

But the Fruit of the Spirit is Love

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[0 : 00] Last Lord's Day evening, those of you who were here with us, if you remember we were focusing on the great truth that the believer, the one who's in Christ, has freedom, freedom in Christ.

And that freedom that we looked at in the various aspects of that freedom that the believer in Christ knows and has, freedom from the dominion of sin, freedom from the law in relation to keeping the law as a means of salvation, freedom to commune with God, freedom to love God, and freedom to love one's neighbour as oneself.

It's that freedom that the Lord's people have, that freedom that the Lord's people exercise because we've been set free by the blood of the Lord Jesus, set free from the slavery to sin, and set free to keep the law, to keep the laws as evidence of saving grace, evidence that you have salvation.

And so we've been given that freedom to serve one another, as Paul tells us at the end of verse 13 here, and he confirms in that summary statement of verse 14, where he writes the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

It's that freedom that a person has in Christ. Well, as we said last Lord's Day evening, it's a freedom to action. Just as we said last week, the freedom that you have in Christ, that freedom gives you that motive, it gives you that incentive, that desire to be as Christ, to seek out the lost, to have compassion on others, to give self for the sake of others and their various needs.

[1 : 58] And it's exercising that sacrificial love. That's the expression of the person who knows freedom in Christ, that freedom to serve, that freedom to love sincerely from the heart and enable to do so, empower to do so, as you do what God has given you to do, the works that God has given you to do in love, through the power of the Holy Spirit within you.

And so you who know the Lord Jesus as Saviour, in your walk with the Lord, as you're showing that love to your neighbour, that love to others, you're doing it, a spirit-filled people.

And that's what Paul is doing, as we read there in the passage there, he says, moving on logically in this great section, he's showing what true God-glorifying, Christ-honouring, spirit-filled life looks like.

A life that's lived to the glory of God, that life that doesn't seek to gratify the flesh, to gratify the sinful nature, but a life that desires first and foremost, the glory of God, man's chief purpose, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

That's the spirit-filled life, that's the spirit-filled purpose of life. And you'll do that in the love that you have in your heart for the Saviour, and the love that you show into your neighbour.

[3 : 30] And it's that outworking of the spiritual life that really Paul's spelling out here in the verses that we read. And we went this evening, just simply this evening, to focus just on one aspect of that spirit-filled life.

And of course, as we say this in many ways, it's a continuation of what Paul's been writing about, about living by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, as we read in verse 18 there.

As you're led by the Spirit, if you're walking by the Spirit, you're exercising that freedom to love one another, to serve one another, to serve in love, and in doing so, obeying the law of God.

And it's that living by the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, so we're going to focus our hearts and minds on this evening, with a view to action. We're not simply here to hear the Word, we're to hear the Word with a view to application.

And if you're truly serious about living that life to the glory of God, then we seek to apply God's Word in every aspect of the life that God has given us.

[4 : 45] to be, to show that you are someone who is walking by the Spirit, rather than someone who simply indulges the flesh, indulges the sinful nature.

And so to emphasize that contrast, that contrast between a life that's centered on self and the world, as opposed to life that's Christ-centered, driven by the desire of the Spirit, well, Paul here, he's showing the contrast, he's bringing out the differences, he's showing what the evils of a lifestyle are that's driven by our sinful nature, as opposed to the life that one lives when we're driven by that desire to honor and glorify God, that life that we, the Lord's people have through the Spirit.

And so there's this difference then, if you like, between license and freedom. On the one hand, that license to sin, as opposed to that freedom from the power of sin.

And so Paul's going to show us the differences, the difference in these lifestyles. What do we see then? First of all, we see the lifestyle of the sinful nature, as we read there in verses 19 to 21.

Now, the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

[6 : 30] As Paul says, I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. What's Paul doing here? He's really spelling out, he's issuing a statement of what a lifestyle is that indulges the sinful nature.

An indulgence that's utterly and completely different to the life of the believer whose true desire is to love God and to love one's neighbour.

Now, for this evening, we're certainly not going to examine each one of these. I think there are 15 specified sins of the flesh, sins of the sinful nature that Paul's expressing here.

We don't need to go into these in any great detail. But the point surely has to be made as we were reading that list a second time this evening, that this list of, as it were, flesh living.

It's got no place in the life of the spirit-filled believer because each of these sins that we read there in these verses, each of these sins runs counter to the law of God and to loving God and our neighbour as we ought to.

[7 : 49] And so, Paul, well, Paul earlier, as we read in verse 14, he's mentioned that we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Well, look at the contrast between what Paul has written in these verses in relation to the sins of the flesh, how that contrasts with loving, loving our neighbour.

Let's just give some examples. Think of the immorality that Paul mentions there. We can give, of course, various aspects of that particular immorality.

Think, for example, of the cheating on one's spouse. That's a lack of love, a lack of love for the spouse, the husband, the wife. Or think of idolatry, because idolatry doesn't just reveal a lack of love for the one true God.

Idolatry shows a lack of love for others. If we're going to make an idol of self, if our idolatry is self, that obviously will show a lack of love towards others when we demean others, when we humiliate others in our exalting of self.

Jealousy, the jealousy that resents other people's abilities, characters, and again, a refusal to love that person. Drunkenness, as Paul mentions here, the drunkenness that involves losing self-control and damages relationships.

[9 : 16] That's a lack of love, a lack of love towards others. So that all that Paul has listed there in these verses contradicts the love required from the spirit-filled believer.

It's the complete opposite of the spirit-filled life, that life that desires holiness, that life that's lived to express love for God and one's neighbour.

Well, the message is clear. God's kingdom, as Paul tells us here, God's kingdom is a kingdom of godliness, it's a kingdom of righteousness, it's a kingdom of self-control.

And those whose life and lifestyle is perpetually, consistently one of indulging in the works of the sinful nature, what Paul tells us, won't inherit the kingdom of God, are going to be excluded from the eternal kingdom.

So the works of the sinful nature are evidence of a life outside of Christ. The sins of a sinful nature show utterly devoid of the Holy Spirit within.

[10 : 37] So when Paul begins his list of graces that we read there from verse 22, these graces that reflect the spirit for life, he's doing it to show the contrast to the sins of the flesh.

Notice how he does it, as he does it there in that contrast. He uses the little word but, but the fruit of the Spirit is, what?

Verse 22, but, so but, in other words, in contrast to the ugliness, in contrast to the sheer repulsion of the works of the flesh, in contrast to that ugliness of sin, are fruits.

Fruit. Beautiful, nourishing, life-giving, life-affirming aspects of the Spirit-filled life. And it's for each one of you who love the Lord to strive to apply in your life, in your life of service, in your life of loving your neighbour, as you love God and show that love even in loving one another.

So what then secondly do we see in the fruitful freedom of the Christian? Because when Paul's speaking of fruit in relation to the Spirit for life, doing it differently, he's bringing out what's truly blessed in that life that's lived to the glory of God.

[12:02] He's using this word fruit here because fruit is something that's produced. It's something that's good that comes from a good source, something that comes from, if you like, a life-giving source.

It's something that's, well, not just pretty to look at, but it's something that's to be used and something to be used for benefit, something that gives benefit to others, health to others.

fruit nourishes, fruit feeds, fruit gives health, fruit sustains life. So when Paul's using this expression of fruit here in relation to the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, what's he saying?

He's saying, look, he's saying, the freedom that a Christian has is demonstrated, is shown by the evidence of a Spirit-filled life, and the evidence is seen in what's produced by the Holy Spirit working in your life, working in your heart that's seen in your life, the fruit of the Spirit, the Spirit's fruit.

And the evidence, Paul is about to list the evidence shown in a person who loves the Lord, who's filled with the Spirit, who seeks to honour God in a life lived to God's glory.

[13:25] And so Paul's telling us of the evidence of that Spirit for life, love, peace, joy, and the rest of these graces. It's fruit, because it comes from the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of life, the life-giving Spirit.

Because without the Holy Spirit in anyone's life, there's no eternal life. but with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit gifted to every believer, you have that absolute confidence and assurance.

You have eternal life. And so the Holy Spirit then works in your life to give you these qualities that you're going to show in your life, in your lifestyle, to show that you truly are somebody who has a life of true freedom.

and it's not only going to nourish you as a Christian, you're going to nourish others. These qualities, these graces, if you like, that give you and to give others, that spiritual health, these graces that keep you spiritually healthy, equip you for a life lived to the glory of God.

And so in contrast to the sins of the flesh, these sins that are so self-centered and sins that we have to say are sourced in the devil, the evil one, the foot of the Spirit demonstrates a life that fulfills the law of God.

[14:59] It's a life that's lived selflessly. It's a life that's lived in self-giving love. It's that that distinguishes a Christian, somebody who's been born again, you've received the Holy Spirit, as opposed to somebody who isn't a Christian, who's had no second birth.

And the Spirit's fruit is evident, it's evident in a life of repentance, that life that's gifted through the saving grace of God and that you enjoy as somebody who's in Christ.

As we have to say before we move on, notice as Paul tells us here, it's fruit and not fruits, not the fruits of the Spirit, the fruit but the fruit of the Spirit.

How do we understand this? Why is it fruit and not fruits? Well, somebody's said, and I apply this illustration to yourselves, think of a jewel, think of a beautifully cut jewel.

Now, as you know, saying a beautifully cut diamond, for example, there are different surfaces, but they're on the same jewel. Each of these surfaces, they give a luster, but it's the luster from the same jewel.

[16:18] So it's the case with the Spirit's fruit. It's the one gift, the one benefit, with different aspects of the gift, that gift that binds these graces together.

And so, if you like, we have that common bond, if you like, that common bond of these qualities, these graces that Paul mentions, these nine graces. And of course, the first mention is love.

And so we have to see why love is mentioned first. Why does Paul mention love as the first of these graces? Well, let's look thirdly then at the priority of love in the Spirit-filled life.

Paul, as we said, lists love first of all. What is Paul meaning? What is he saying here when he speaks of love as the first fruit of the Spirit?

Well, he's writing of that love that speaks of selflessness, the love that reaches out, the love that gives irrespective of who the object of that love is.

[17 : 26] It's that love, that self-giving love that we read of so often in Scripture. This love word, if you like, this agape word, I'm sure many of you will have heard of that word, the love that has a very special place in the Bible.

Of course, it has to have a very special place in the life of each and every believer. And this word love here, even the special word, this self-giving love word, don't just put it aside in a Bible dictionary.

This is a word that's alive. It's a word that's active. And it really has to be a priority in any list of graces. Why?

Because God is love. And so what's Paul saying here to the Galatians is this, and what he's saying to ourselves. He's saying that the love that God is by nature, the love whose source is God, is that love that's gifted to every believer and gifted by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's the Spirit's fruit, the self-giving love, the love that, if you like, sums up every other grace. It's that love that defines a Christian.

[18 : 46] Because if you're a Christian, if you're in Christ, then you reflect Christ. He's your Savior. Reflect him. Show that you are somebody who follows the Lord Jesus, who's in Christ.

And in reflecting the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus who loved you, remember he still loves you, and he'll love you forever more. Will you respond then?

You show that Christ-like love, even in your loving others. Now, bear in mind what Paul's getting at here when he's warning his readers here, he's saying, you know, true freedom, it's not license, it's not even legalism, but true freedom is life lived in the Spirit.

And so Paul's saying that the greatest freedom that a person has is the freedom to love. And so, you know, to summarize that love, the love that's the fruit of the Spirit, well, I want to look at four things briefly, really just to close, four aspects of that love that really brings home the wonder of that love, the wonder of the Christian who's blessed with God's love and who blesses others with that love.

Four aspects of that love, really just to summarize all that we're saying of the grace of love in the life of a believer. Well, let's look first of all at the love that's the fruit of the Spirit.

[20 : 22] Well, it's only possible, it's only possible to show that love because you were first loved by God. John tells us in 1 John 4 19 that you love because he first loved you.

You love, I love, I love, because he first loved us. The love that you give in treating others as a world better than yourself, that love is only possible because you were first loved by God and loved from all eternity.

The love that you give when you rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, that love that you give is only possible because of God's electing love in Christ.

The love that you show in compassion towards others, the love that you show in service towards others, the love that you show in humbly giving of yourself, the love that you show in giving of yourself sacrificially, that love is only possible because you were first loved by God but has loved you from all eternity.

And so we praise God this evening for us having loved you first before you loved God, before you loved others. But then secondly we can say this, that the person who truly does exhibit the fruit of the Spirit and does so through love.

[21 : 55] Does it by a character that's shaped by love, that self-giving love that, well, that love that keeps you from being conceited, that love that keeps you from being proud, that love that keeps you from jealousy and envy, it's that love that keeps you humble.

If you live a life of love that reflects the Lord Jesus Christ, then that love is going to be seen, your motives are going to be love-driven. Your actions are going to be actions that think less of self and more of others.

Your words are going to be full of love, love that builds up, love that encourages, and yes, even love that admonishes others when we speak the truth in love, even in admonishing other people.

You truly do care for a person's soul, and there will be times when in love you rebuke another.

You're going to live that spiritual life that shapes you as a person, and the fruit of love, the spirit's fruit of love, going to be seen in the way that you interact with others.

And the evidence then of that love, the fruit of the spirit that's love, is going to be seen when you don't hide your light. It's the character of the love-driven person who is not ashamed to show forth the love of the Lord Jesus.

[23 : 28] It's going to be evident. It's going to be evident in your words and in your actions. Because you see the fruit of that love, that spirit-filled love, the fruit of that love will nourish, it will raise up others in their despair, it's that love that reaches out to the lost, it reaches out to the weary, it reaches out to those who are heavy laden.

So the person then who truly exhibits the fruit of the spirit through love does so through a character that shaped my love and is evident that you are someone who lives by that love.

But then thirdly, the spirit's fruit of love enables you to grow as a Christian. Somebody's written of this aspect of this love.

He says this, that Galatians 5.22, this verse that tells us what the fruit of the spirit is love. He says, Galatians 5.22 sheds the clearest light on the sanctification of the individual.

Let's put it like this. Christians are growing people. you grow more like Christ as the Holy Spirit works within you, as the spirit continually enables you to grow in holiness.

[24 : 53] When you were converted, your sins weren't counted against you. Yes, still remains within you. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, you're unable to grow, grow daily.

You grow apart from sin. and grow more like Christ. And yes, this side of eternity, in that your sanctification, your growth in grace, you're growing in holiness.

Then of course, at the point of death, you're made perfect in holiness. So we have to say this, there's a process going on in your life as a Christian. Yes, there's a battle waging, that battle between your sinful nature and your regenerate soul.

love. You can say this, that the more that you exercise the Spirit's love, the more you'll grow in holiness. Because, as Paul says, if the sum of the law is to love others, then the more that you practice that love, the more you'll be like Christ.

Because the Lord Jesus fulfilled the law with his perfect love. one more thing to say about the Spirit-filled love that's evident in the life of the believer.

[26 : 10] You can say this, that the Spirit's fruit of love enables the church, enables the church of Christ to grow. You see, the fruit of the Spirit in a church's life has to be seen in love.

Remember what Paul is doing here. He's writing to a church, this church here in Galatia. this church that really needs to be taught that love is the most important aspect of their existence as a church community.

Already in chapter 5, verse 15, he's warned the church, he's warned them, that if they don't practice this self-giving love, this selfless love, they're going to break up.

The church is saying you're going to be destroyed, and it's not going to be by the Roman authorities. It's not even going to be by their Jewish enemies. they'll destroy themselves. They don't practice this love.

In fact, the end of this chapter, verse 26, he repeats that message. He's saying that a loveless church feeds conceit and envy and strife.

[27 : 16] It has not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Sadly, we have to say that this has been seen in the tragedies of church division over the history of the church.

It's happened when love has been abandoned, love for others within the community of the church has been abandoned, when the works of the flesh have taken over, when jealousies have crept in, when hatred's been allowed to display selfless love for others, even in the church of the Christ, and that church suffers.

love for others because, you know, it gives the devil no greater happiness than to see a breakdown and a breakup in the life of the church.

When love is replaced by self, when love for others is replaced by love for self, when my way is preferred to the Lord's way, when love for the brothers and sisters in Christ is absent from the hearts of people who are called to love, and instead prefer love of self.

Of course, none of us can ever be complacent. Surely it's your desire, it has to be your desire, my desire, to see fruit in our lives, fruit in our lives as individuals and fruit in the life of a congregation.

[28 : 45] Surely it has to be your desire to want to see the Holy Spirit move within as we seek to witness for him, as we seek to see love, the love of God abound.

Remember that love that comes from God, that love that's sourced in him, that love that's life, that love that's yours forever as you grow in grace, as you journey towards your heavenly home where your holiness, you will have to say, is fully realized, and you're with him, and you behold him face to face, and you see the one who first loved you and gave himself for you in love.

Amen. And let us pray. Our Lord, our God, you who are loved, you who sent your one and only Son in love for us, and that Lord Jesus, you who came in love and gave yourself in love.

Lord, we pray that truly we will live lives, that our lives lived in love for you, and love for one another, as we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Lord, help us, we pray, when we are weak in our love, strengthen that love, so that we might serve you willingly and diligently, so that we might serve you with all our hearts.

[30 : 18] Lord, hear us, teach us, provide for us, help us to be those who truly do exhibit the love that is that spirit-gifted love.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to honor you in this. Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.