

# The Fruit of the Spirit (1): Introduction

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[ 0 : 00 ] And then we shall read in Galatians, Galatians in chapter 5, from verse 16.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit contrary to the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The acts or the works of the sinful nature 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. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[ 1 : 24 ] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Against such things, there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying one another.

Amen. Amen. May God bless these readings of his word. Over the course of the summer holidays, I want to break off from our studies in the book of James and explore a related subject.

I want us to study the fruit of the Spirit as defined by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5, 22 through 23. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

[ 2 : 42 ] In Martin Luther's famous commentary on the book of Galatians, he says of the fruit of the Spirit, And so our summer Sunday evenings are going to be devoted to learning how we may bring glory to God and how we may attract others to embrace Christ.

What better way to spend our holidays? This evening, by way of introduction to this subject, I want to explore three things with you about the fruit of the Spirit from these verses.

First, it is the fruit of familiarity, the fruit of familiarity in that we never look more like Jesus than when we are filled with and expressing love, joy, peace, patience and so on.

Secondly, it is the fruit of faith. That is to say, it is a consequence of our new life in the Spirit. And thirdly, it is the fruit of form, namely how we can organize the list Paul provides us with.

I intend each of these sermons to be slightly shorter than usual so that we can devote more time to praying the fruit of the Spirit more deeply into our lives as Christians today.

[ 4 : 28 ] First of all then, the fruit of familiarity, the fruit of familiarity. The fruit of the Spirit, as defined by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5, 22 through 23, seems a million miles away from the world as we know it today.

You will notice that Paul begins verse 22 with the word, but, but, indicating that what comes after is very different from what has come before.

What has come before are the so-called acts or works of the sinful nature listed for us in verses 19 through 21. As we read our way through these works of the sinful nature, they all sound eerily familiar to us.

In that if we read through a daily newspaper, we would find examples of them all. Sexual immorality. Sexual immorality.

Debauchery. Idolatry. Witchcraft. Hatred. Discord. Jealousy. Fits of rage. Selfish ambition. Dissensions. Factions.

[ 5 : 42 ] Envy. Drunkenness. Orgies. The tabloid press feed on such things. And we have become all too familiar with them.

You know, we don't need a newspaper to see them. Rather, as we look in upon our own sinful hearts, we see them all there in seed form.

The works of the sinful nature are very familiar to us as individual Christians and as a human society. However, this is not a study in the works of the sinful nature, but in the fruit of the spirit.

Just as we are familiar with these sinful works, so we are also familiar with the fruit of the spirit. Or we might hear of isolated demonstrations of them in the news.

But our familiarity with them stems from our knowledge of Jesus. Because it's in him, in Jesus Christ, we find perfect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

[ 6 : 55 ] As we read about Jesus in the gospels, and as we get to know him for ourselves, the list of the fruit of the spirit become for us a portrait of Jesus.

This is who he is. This is what he is like. If we want to see worked out examples of love in action, we need to read about Jesus in action.

If we want to know what it means to control ourselves, we need to look at how Jesus controlled himself. These nine fruit are the portrait of our Lord.

Picture in your mind for a second a heavyweight boxer. He is tall, fit, and solid. He has muscles in places we don't have places.

He needs to be fit if he's going to compete against other boxers. Now picture in your mind a marathon runner. He is thin and he's agile.

[ 8 : 08 ] He does not have an ounce of fat anywhere on his body. He needs to be if he's going to have the stamina and perseverance to run that marathon. Now picture in your mind the word love.

And what do you see? Or rather, who do you see? Picture in your mind joy. And what do you see? Picture in your mind peace.

And what do you see? We see Jesus. We see Jesus. Because this list called the fruit of the Spirit is the portrait of our Lord.

Perhaps some of us this evening are asking the question, how can I be more like Jesus? Well, here's the answer. Because in these verses we have the perfect portrait of Jesus.

If we want to be like him, we need to pursue love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. To the extent that we are pursuing and demonstrating these virtues, we are like Jesus.

- [ 9 : 21 ] Over the next number of weeks, we're going to unpack these virtues. And we're going to see how they work in the life of our Lord so that we can become more like him.
- Well, maybe you've been brought up in the church. But you are not yet a Christian. Perhaps there were prominent Christians in the past who turned you off Christianity because, well, quite frankly, they weren't loving to you.
- And they weren't kind to you. And they weren't joyful. And so you thought to yourself, well, if that's what it means to be a Christian, then I don't want anything to do with it.
- It's made you hard to award the gospel because you can't shake off your bad memories of these people. You need to know that these people will have to answer to God for the ways in which they were not like Jesus.
- And they were not patient with you and kind to you and loving toward you. But you also need to realize that just because some Christians seem to get away with acting in a harsh, unloving, and unkind way, it doesn't mean that the gospel isn't true or that Jesus isn't very different from them.
- [ 10 : 46 ] Perhaps you need to put these hurtful memories from your youth behind you and realize afresh just how loving, kind, gentle, and patient Jesus really is.
- That even if you cannot put your trust in Jesus' sinful followers, you can put your trust in Jesus and find peace from him and in him.
- The fruit of familiarity. Secondly, the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of faith. The fruit of faith.
- You will notice that this list is called the fruit of the Spirit. The previous list is called the acts or the works of the sinful nature.
- But this list is the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit is of a different order from the works, not just in what they are, but in where they come from and how they come to us.
- [ 11 : 54 ] Weeds and flowers grow in exactly the same way, but the fruit of the Spirit is a world apart from the works of the sinful nature. I want you this evening to think of the fruit of the Spirit in three ways.
- They come from the Spirit. They come by faith. And they come as we keep in step with the Spirit. Think, first of all, of how they come from the Spirit.
- They come from the Spirit. Of course, we know that when Paul uses the word Spirit, he's not talking about the Spirit of a man, to his personality, to his character.
- These are not the fruit of the noble life of a morally excellent man. He's talking, rather, of the Holy Spirit of God, he of whom we say in our opening creed, the Lord, the giver of life.
- This is the fruit of the Spirit of God at work in the life of a man or woman who has placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ. That's where these fruit come from.
- [ 13 : 05 ] They don't come from ourselves. They come from the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus encountered many people who were possessed by evil spirits.
- These evil spirits forced their victims into acting in self-destructive, inhuman ways. Legion, the demon-possessed man, would cut himself with sharp rocks and break all his chains.
- Other demon-possessed people shouted loudly and succumbed to epileptic-type fits. Jesus could tell by the way a person acted if they were possessed by an evil spirit.
- Now, the Holy Spirit possesses no man unwillingly. Rather, we say of him that the person controlled by the Holy Spirit is filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and so on.
- A person possessed by an evil spirit hates and hurts others. A person controlled by the Holy Spirit loves and suffers long with others.

[ 14 : 23 ] They are, to use a famous phrase, the life of God in the soul of a man. This is who God is, the God who dwells in us by faith in his Son, loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, and so on.

And as he lives within us by faith, he shines out from us in thought, word, and action. So they come from the Spirit.

They come, secondly, by faith. They come by faith. As Christians, God himself places within our hearts the desire to be more like him.

And this is his way that we love one another, that we are self-controlled, that we are patient with one another and everything in between.

Because of who we are by nature, we assume that we can be more loving toward each other by doing more. That we can control ourselves better by trying harder and so on.

[ 15 : 37 ] This is who we are by nature. Those who think that forward progress in the Christian life is all about doing more and trying harder.

And so we treat the fruit of the Spirit rather like we do the Ten Commandments. Thou shalt be loving. Thou shalt be joyful. Thou shalt be peaceful.

And so on. To which the Apostle Paul says, no, no, and no again. The fruit of the Spirit is not expressed as we do more and try harder, but as we trust more and believe deeper.

The fruit of the Spirit is not a New Testament Ten Commandments, but an opportunity for us to exercise our faith in Jesus. The problem for the church in Galatia, the church to which Paul is writing this letter, was that having been saved by faith in Christ alone, they were now being deceived into thinking that forward progress in the faith was made by doing more and trying harder.

Let me read you Paul's devastating critique of that way of thinking from Galatians 3, 1-3. Just listen to these words.

[ 17 : 07 ] Paul writes to them, you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you.

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law? That's Paul's code for doing more and trying harder. Or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish?

After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? By trying harder and doing more? Listen, the fruit of the Spirit, according to the Apostle Paul, grows not as we try harder and do more, but as we trust more in Jesus and believe deeper in the crucified and risen Christ.

The path to being filled with love, joy, peace, patience, and so on, does not primarily consist in obeying the commandments, but in believing the gospel more firmly and with a deeper certainty.

The fruit of the Spirit does not primarily rouse us to more action for Jesus, but a greater devotion to Jesus.

[ 18 : 33 ] Because the more you believe the gospel, the more normal it will be for you to love one another, to be joyful and to control yourself.

And then thirdly, the fruit of the Spirit come as we keep in step with the Spirit, as we keep in step with the Spirit. If the fruit of the Spirit is not ours as much as it belongs to the Spirit, and if it comes to us by faith, then in what sense is this fruit mine, ours?

Is Paul calling us to passivity, to doing nothing at all? Not at all. This passage is riddled with commands, with imperative verbs, chief of which we find in verse 25.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. There is the command.

That if we want to grow in, be filled with, and express the fruit of the Spirit, then we must keep in step with the Spirit. What a privilege this is, that we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in growing in, in being filled with, and expressing the holiness of the gospel.

[ 20 : 05 ] The word which we translate as keep in step with is a military term, which means to march in line, to maintain our position along with our fellow soldiers as we follow our leader into battle.

The great Anglican John Stott, whose comments on this passage are worth gold, writes, As our leader, the Holy Spirit takes initiative.

He asserts his desires against those of the sinful nature and forms within us holy and heavenly desires. He puts this gentle pressure on us, and we must yield to his direction and control.

Just love those words. He puts this gentle pressure on us, and we must yield to his direction and control. The Holy Spirit is leading us away from the works of the sinful nature.

So to keep in step with the Spirit means that we too shall follow him away from rage and greed and selfish ambition and division and factions and so on.

[ 21 : 22 ] And he places within our hearts new desires for love and joy and peace and so on. John Stott continues, We are to walk actively and purposefully in the right way.

from what is evil in order to occupy ourselves with what is good. And if it's vital to be turning away from the things of the sinful nature, it is equally vital to be disciplined in turning to the things of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, as our leader, is leading us away from the works of the sinful nature. But to keep in step with the Spirit means to live in this gospel-driven dynamic of continually repenting of what is wrong in our lives and turning to what is right.

To reject hate and turn to love. To reject despair and turn to joy. To reject discord and turn to peace and so on.

We must always remember that there is forgiveness and failure, but we strain every sinew of our spiritual bodies to pursue the familiarity of Christ-likeness.

[ 22 : 53 ] There may be some here who were just longing for me to say this evening, that the path to growth in the fruit of the Spirit consists in trying harder and doing more.

Try to be more loving. Try to be more joyful. Yes, we must keep in step with the Spirit, but ultimately, it is not human effort, but faith in Jesus Christ, which will be sufficient for even that also.

There is a promise here for all of us who are try-harders and doers more. Jesus says, Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

It is in actively resting in Christ, believing in the gospel and living out the truth that we shall achieve genuine growth in expressing the fruit of the Spirit.

There is good news for the legalist here. In law, there is only weakness and guilt. In gospel, there is power and hope.

[ 24 : 09 ] The fruit of faith. And then lastly, and briefly, the fruit of form. We've seen the fruit of familiarity, the fruit of faith, and now the fruit of form.

I want to very briefly comment on these nine components which make up the fruit of the Spirit under these two headings of organization and oneness.

Organization and oneness. Organization, first of all. There are nine virtues which make up the fruit of the Spirit, the expression of his work in us as we keep in step with him day by day.

Commentators differ to how they are organized. Some suggest that the nine are divided into three sets of three. The first set, love, joy, and peace, concern our attitude to God.

The second set, patience, kindness, and goodness, concern our attitude to others. The third set, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, concern our attitude to ourselves.

[ 25 : 15 ] The whole life of the man of God is therefore contained within the fruit of the Spirit. Our attitude to God, to others, and to self.

Other commentators prefer to see this list as dominated by the first and last virtues. This is the way in which ordinary Greek speakers would have understood this emphasis, to rest on love, the first virtue, and self-control, the last virtue.

In other words, our joy should be loving and self-controlled. Our gentleness should be loving and self-controlled, and so on. You can take your pick of either interpretation because it's not really been made clear what is the right one.

I personally favor the second way of looking at that list. That's organization. Let's look at oneness. Oneness. Perhaps more important than the way in which we arrange the nine virtues which make up the fruit of the Spirit is to notice that they comprise one fruit.

There are not nine fruits. There is only one fruit. fruit. The Christian heart which is driven and motivated by the gospel will grow in each virtue.

[ 26 : 44 ] There is only one seed, the Holy Spirit, and therefore there is only one fruit. So the Spirit who works within us will make us more loving and more joyful, more reliable, and more self-controlled.

If someone is very joyful but is also rather impatient, then whatever else he is possessed by, it may not be the fruit of the Spirit. If someone is very self-controlled but is very harsh with other people, then whatever else it is he has, it may not be the fruit of the Spirit.

We have them all or we have none at all. Behind what I'm from up north in Gullsby, there is a huge forest made up of tens of thousands of trees.

The question has always puzzled me. How do you tell the difference between a Scots pine, a Douglas fir, and a larch tree?

They're all different kinds of fir trees, but what's the difference between the three of them? Well, the answer is in three things. Their cones, their bark, and their needles.

[ 28 : 07 ] Each tree produces a different kind of cone. A Scots pine cone is not small and fragile like a larch cone. each also has a different kind of bark.

The Douglas fir is grey and rather rough. The Scots pine is brown and smooth. A larch tree projects its needles in a certain pattern.

The Douglas fir is more bushy. You don't get Douglas firs with smooth brown bark and small fragile cones.

If it's a Douglas fir, its cones, its bark, and its needles all fit with its species. And in the same way, the fruit of the Spirit is not love, joy, discord, impatience, kindness, goodness, unreliability, harshness, and self-control.

No, it is all of one or it's none at all. This is the true familiarity of Christ's portrait and the seed of the Holy Spirit which grows in us as we keep in step with him.

[ 29 : 29 ] No one is saying that we shall ever perfectly attain to all these virtues, but we should at least, and we can most definitely by faith, grow in them. Now let me finally conclude by directing a few thoughts to anyone here this evening who wonders what the relevance of any of this is to our present situation.

Perhaps you're someone who looks more to science and the material universe than you do to God. Well, cast your mind back three months, seems like eternity, but it's three months.

At the beginning of the coronavirus lockdown, do you remember how selfish people were hoarding all the toilet roll and pasta from the supermarkets? Remember that?

And you probably stood at the end of an empty aisle longing for a new packet of toilet roll to be put up there and you were thinking to yourself, wouldn't it be a better world if all of us could be all of these things?

Loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self-controlled. Yes, if everyone was like this, at least I'd be able to get some toilet roll and some pasta.

[ 30 : 49 ] The thing is, you can't have the fruit of the Spirit without the seed of the Spirit. You can't have the portrait of Jesus before your eyes without having Jesus in your heart.

And so for you, as for us all, the answer is in a change of heart. For as much as the material universe is precious to us all, science is crucially important to us, it can't change us on the inside.

It can't make us joyful people or patient people. Only the Holy Spirit is able to do that. And His way is through faith in Jesus.

It's as we believe and trust in the gospel of Jesus Christ that He died to take away our sins and to make us new that we begin to change. change. It might not make the world a better place and if this lockdown goes on or we get a second wave we won't be able to buy any more toddler roll.

But it will make us more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled people.

[ 32 : 06 ] Let us pray. Thank you, Lord, for this description of the character of your Son, Jesus Christ.

And for the way in which your Holy Spirit who loves nothing more than to point to Jesus is forming, as it were, in us His perfect image so that at length, albeit imperfectly in this world, when people see us, they'll see the same portrait of Jesus we see here in Galatians 5.

They'll see someone who's loving, joyful, and peaceful, and patient, and kind, and good, and faithful, reliable, and self-controlled. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.