



**All Walks  
Are Not Equal**



## RETHINKING EMPOWERMENT

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*Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

Galatians 5:19-23

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Everyone who wants to attend college is required to take the dreaded Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The SAT-test score must be provided to the school's admission department to which the future student applies. In college admissions SAT-test scores rise above all else. If your score is not above fourteen hundred, forget being accepted into a prestigious school.

Consider with me for a minute the SAT procedure. The student has prepared for twelve years in a classroom setting, taking a variety of courses and subjects. Most students also take special courses to further broaden their knowledge in particular subjects stressed on the test. Being prepared, the student applies all that knowledge and those sharpened skills to one question at a time on the SAT. Each question has one correct answer. The test booklet includes numerous pages with hundreds of questions that have only one correct answer each. The procedure takes a laborious length of time. After thinking about, calculating, and deciding on his answer, the student makes a mark with his number-two pencil on the answer sheet. When the allotted time is up, the student hands in his booklet for evaluation.

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### Choices Determine Behavior

The Christian life is somewhat like taking the SAT. Life's test booklet is made up of many chapters, the entire spectrum of the Christian life, involving countless events. Each one of those experiences required you to make a choice—each incident at a time, one by one. That is life's SAT. However, rather than total preparation prior to the examination, we are on a constant learn-as-you-go (on-the-job-training) program. As a result, when the pages on life's evaluation are turned, we should show improvement in our spiritual-aptitude

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scores. In fact you should see a rising cumulative tally since our later choices should have improved from those found on earlier pages of our Christian life. This would reflect Christian maturity, progressively improving in the understanding and personal application of God's Word.

Choices lead to action. As previously addressed, we are discussing the actual behavior of the believer—the mark we made on our spiritual answer sheet. Some marks are right and some are wrong. It is the believer's test and it is the believer's mark. The issue is the decision to increasingly live in the realm of the Spirit or to increasingly walk in the ways of the flesh. Each individual choice is reflected in his behavior—either good or bad.

### Choices Have Consequences

In Galatians 5:19-23 Paul discussed the different outcomes relevant to believer's choices. Two aspects require consideration—behavior and consequences.

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Now the *deeds of the flesh* are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (vv. 19-21, italics added).

But the *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (vv. 22-23, italics added).

### *Behavior, the Product of Choice*

Each of these two lists describes the behavior of those who walk either according to the flesh (vv. 19-21) or the Spirit (vv. 22-23). Much has been made of both lists. They have been dissected, subdivided, and classified in multiple ways. However, the lists are a representative sampling of the behavior of those who walk in one manner or the other. Those who walk in the sphere of the flesh reveal one lifestyle while those who walk in the sphere of the Spirit demonstrate a different lifestyle. These contradictory ways of living correspond to the possible, and yes, contradictory choices the believer can make.

Four items are of interest. *First*, some have made much of the comparison between “deeds” (v. 19) that are in the plural form, while “fruit” (v. 22) is singular. In the singular, fruit supposedly indicates that the believer will manifest all the character traits of the Spirit simultaneously, at least to some extent. However, more likely this is the use of a collective noun in a singular form to indicate a group or unit. Therefore a distinction based on the singular-versus-plural form is questionable.

*Second*, some indicate the different words used (“deeds” and “fruit”) spotlight the means by which both are accomplished. Char-

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acter traits produced by the Spirit are compared to the deeds of the flesh. Fruit (*karpos*) is assumed to be produced by the Spirit's power through the believer, while deeds (*ergon*) are the behavior resulting from one's own abilities apart from God. The distinction is between deeds or works that men do and fruit that God produces. However, "fruit" and "deed" can be used interchangeably. When addressing

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repentance, Luke used these two words—"bear *fruits* (*karpos*) in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8) compared to "performing *deeds* (*ergon*) appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:20). A distinction based merely on the use of "deeds" and "fruit" lacks support.

*Third*, the context of Galatians 5:16-26 concerns two influences that are in competition for the believer, influences that ultimately affect one's behavior. Walking and living

*according to the flesh* or *according to the Spirit* is also addressed in Romans 8:4-5 and 8:12-13. To walk by the flesh concerns the believer's decision to allow his capacity to sin to influence his behavior. Paul's concern is that believers choose not to be governed by the flesh: "Do not turn our freedom into an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal. 5:13). On the other hand, to walk by the Spirit concerns the believer allowing the Spirit to influence his behavior. Believers have been given freedom in Christ (Rom. 6:1-10), but believers are free to choose to be slaves to righteousness or to sin (Rom. 6:11-23). Freedom came with a cost on Christ's part: once free we can choose to be influenced either by the flesh or by the Spirit. This then is the conflict each believer faces—the Choice! Paul explains the dilemma, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another"

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(Gal. 5:17). Rather than addressing a “spontaneous quality of life” produced by the Spirit and based on the “passivity” of the believer, these texts concern the active involvement of the believer in choosing and living obediently or disobediently.<sup>1</sup>

The representative lists of behavior are the *fourth* item of interest. In particular four of the nine virtues in the fruit-of-the-Spirit list (love, patience, kindness, and gentleness) are identical to four of the eight virtues believers are commanded to “put on” in Colossians 3:12-14. As discussed in chapter 2, *Finding Insight from the Scriptures*, believers are commanded to “put on” a way of life and live in a godly manner and “put off” another lifestyle, living according to the flesh. The point of Colossians 3 is behavior because the believer now has a new position in Christ. The believer’s new position should lead to godly living. When Colossians 3 and Galatians 5

are placed side by side, it is evident that the believer’s fruit of choices (Col. 3) is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5). Of course, if you hold the view that the Spirit empowers the believer to live, producing godly behavior, then the fruit of the Spirit would of necessity be understood as the Spirit’s spontaneous work. The

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Spirit’s conduct demonstrated and the Spirit’s fruit revealed. This concept, however, lacks biblical support and imposes an interpretive agenda. Rather, the passages in Galatians and Romans address believers actually choosing to obey or disobey God’s Word. The result of disobedience shows up as deeds of the flesh, while obedience manifests the fruit of the Spirit.

### *Choices Have Consequences*

The consequences of divergent and contradictory behavior are revealed at the conclusion of each list (Gal. 5:21b, 23b). After

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listing the deeds of the flesh, Paul wrote, “that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21b). Many say that the result of habitually practicing the deeds of the flesh means that this person is unsaved. In fact, if you think that the Spirit is the energizing, empowering, or activating cause of works through the believer, then no evidence of the Spirit’s fruit would prove that this person was unsaved. A “truly” born-again person, they say, would express the empowering presence of the Spirit.

However, if the “present-tense” form of “practice” in Galatians 5:21b is not unjustifiably translated “habitually practicing” and the use of the word “inherit” is thoroughly studied, the confusion is resolved. *First*, 1 John 1:6 likewise points out that those who “walk in the darkness...do not practice the truth.” A different word is used for “practice” in 1 John, but both words substantially mean the same thing in these parallel contexts (Gal. 5 and 1 John 1)—“to do” or “to practice”—and both are in the same present-tense form. Obviously the context of 1 John 1:9 reveals that confession of sin rectifies the wayward walk of a believer. However, would not the same believer who needed to confess have been the same one who had made bad choices spoken of in the Galatians 5:19-21 passage? The answer is a resounding, “Yes.” These parallel texts concern the believer’s decision to live in one of two ways, according to God’s Word or according to his own desires.

In the previous illustration with my daughter, each and every day, I expected her to make her bed. The choice was hers. However, if she did not make her bed five days in row, would that be habitual? Ten days? Thirty? See the problem? Who is to determine which works, how many and for how long? Just how much sin is necessary before it is evident that a person is not saved? Who has the authority to decide? Do you? Does your church leader or anyone for that matter? In fact if my daughter neglected to make her bed for two years, she would continue to be my child. However, we would definitely experience a severe disruption in our fellowship. Those who espouse that a habitual-behavior pattern proves salvation never

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occurred, base their teaching on the passages we have discussed and are unable to separate initial salvation from the Christian life of fellowship with God.<sup>2</sup> This theological bent places those who hold it into a theological corner, which is indefensible.

*Second*, proponents find themselves in a word-usage box when they always connect “entering the kingdom” with “inheriting the kingdom.”<sup>3</sup> In their theological mindset, entering heaven and inheriting the kingdom are equivalents. However, a study of the word “inherit” reveals that the word is most often, if not exclusively, used either to refer to earning a reward for meritorious behavior or forfeiting a reward for nonmeritorious behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the use of “inherit” gives clarity to the text. The context in Galatians 5 does not concern heaven or hell, but rather loss of kingdom rewards. While living in disobedience forfeits rewards, the converse is true; walking in the Spirit results in inheriting rewards. Following the list of the fruit of the Spirit, Paul wrote, “against such things there is no law” (v. 23b), which takes us back to verse 14 — “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word” — Love. Love is expressed in serving others as we walk by the Spirit (vv. 14, 16, 22-23). Paul uses this proverbial statement to indicate that walking by the Spirit surpasses “all legal prescriptions”

*Rewards will be  
gained or lost  
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what he has done,  
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or bad.”*

and is “therefore beyond any legal accounting.”<sup>5</sup> The law of love (Gal. 5:14), the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), cannot be compared to the old Mosaic Law. Obedience is not to be in “oldness” of the letter, but in “newness” of the Spirit (Rom. 7:6). The Mosaic Law stimulates the flesh (Rom. 5:20); the law of Christ is accomplished out of love (Gal. 5:14). Believers will be evaluated for their works as the basis for rewards, but entering the kingdom is a free gift of grace.

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All believers will give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Rewards will be gained or lost “according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

### Choices Critiqued

The context of Galatians 5 centers on believers and the moral choices they make. Those choices will eventually be evidenced in behavior. A wise person once said, “You need to make good choices because the choices you make turn around and make you!” Choices determine conduct, and conduct develops maturity.

Choices have consequences, and those made in the Christian life are no exception. When Christ judges the believer’s life, those who merit rewards for obedience will be honored and rewarded. Believers who walk in an unworthy manner will lose the inheritance that could have been theirs. Rewards, not salvation, can be lost. Make no mistake; what we do today has eternal consequences.

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## Chapter 5, NOTES

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1. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 259-60.
2. Ken Neff, *Hold Fast* (St. Augustine, FL: LQ Press, 2010), 129-64.

Myths 10, 11, and 12 of *Hold Fast* provide a biblical distinction between coming to faith and walking by faith. The former concerns one's relationship with Christ, while the latter refers to intimacy or fellowship with Christ.

3. Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992), 68-82.

A study of “entering the kingdom” and “inheriting the kingdom” shows they are not used interchangeably. Entering the kingdom refers to gaining heaven as a gift, and inheriting the kingdom is used in conjunction with rewards as follows:

### *Entering the Kingdom*

<u>Book</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Vs.</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>Gift</u>	<u>Reward</u>
Matt.	5	20	<i>enter the kingdom of heaven</i>	X	
	7	21	<i>enter the kingdom of heaven</i>	X	
	18	2-3	<i>enter the kingdom of heaven</i>	X	
	19	23-24	<i>enter the kingdom of heaven</i>	XX	
Mark	9	47	<i>enter the kingdom of God</i>	X	
	10	15	<i>enter it (kingdom of God)</i>	X	
		23-25	<i>enter the kingdom of God</i>	XXX	
Luke	18	17	<i>enter it (kingdom of God)</i>	X	
		24-25	<i>enter the kingdom of God</i>	XX	
John	3	5	<i>enter into the kingdom of God</i>	X	
Acts	14	22	<i>enter the kingdom of God</i>	X	

### *Inheriting the Kingdom*

<u>Book</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Vs.</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>Gift</u>	<u>Reward</u>
Matt.	25	34	<i>inherit the kingdom</i>		X
1 Cor.	6	9-10	<i>inherit the kingdom of God</i>		XX
	15	50	<i>inherit the kingdom of God</i>		X
Gal.	5	21	<i>inherit the kingdom of God</i>		X
Eph.	5	5	<i>inheritance (n) in the kingdom</i>		X

4. A study of the word “inherit” shows that the word is most often, if not exclusively, used either as a reward for meritorious behavior or, conversely forfeiting a reward for nonmeritorious behavior, as follows:

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<u>Book</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Vs.</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>Gift</u>	<u>Earned</u>
Matt.	5	5	<i>inherit the earth</i>		X
	19	29	<i>inherit eternal life</i>		X
	25	34	<i>inherit the kingdom</i>		X
Mark	10	17	<i>do to inherit eternal life</i>		X
Luke	10	25	<i>do to inherit eternal life</i>		X
	18	8	<i>do to inherit eternal life</i>		X
1 Cor.	6	9-10	<i>inherit the kingdom of God</i>		XX
	15	50	<i>inherit the kingdom of God</i>		X
Gal.	5	21	<i>inherit the kingdom of God</i>		X
Heb.	1	3-4	<i>inherited a more excellent name</i>		X
		14	<i>inherit salvation</i>		X
	6	11-12	<i>inherit the promises</i>		X
	12	16-17	<i>inherit the blessing</i>		X
1 Pet.	3	8-9	<i>inherit a blessing</i>		X
Rev.	21	6-7	<i>who overcomes shall inherit</i>		X

5. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 264.