

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 19 – “Living Up to Your Spiritual Potential”
Galatians 5:24-25
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TAKE YOU BIBLES, PLEASE...

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:24-25 ESV).

Perhaps the key question we must ask after we read the verses describing the results of a life in the flesh and a life in the spirit is simply, “What is our spiritual potential?” With reference to Christian service, each of us has a different potential. It varies with the gifts God has given us and the opportunities that come to us. However, in Christian character each of us has the same potential. **THE POTENTIAL FOR ALL OF US IS CHRIST-LIKENESS. We have the potential of producing a full harvest of the “fruit of the Spirit.”**

So, in order to answer this question, let’s take a little personal quiz. What percentage of your spiritual potential are you now reaching? How do you measure your fruitfulness? Can you see areas where you are becoming more like Christ? Have there been changes in your relationship with God, in your relationship with others, in relationship with yourself that would encourage you to believe you are moving toward your potential? While our primary focus is always on who we are in Christ, there is no doubt that He wants us to recognize that we are to bear good fruit as a result of that relationship. The fruit of the Spirit ought to be in the developmental stages within our life. That is a natural part of the process of becoming mature believers.

It is to this end that the Apostle Paul comes to our text today. Our being fruitful depends upon the two truths stated in these two verses. To the degree that these verses affect us, to that degree we will be moving toward our potential. You will not make one giant leap and arrive; in fact, you will not completely arrive until you are perfected. And, that only happens when we discard this body of flesh in glorification.

BUT THERE ARE TWO THINGS TO RECOGNIZE...

First, If You Are Going to Live Up to Your Potential, You Must Realize that the Flesh Has Been Crucified (v. 24).

By “flesh” the apostle refers to the “old man.” This is the Scripture’s way of talking about our human nature. It is sinful apart from the influence of God. To those acquainted with the flesh it is obvious that something must be done with it if there is ever to be the fruit of the Spirit in a human form. Not one of the qualities produced by the Spirit is native to the flesh. The flesh does not naturally love God. Instead it just naturally resists and opposes God. The flesh does not naturally take joy in God, rather it just naturally delights in self and sin. The flesh is not naturally meek, faithful, or temperate. It will by nature be just the opposite. So, if there is to be a fruitful life, something must be done with the flesh. That “something” is crucifixion, or death.

Paul affirms that this has been taken care of. The world crucified Jesus. The verb used by Paul here is past tense indicating a point action. It has already happened and is finished. He sees it as a completed action in the life of every believer. The flesh has been crucified along with Jesus. This is an essential truth. Again it is an emphasis that the death of the flesh is not something we DO; it is something that Jesus has DONE.

Let me see if I can make this a little clearer. I know you are asking if this is true, why do we still struggle with our temptations and often fail in our attempts to be Christ-like. Recall the crucifixion of Jesus. What was involved?

1. *First, there was a judgment reached with reference to Jesus.* In its own blind way the world came to the conclusion that Jesus was not worthy to live, that he should be put to death. This belief led to the actual crucifixion. In the same way a Christian is a person who has reached a point of judgment on his own sinful nature. He has come to the settled conviction that the old man deserves to die, that he should be crucified. He concludes that flesh will never be able to please God, that in it dwells no good thing. One reason some men never come to Christ for salvation is they never reach this judgment about themselves. They keep holding on to the hope that they might be good enough under their own power and good works. However, every genuine Christian has come to this judgment at some point in their life.
2. *Second, there was a final renunciation by the world of Jesus when they crucified Him.* So we too, must renounce the flesh. The Christian dies to any claim of the flesh in his life. He gives himself over to a new master and determines to follow his commands. While the apostle refers to this as something that happened in the past, at the point of conversion, it does have ongoing implications. The crucifixion of the flesh does not remove the flesh. It will still be there to struggle for the mastery of your life. There is a sense in which one must reaffirm his judgment upon the flesh and his renunciation of the flesh with each new day. Certainly this is what Jesus meant as he instructed his disciples to “take up their cross daily” (cf. Luke 9:23). It is a daily reaffirmation on the part of the disciple that the flesh has no claim on our life. Rather, we belong to and are obliged to obey only the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are ever to live up to your spiritual potential, this must be true in your life. If you allow the flesh to master or influence your life in any area, you will not be producing the fruit of the Spirit to the extent you are capable of producing. Wherever the flesh dominates, it will prevent the development of Christ-like character.

SO WHAT ABOUT THE “CARNAL CHRISTIAN”? Is it possible to become a “carnal Christian”? This phrase has become a commonly used description to professing Christians who lead a flesh dominated life. They are under the daily control of the old man. Such a view of the Christian life is in conflict with the bold assertion of this text. If a person who belongs to Jesus comes under the domination of the old man again, God will remove them from the earth just as the vinedresser removes branches that do not produce fruit! **THAT IS A BOLD STATEMENT.** Let me unpack it a bit more. **While the flesh continues to seek dominance, and may at times gain control in one area of our life, God will not allow the old to overcome our life.** That is the same as saying we can fall in and out of redemption. God simply moves his people into the practice of a daily death to the old way of life. His children are moved each day with an affirmation that they belong to Christ and they are dead to the old man.

Second, If You Are going to Live Up to Your spiritual Potential, You Must Rely Upon the Life of the Spirit (v. 25).

Paul says, *If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.* The Christian has not only participated in Calvary, they have been to Pentecost. The great assumption about every Christian is that they live by the Spirit. The “if” in this verse does not suggest doubt. Rather it assumes a fulfilled action. It is as if the apostle is say, “So then, because...” The Holy Spirit comes into the life of a Christian at the moment of conversion to be the seal of God. He marks the Christian as God’s special property. Christ dwells in the Christian through the Holy Spirit. So, actually when we invite Christ to live in our hearts by faith, He comes to live within us by the Holy Spirit. It is true that you may not have invited the Holy Spirit to take up residence in your life, but if you extended an invitation to the Lord Jesus, when He came in, the Holy Spirit came in. So, the Christian lives spiritually by the Holy Spirit. All of the Christian life is “in the Spirit.”

Paul’s appeal then is that since we do live by the Spirit, we should also daily walk by the Spirit. This is a call to an ongoing course of action. **To walk means to walk in a line, to march under a battle order. So it means that our daily conduct is to be under the rule and control of the Spirit.**

THE REAL KEY IS IN UNDERSTANDING HOW THIS PRACTICALLY WORKS. I am always a little surprised how quickly we ask the question “how?” It is a very valid question, but the real question should always be first, “who?”

As the indwelling Spirit, he produces in us an impulse toward Christ-likeness in every situation. For example, in your response to God, He will produce in you a desire to love God, a desire to delight in God, a desire to enjoy the favor of God. Then when you respond to that desire with the intention to do it, the Holy Spirit gives you the power to love God, to delight in God, and to enjoy the peace of God. That stepping forth, that intentionality of life in Christ is walking in the Spirit.

Use another example. Perhaps you have a particularly difficult neighbor or acquaintance. They are a constant source of irritation to you. It is the Holy Spirit who will produce in you a desire to be longsuffering, kind, and helpful to that neighbor or acquaintance. When you go out to fulfill that longing with a dependence on the Holy Spirit to enable you, then he gives you the inner strength to be longsuffering, kind, and good.

To further apply this, in your own life, the Holy Spirit will produce within you a desire to be a person of faithfulness, meekness, and self-control. The impulse in that direction is surely from Him. And when you respond to that impulse with faith in the Holy Spirit to enable you to fulfill it, He does it. This is walking in the Spirit.

The application of this is so important in your daily life. The realization of the spiritual potential in your Christian life is dependent upon your learning who you already are as a child of God, not learning more about what to do to become the child of God.