisive teaching, whilst factions are rival parties in a fellowship. The tendency is for people with particular views to form groups. The original Greek word for faction (heresy) meant choice and is used to describe division into small groups within a church. This can be over small things, unimportant detail. Error has to be opposed, but splintering is more about egos and idiosyncrasies. This all stems from a sinful nature.

Verse 21

and envy;

Envy means anger at someone else's success.

Group 4: Sins of excess

drunkenness, orgies,

This is the loss of self-control through excessive drink and any celebration leading to undisciplined behaviour. These sins are disruptive to society in many ways and create fear. They are restrained by civil laws. Nowadays economists calculate the cost of such sins to the local and national economies.

and the like.

The above list of 15 things is not all! The fact that a specified sin is not included by Paul does not mean it does not count. It does, because the sin will fall into one of the above pattern groups.

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this

There are consequences for all those who continually practise such things. It is a serious matter that has very long-term effects. The activities that arise from human sinful nature lead only to a disastrous and terrible end. Therefore Paul is warning the Galatians of this. It is not simply friendly advice, but making the Galatian believers aware of the serious danger, i.e. any who repent of these things and cease to do them may be inheritors of the kingdom of God.

will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The warning is clear: such people who continually pursue their sinful nature will not inherit the kingdom of God. Notice that "the kingdom of God" is an inheritance - a gift, not a reward to be earned. Nevertheless evil deeds disqualify a person from entering it. This will be the end result for those who follow the false teachers and rely upon their observance of keeping to the rules (law of Moses). They will fail because the law cannot help them to overcome the sinful nature but only emphasises it.

Note: "The kingdom of God" means "God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people". This has a three-fold effect upon such people:

- i. it causes their salvation
- ii. it forms them into a purposeful church, and
- iii. equips them to inhabit the new heavens and a new earth.

Sometimes verses referring to the kingdom apply to i, or ii, or iii. The different parts of the kingdom are not contradictory; all are included in the term. So the kingdom can be both present (i) and future (ii and iii); visible (i and ii) and invisible (iii).

Verse 22

But the fruit of the Spirit is

In the believer the sinful nature has the same tendencies as in the unbeliever. However the Christian's behaviour is controlled by the Spirit and not the sinful nature. The believer is not without sin, yet Paul is convinced that we can use outward behaviour as a test of a person's spiritual state. If a person claims to believe and has put their trust in Christ, then Christ's Spirit will be within the person. The Spirit cannot be seen but his presence within that person will have an effect that will be recognised by others. Paul calls this the "fruit of the Spirit". The use of the word "fruit" to describe spiritual graces is significant. "Sinful nature" produces not fruit but thorns and thistles that damage fellowship. But spiritual graces are a profitable fruit that produces healthy fellowship. Compare Matthew 7:16-20. The word "fruit" is singular. The true Christian character contains these 9 ingredients.

The nine-fold fruit is sometimes divided into three groups:

- (i) The believer's relation to God comprises the basic spiritual qualities of love, joy and peace.

love,

The kind of love God has. It does not think of self but always has another as its object. We are to love God and our neighbours. Loving God means being convinced he is great, above everything else. We are to delight in that greatness and to be desirous of what he wants. We are to be grateful for all that God does. We are to love God with sincerity (all our heart), so that our emotions are to be fully engaged in this (all our soul) and our thoughts are taken up supremely with God (with all our mind). This love is spontaneous towards others, putting them first, being patient, not holding grudges. This love will be seen in our actions. It breaks down barriers and the world around will see this love interacting between Christian believers. Non-believers will themselves experience a considerate attitude that they do not receive from others. This love is required for the smooth running of the Christian church and is essential to the preaching of the gospel. Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, places love first because it is the foundation for all the other items in the list that now follows.

joy,

This can be described as the deep inner happiness that comes from knowing and loving Jesus Christ. Joy arises from the hope of sharing the glory of God. This is why true joy can only be experienced by the Christian believer. It is a duty for the Christian believer to show their faith by displaying the joy of the Lord to those around them. In practice this means that the person is willing to be content with their lot. It is not about having a smiling face whilst attending church. It is a satisfaction and happiness with all that God gives. Paul exhorts us to be always rejoicing (Phil. 4:4), which means even in times of sadness and suffering.

peace,

This peace is not about the absence of war. It is about the inner wellbeing and wholeness of the person because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This comes about because the person has peace with God through believing in Jesus (Rom. 5:1). The person's guilt has been removed and consequently the liability of punishment. What follows is a peace of mind for that person. Peace then is an inner experience that is a natural accompaniment of the work of God. It is what sets the spiritual man apart from the worldly man (Rom. 8:6). Whilst this peace can only be the result of the Holy Spirit's presence in the believer, it is to be cultivated by the believer. In other words believers are to live as those who have had their

sins forgiven and guilt dealt with. They are to be completely satisfied with what God has done for them. Being at peace with God also means being at peace with one another and living peaceably amongst all men. This may bring the anger of the world upon the believer, but it will be suffering for the right reason. (See 1 Peter 2:19-23.)

- (ii) The believer's relation to other believers. This group works out in more detail the themes of love and peace.

patience,

Patience means bearing with one another, forgiving one another. The problem with any church is that it is made up of sinners. Therefore it is inevitable that offence is going to be given by something that is said or done. Patience is love in action; it bears, forgives and makes peace. The church leader has to show patience when things go wrong. The people in the church need to be patient with each other as well as with their church leaders. (They are sinners as well.) If Christian believers serve Christ together they must bear with one another's faults and forgive as Christ forgave. The Christian must also show patience to the non-Christian. That person will be acting in ignorance and reject the gospel until he believes the message of forgiveness. He or she may not do so unless they see the forgiveness in the believer's life. What may be surprising is that patience has to be exercised towards God. This is because God's ways are not our ways and he may not work along the lines we have laid down for him. God will work when and where and how he will. The believer's life should show patience because God is patient and he is called to be like God.

kindness,

We start with God because he is kind in the provision he makes for men. We see this in Jesus, where God makes a provision that is not deserved. There seems to be no way out for sinful man as the law condemns him. Yet through his kindness God has provided a way for forgiveness to take place. His kindness is an expression of undeserved love, which is called "grace". This kindness is gentle because it does not expect to be paid back. Instead it is tenderhearted forgiveness, reconciling sinful men to a holy God.

goodness,

Being good means a spiritual and moral excellence. This does not come naturally to human beings because they have denied God. There is therefore a bias towards what is bad. God by his Spirit corrects that bias and people are made good within and therefore do good. It is the fruit of the Spirit. In Micah 6:8 three things are required of the people of God;

justice, peace and humility. Justice means treating others in ways that are right, mercy means going beyond that and being good when they don't deserve it and humility means following the Lord, worshipping, following and submitting to him. Goodness is the work of the Spirit and we have had nothing to do with its origins.

(iii). *The believer's own inner basic attitudes* of faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

faithfulness,

In the context of this passage, faithfulness is to be seen in the lives of those who have believed, i.e. being worthy of the trust of other people. It means being consistent and is an attribute of God to be copied. The consistency is to be found in the submission to God in all things, at all times and in all circumstances. In practice faithfulness means being consistent in loving, being joyful and good and all the other attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul describes a man as being faithful when he consistently holds to the Word of God (e.g. Epaphras, see Colossians 1:7). Onesimus is described as being faithful (Col. 4:9) because his new life was consistent with the profession of his new-found faith in Christ. This consistency applies even to death, by the believer's being ready to die for his faith (Rev. 2:13).

Verse 23

gentleness

Faithfulness is our basic attitude towards God. Gentleness is our basic spiritual attitude to our fellow men and women. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts the believers to be completely humble and gentle, bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4:2). So gentleness produces love, patience, kindness and goodness. The principle is that the needs of others must come first. This applies to fellow believers and non-believers. A gentle and quiet spirit will win over where words cannot (1 Pet. 3:1-4). The meek and gentle will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). These are the agents God uses in conquering the world for Christ and his kingdom.

and self-control.

Self-control is the discipline of bodily appetites i.e. keeping them under control. Since the fall of Adam, all people since, everywhere in the world, have lost the will and the ability to control themselves. Paul describes this as selling oneself into the slavery of sin. Without self-control, we do the things Paul lists in verses 19-21. The consequence of such behaviour is that the kingdom of God cannot be inherited (5:21). But people can regain self-control. This can only happen by an act of God

(Ezek. 11:19-20) through his Spirit. The person who has trusted in Christ is given the desire not to sin. The Spirit indwells the believer, instructing him or her to run away from sin, to continually repent and ask for forgiveness. In this atmosphere the Spirit teaches the believer to live in a way which is pleasing to God. The result will be that the fruit of the Spirit will be seen in the person, including self-control. Every believer has a responsibility to be self-controlled, and is required to avoid the sins of verses 19-21. This is not easy and is part of the daily struggle that the believer experiences. Sin is present, but the desire must be to move from sin to righteousness. Self-control is that part of the Spirit's fruit, which enables the believer to say "No" to sin. Whilst the believer cannot exercise self control without the Holy Spirit, there is continual action for the believer to do in order to regain control of him or herself. Self-control must not be looked upon just in its use against the sins listed in verses 19-21, but also applies to all our behaviour and attitudes.

Against such things there is no law.

The purpose of law is to limit the harm done by evil. There is no need to limit the good done by these and all other Christian graces!

Verse 24

Those who belong to Christ Jesus

i.e. all true believers. (See 1 Corinthians 15:23.)

have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

This is different from 2:20. There Paul refers to an experience that happened to him. Here Paul refers to something he does himself.

2:20

Christ's death, on behalf of Paul, meant that Paul was crucified, i.e. God's law had received what it demands in payment of Paul's sin.

5:24

At his conversion and by his repentance, Paul now determines he will not obey the desires of the sinful nature. He will strive to put them to death.¹

Verse 25

Since we live by the Spirit,

Paul in this verse expresses the same truth as that in verse 24 but in a different way, i.e. those who are Christ's are those who have been given spiritual life by the Spirit.

¹ Paul uses this phrase "to put to death" in his letter to the Romans (8:13). Grace Publications has a book called "What Every Christian Needs to Know". Part 2 of the book deals with the whole subject of putting sin to death. For a free copy of this book please write to Grace Baptist Mission.

let us keep in step with the Spirit.

In some translations “walk” is used. Walking (i.e. living daily) in ways that please the Holy Spirit is the only way to crucify the lusts of the flesh and its affections. The Greek word “walk” (keep in step) in this verse is different from “walk” in verse 16. In verse 16 the word means “to walk about”; here, the word means “to walk in line” or “to keep in step” with the Holy Spirit. A very well-known French theologian, John Calvin who lived in the 16th century, said this about verse 25, “If God’s Spirit lives in us, let him govern all our actions. There will always be many who impudently boast of living in the Spirit but Paul challenges them to prove their claim. As the soul does not live idly in the body, but gives motion and vigour to every member and part, so the Spirit of God cannot dwell in us without manifesting himself by outward effects. Paul means that our works are witnesses to our spiritual life.”

Verse 26

Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Paul concludes this section with an exhortation. He wants us to understand how, in practice, keeping in step with the Spirit affects our behaviour and attitude to ourselves and to others. To ourselves we must put to death the natural conceit of our fallen nature. We are not to have an opinion of ourselves higher than it ought to be. To others we are to avoid provocation and being envious. To provoke means challenging someone to a contest. Thinking too much of our own abilities is often caused by our envy of others who are greatly gifted. The behaviour found in this verse is that of people where the Holy Spirit is not present and they can only keep in step with the dark powers of this world.

The material on the fruit of the Spirit has been taken from notes by P. Tait.



Summary

The gospel, which Paul had brought to the Galatians, was the good news that God had intervened in man’s hopeless plight and had come to his rescue. God did this by sending his own Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth to save people from their sin. This was made possible because Jesus who was without sin took the place of sinners and died in their place. In doing this God punished his own Son for the sins of others. God’s law was met in that the penalty of death for sin was carried out. God accepted his own

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Son’s death as the penalty so that whoever’s sins were punished on the cross, that person has been freed from the punishment. The whole action that took place was of God and did not involve any human activity. This is what the Galatians believed. Now others had come and told them they must go through ceremony and ritual for God to really accept them. In effect the Galatians were being told that their salvation was reliant upon their effort. The Galatians were being misled and must not take in this false teaching. This is the whole point of the letter. The two different approaches will show themselves in the lifestyle of the person. If a person relies on their effort, their failure to meet God’s standard will be clearly seen by their sinful nature. Paul sets these out and it makes painful reading. The person who has put their whole trust in Christ for salvation will have his Spirit living in them. This will be clearly evident in their life because of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Observing the law cannot bring about such a change in lifestyle, but Spirit-led behaviour can surpass the requirements of any law.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Be what you are!

In old times when two armies fought it was important for the soldiers to keep near to the flag of their army. To be cut off from their own flag would be a very dangerous, possibly fatal, situation.

Paul has been describing two kinds of armies – the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Everyone on earth is a member of one or other of these armies. These two armies are in constant conflict in the world. Christians therefore need to be sure that their lives clearly indicate which army they are in. (See Romans 14:8.)

In order to make it clear which army we are in, there are two parts to our Christian attitude – a negative part and a positive part: “crucify” (verse 24) and “walk” (verse 25).

A. **Negatively** – “crucify the flesh”. Compare Mark 8:34. Every follower of Christ is to behave like a condemned criminal who carries his

cross to a place of execution. We are daily to take our sinful nature and crucify it (i.e. to prevent it from controlling our actions).

1. Crucifixion was **painless**. It was kept for the worst criminals. We are to be merciless with the evil thoughts and desires that can arise from our sinful nature.
2. Crucifixion was **painful**. There was no more painful way of inflicting death. We must anticipate the anguish we may feel at refusing the suggestions of our sinful nature.
3. Crucifixion was **permanent**. No criminal ever survived a crucifixion. He was fixed there on the cross until he gradually died. So once we have refused to obey some suggestion from our sinful nature we must never obey it again in that matter.

The secret of holiness lies in the extent of our repentance – never pull the nails out again!

- B. **Positively** – “walk by the Spirit”. Compare verses 16,18,25. As well as refusing to do what is wrong, we must occupy ourselves with what is right. In all three verses (16,18,25) the verb is in a form that means “keep on doing this continuously”.
1. Christians are described as “walking about in the Spirit” (verse 16). “Walking about” refers to “their whole conduct of life”. “To be in the Spirit” means being guided by the Spirit according to the Scriptures.
 2. Christians are described as “led by the Spirit” (verse 18). This verb is used of farmers leading cattle, or soldiers escorting a prisoner, or wind driving a ship along. Our leader, the Holy Spirit, takes the initiative. He has already prepared the Scripture to teach us; he lives in us to make us willing to obey the Scripture truth.
 3. Christians are described as “walking in line with the Spirit” (verse 25). The verb describes people all walking in the same path. To be Spirit-led does not mean that we become different from other believers. All believers who are walking in the Spirit will have the same fruit in their lives.

The fruit of the Spirit grows only as we occupy ourselves with spiritual things – it does not come automatically.

Be what you are! Don’t wander away from Christ’s flag! Examine your leisure occupations; the things you read and listen to; the places you visit; the friends you have; the use you make of private and public times of worship. Fight for holiness!



Focus Point:

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit

1. Introduction

When a person becomes a Christian he becomes a son of God. That means that he is now part of God’s family. Because he is now a son of God, God sends to that person the Spirit of his Son so that the Spirit enters the heart of the believer, crying out, “Abba, Father!” (4:6). We have seen in his letter to the Galatians that Paul talks about walking in the Spirit and also mentions the fruit of the Spirit. What does all this mean?

It is an appropriate place in our studies in Galatians to consider what the Bible teaches about the Spirit of God’s Son. We usually give him the name of the Holy Spirit. Today there are many misunderstandings about the Holy Spirit.

2. The Holy Spirit is a person

Many people think of the Holy Spirit as a power or a force. We accept and understand the being of God the Father and Jesus as God’s Son. We have no difficulty in accepting them as persons. Jesus when on earth had a human body. From that we can easily relate to his Father’s being a person. But when it comes to the Holy Spirit we have more difficulty, for the Holy Spirit has never appeared in personal form. Some parts of the Scriptures speak of him as wind and breath.

When you look at the whole of Scripture it is clear that the Holy Spirit is a person. In John chapters 14 –16 we find Jesus speaking of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 4:6 the Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of the Son, so we need to take notice of what Jesus says about his Spirit.

Here are some of the descriptions Jesus uses:

dwelling (John 14:16)
teaching, bringing things to remembrance (John 14:26)
testifying (John 15:26)
guiding, hearing, speaking, showing, glorifying (John 16:13-14)

Other writers too give us some of the activities of the Holy Spirit:

forbidding (Acts 16:6-7)
raising from the dead (Rom. 8:11)
interceding (Rom. 8:26)
searching, knowing (1 Co. 2:10-11)

and the reactions of others to the Holy Spirit

people lied to him (Acts 5:3)
people tempted (tested) him (Acts 5:9)
people resisted him (Acts 7:51)
people grieved him (Eph. 4:30)
people blasphemed against him (Matt. 12:31)

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the helper, comforter (Counsellor). All these things point us clearly to the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person.

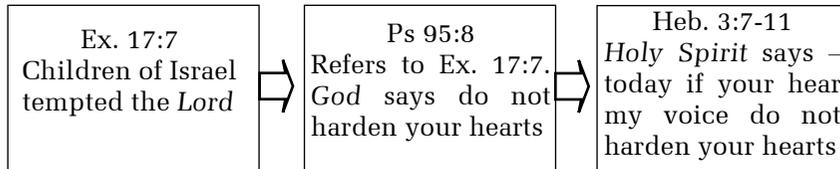
Divine person

The Holy Spirit is a divine person. Jesus as God's Son is God. He sent the Holy Spirit to take his place after he left earth and ascended into heaven. How then could the Holy Spirit be a substitute for Jesus if he were not God? Here are four areas which show us the divine nature of the Holy Spirit.

(i) Names of God

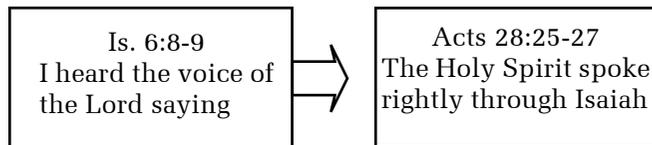
The Holy Spirit is called God in the Bible. Here are two examples where the names of God are used for the Holy Spirit.

Example 1



See how the names Lord, God and Holy Spirit are used in each of these verses, which all refer to the same incident.

Example 2



(ii) The attributes of God are given to the Holy Spirit

- eternal (Heb. 9:14)
- in all places at all times (Ps. 139:7-10)
- all-knowing (Is. 40:13-17)
- able to do all that he pleases (1 Co. 12:11)

(iii) The works of God are attributed to the Holy Spirit

- made me (Job 33:4)
- casting out demons (Matt. 12:28)
- renewing (Titus 3:5)
- transforming the characters of believers (2 Co. 3:18)

(iv) Worship given to God is also given to the Holy Spirit

- you can blaspheme against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32)
- that would not be possible if the Holy Spirit were not God

A distinct person

The Holy Spirit is a distinct person:

- he is God, as God the Father – but not the Father
- he is God, as God the Son – but not the Son
- having just considered the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit we find that this sin is only described as being against him, not against the Father or the Son
- in John 15:26 we read that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit from the Father
- so the Holy Spirit is not the Son, because the Son sent him
- nor is the Holy Spirit the Father, for the Son sends him from the Father

3. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity

The Trinity is hard for us to fully understand. There is no satisfactory illustration that we can use to explain the Trinity. God is one but at the same time three distinct persons. In this Focus Point we have been considering the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. Each person in the Trinity is distinct from the other two. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not different names of the same person with the names changing. Each person of the Trinity uses the description "I" (John 12:28;17:4; Acts 13:2).

They are three persons but one God. Their existence as one person is a deep mystery. One body – yet one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father (Eph. 4:4-6). They are so obviously three, but they are one. We believe this, though we cannot fully understand it, because it is a biblical truth.

4. Ministry of the Holy Spirit

We cannot separate the work of the Holy Spirit from the working of the Trinity. Their ministries are all essential for our salvation. God the Father planned our salvation, God the Son purchased it and God the Holy Spirit applies it to us.

The way the Holy Spirit brings this salvation to us is by giving us new life (John 3:5-8). This new life comes about as we are convicted of sin (John 16:8). Without conviction there can be no repentance. Without repentance there can be no salvation.

The reason we need to be saved is because of the terrible effect sin has on us all. It is very powerful and we cannot escape it by ourselves. When God planned our salvation he sent his Son, Jesus, to die on the cross. This was to enable our sins to be punished but that by itself could not break the power of sin. Sin has such a hold on us that we cannot by ourselves trust in Jesus Christ and his death for our sins. We were incapable of doing this; our minds and hearts are so corrupted by sin. That is why Jesus said, "No one will come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44).

How does God draw people unto himself? He does this by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses the truth about Jesus in the gospel and through this brings conviction of sin. Only the Holy Spirit can do this; for a human being this is impossible. Conviction is the knowledge of the reality of our sin. This means that we feel awful about our sin. We grieve as we realise we have offended God. This conviction brings about a longing for salvation. As the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to all these things, he points us to Jesus and we ask him for forgiveness. All this is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

After we are saved the Holy Spirit continues his work within us. He produces within our lives his special fruit. This is what we have considered in our present study in Galatians 5:22-23. The Holy Spirit is our comforter and help in all our sufferings. Jesus told his disciples that they will suffer for his name's sake and the Holy Spirit encourages us in our obedience to God to live our lives cheerfully, willingly and patiently.

5. The gifts of the Holy Spirit

In considering the ministry of the Holy Spirit no mention was made of gifts. We now consider this part of the Holy Spirit's ministry separately. By his gifts the Holy Spirit enables us to become involved in the work of the gospel. Today it is quite a controversial subject. Some Christians think that all the miraculous gifts we read of in the New Testament are still available to the church today. Others say that God has withdrawn them.

The reference to the Spirit's gifts is only made by Peter and Paul. They are found in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:7-11 and 1

Peter 4:10-11. The lists in these verses differ. The reason is that there is no complete list, which people can follow rigidly. God is sovereign and we must not try to limit him. We are given these lists to tell us about the sorts of gifts which the Spirit gives to the followers of Jesus.

Rather than trying to concentrate on all the gifts listed in these references, it is more important for us to recognise three principles concerning the Holy Spirit's gifts. Paul sets these principles out in his first letter to the Corinthians.

- there is great diversity in the Spirit's giving (12:4-10)
- all gifts are for the good of the church (4:7)
- the Spirit decides who receives what gifts (12:11,18)

Remember too that the Holy Spirit may give a gift for a particular occasion and then withdraw it afterwards. This would apply in areas such as healing. Preachers can experience extraordinary power when preaching one week, which is not repeated the following week. The Holy Spirit gives his gifts in accordance with the will and purpose of God. Be very careful about claiming a continuing gift from the Spirit. Note that the gift of tongues does not prove the Holy Spirit is present. Plenty of people who follow other gods exercise that gift. Nor are elated and emotional feelings a sign of the Spirit's presence. The presence of the Holy Spirit is recognised because he brings about a spiritual change within a person for which God gets all the glory.

6. False Ideas about the Trinity

Tritheism: There are three gods, all of the same sort but separate and distinct from each other. A belief in more gods than three is called *polytheism*. The Mormons are a modern sect who follow this way of thinking.

Monarchianism: The three persons are not equal. The Son and the Holy Spirit are lesser than God the Father. This philosophy appeared early on in the 2nd century. Today it is the Unitarians and Jehovah's Witnesses who follow this line.

Modalism One God, who like an actor, plays three parts. He appears as God the Father, then as God the Son and finally as God the Holy Spirit. Early in Church History this was called Sabellianism, after Sabellius who first taught it.

7. Division between East and West

In AD325 the Council of Nicaea met and defined the doctrine of the deity of Christ. They were vague on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and just declared a belief in him. The Council of Constantinople in AD381 added to the Nicæan Creed concerning the Holy Spirit by saying, “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father.” The Latin-speaking churches of the West were unhappy with this because they wanted the scriptural teaching of the Spirit being of Christ as well as of the Father. So the Council of Toledo in AD589 added the words “and from the Son”.

The Greek-speaking churches (East) opposed this. The Nicæan Creed, as added to by the Council of Toledo, is accepted by the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. It is rejected by the Orthodox Churches (Greece, Balkans, Eastern Europe and Russia).

Sources used: Peter Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology* (Evangelical Press); Stuart Olyott, *The Three are One* (Evangelical Press); Roger Ellsworth, *Strengthening Christ’s Church* (Evangelical Press).



Over to you

Has the study of this passage changed the way you ought to deal with the problems and sins of people?

Have you tried to make your people conform to a moral set of rules without discerning their true spiritual state?

If a professing believer committed one of the sins listed in verse 19-21, how would you deal with the situation? Would it be different from your method with a person who had made no profession of faith?

How does your understanding of the fruit of the Spirit affect your preaching and teaching?