

I don't know how many people have seen the Shawshank Redemption, but at the end of the film, one of the characters; Andy, crawled to freedom through half a mile of sewage. That's the length of 10 football fields. But Paul tells us in Galatians; 'you my brothers and sisters were called to be free.' We were free from the very beginning, free to walk with God and with each other. Free to think for ourselves and decide on our own choices. We have always had the ability to reason and conclude the best course of action; we can choose whether to buy Tesco value or Finest, we can choose whether to accept one job over another, we can choose whether to support Kettering or Reading. (had to be done!). But God gave us this freedom in the full knowledge that there are other options other than him. So whilst we can choose to walk with God, we can also choose to walk in and of the world. Verse 16 says 'So I say, walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.'

So we have freedom, and we have a choice. We can live according to the ideology this world presents to us, or we can live God's way, we can live by the spirit. Paul says that both of these choices have consequences.

If we choose to live the world's way we find ourselves involved in all sorts of acts which are unholy. Paul says 'The acts of the flesh are obvious; sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like.' Now I don't know that we can all relate to all of these. But I can guarantee that we can all relate to at least one. It is in our nature to be sinful (that's why we all are!). What I want to look at though is verse 17. Paul tells us 'The flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.'

Sin and spirit don't go together! They just can't. Its like trying to force two north poles of a magnet together, they don't go! Think about it, when we sin, we're lacking the fruit of the spirit. If we lie we're lacking goodness, we're lacking faithfulness. If we look lustfully we're lacking love, we're lacking goodness, we're lacking faithfulness and we're lacking self control. I could go on. But what Paul is saying is that the same goes the other way. If we fill up our lives with the fruit of the spirit, then there's less room for sin. Verse 16 again; 'So I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.' Now the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

But Pauls says WALK by the spirit. He doesn't tell us to sit in the spirit or to lean on the spirit, Paul says 'so I say, WALK by the spirit'. Those of you who are any good at English will know that 'walk' is what we call a dynamic verb. It involves action! If we read the same verse in the Message it says; 'My counsel is this; live freely, animated and motivated by God's spirit.' ANIMATION. We have to get out there and do something about this.

My Grandad grows chrysanthemums. Every time that I visit he's always at the bottom of the garden looking after his plants. He cares for these flowers like they're his children (he's actually named one Ruth!) and they always grow tall and strong and beautiful. You see plants grow when we water them and care for them. And the same is true of the fruit of the spirit. I want to make this very clear from the beginning that this takes effort, it takes action, motivation and animation.

So how are you doing with the fruit of the spirit? I don't have time to go into detail on each one, but how are you doing with love?

I want to introduce you to three kinds of love.

The first kind of love I want to introduce is something that I am going to call selfish love. This is the love of something or someone because it benefits you in some way. I love this person because they

cook nice meals for me or because they gave me a nice gift. I love chocolate because it tastes nice. I love going on holiday because I get to relax.

Another kind of love is one that I want to refer to as 'sacrificial love'. Now this is what God is interested in. This is the kind of love that causes you to sacrifice your lie in to take the kids to school or to pray with a friend when there's a show you really want to see on TV. But there's one more. This is the love that will die for the ungodly. This is 'revolutionary love'. This is the love that Christ demonstrated when he was hanging from a tree, and in agony he cried out 'Father, forgive them'. They who had nailed him to a dirty piece of wood, pierced nails through his hands and feet and mocked him with a crown of thorns. These were the people that Jesus asked for forgiveness for, because he had revolutionary love for them... for us.

When Osama Bin Laden was killed, were you glad that he might meet his justice in hell? Or were you concerned that he might spend eternity there? Did you celebrate? Or were you burdened for his soul? Did you have revolutionary love for him? This is the kind of love that Paul is speaking of when he lists it as the first of the fruit of the spirit.

How are you doing with love?

How are you doing with joy? Do you appreciate the blessings God has given you? Do you pass that joy on to others?

How are you doing with peace? A baby will sleep peacefully in the complete trust that it will be cared for by its parents. Do you have that same trust in God to live in peace? Do you strive to maintain peace with others that you come into contact with?

How are you doing with patience?

When Joseph was kidnapped by his brothers and thrown into jail he could have sat in self pity and not bothered to interpret any dreams. He could have even tried to escape. There would have been no interpretations of dreams, no prophecy of famine, no lives saved. But Joseph trusted God and had patience because he knew that God's timing is perfect. Do you have the patience to allow God the time to resolve your situation?

How are you doing with kindness? Do you seek to help others? Do you let any cars out as you drive past a busy junction? Do you allow the person behind you to go in front of you at the checkout? Do you smile at people you don't know as you walk along the street?

How are you doing with goodness? Paul tells us in Philippians 4 'Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.' Do you read trashy magazines? Do you seek the details of a brutal murder? Do you listen to provocative music full of innuendoes? Or do you watch the food with which you feed your soul?

How are you doing with faithfulness? Do you keep to the promises that you make? Do you remain faithful to the people you love?

How are you doing with gentleness? How do you treat the vulnerable people you know? Do you take risks in what you say and do or do you think about how your actions and words could affect others?

How are you doing with self control? This is vital, because we need self control in order to grow each fruit of the spirit. Can we control ourselves enough not to say something hurtful to the person who is testing our patience? Can we say no when offered a trashy magazine or change the channel when an inappropriate song is played on the radio? Can we turn down something which seems appealing but might damage our relationships with others and with God? Joseph was faced day after

day with offers from Potiphar's wife to sleep with him, day after day Joseph said no. He said; 'How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?'

All along I've asked how you are doing with each of the fruits. What I want to look at now briefly is how we can grow the fruits in our own lives. Well in John 15 Jesus says; 'I am the vine and 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.'

Have you ever seen an apple grow up out of the ground? Or have you ever seen an orange grow on an apple tree? An apple becomes an apple because it grows on an apple tree! And so the same is for us; Jesus promised that 'if a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit'. I cannot stress the importance of relationship with Jesus enough. Unfortunately, I'm often told how similar I am to my parents but I wonder if that would be the case if we never spoke. How are we supposed to become Christ like and grow in the fruit of the spirit if we never pray? Or if we never read the bible? In the front of my bible I have written the words 'letters from Daddy'. If someone sent you a letter would you just put it on the side? If someone invited you round for a conversation would you fail to turn up? In the same way that fellowship with our parents and our friends is vital to us, so is fellowship with our heavenly father. And I mean REAL prayer. As much as it is important to pray for the hungry and the poor, it is equally important to tell God how you're really feeling, what you're really concerned about. Tell God about that person that rubbed you up the wrong way, tell him if you're having a hard day or if you're frustrated with him, tell him when you're excited about something. Do this and you will bear MUCH fruit.