

“The Fruit of the Spirit” (part 1)

Galatians 5:22-23

Some time ago, I was intrigued by a documentary that was on the National Geographic Channel about a man who was called “The Forest Man of India.” I’ll not try to pronounce the man’s name, but his story is fascinating. He was just a simple farmer who lived in the remote part of northeastern India, but he single handedly grew an entire forest in what used to be a barren landscape. When he was a teenager, he was troubled by what he described as a scene of death and lifelessness on a stretch of land that existed on a wide sandbar between two rivers. And so he resolved to plant at least one tree every single day, which he did for more than 40 years. And as time passed by, the barren sandbar went through a metamorphosis. Then came the bamboo shoots, followed by flora and fauna. Then tunes of chirping birds could be heard. Deer began to explore the burgeoning greenery. Even a group of elephants sought refuge in this forest sanctuary for three months annually. The man said, “It felt like witnessing a transformation.” And now, there is a 1500 acre forest in the location which is home to a variety of wildlife. What once was barren is now teeming with life and is full of potential. Tourists from all of the world come to witness the jungle that has thrived under the eye of “The Forest Man of India.”

That’s a neat story, but I want to talk to you this morning about an even greater miracle of transformation that takes place in the barren life of a person in whom the Holy Spirit comes to dwell. If you have your Bible, turn with me once again to the fifth chapter of Galatians. I want to return to a passage that we looked at last Sunday, a text of Scripture in which the apostle Paul lists nine character traits which he refers to as the fruit of the Spirit. Throughout this study of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, we’ve looked at the words of Jesus from John 14, 15, and 16. Then we considered the historical account of the Spirit’s arrival at Pentecost. And we’ve considered what it means to be filled with the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit in our daily living. For the time that we have this morning, I want to emphasize the way in which the Holy

Spirit produces the fruit of Christ-likeness in our lives as believers. We'll finish up our study by taking a good look at the gifts of the Spirit, but not before spending adequate time examining the grace of the Spirit. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and reproduces within the child of God the character of God. These nine character traits can be described as the graces of the Spirit-filled life. The fruit of the Spirit is different from the gifts of the Spirit. A Christian is equipped with unique gifts from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of service and building up the body of Christ, though not everyone has all the gifts. That's why every member is valuable to the body. But the fruit of the Spirit is something that the Holy Spirit produces in every believer. You don't get one without the others. I'm convinced that the greatest witness to the world will not be our gifts, but our graces. It is godly character that leads others to take notice, so that they see Jesus in us.

Jerry Vines — *"We often think we can sweep people off of their feet by the glitter and glamour of spiritual gifts. But we may more often win people by the slow, steady, substantive fruit of the Spirit. Sometimes people may be awed by the 'fireworks' of the faith, but I am of the conviction they are more often won by the 'fruit' of the faith."*

People are drawn to Christ not so much by fireworks but by the fruit. The Spirit's fruit on display in your life will be what C.S. Lewis called 'the final apologetic' to a watching world. And just like any orchard, the fruit will grow and thrive when we carefully cultivate and care for the tree's health. (Read)

The term 'pomology' refers to a particular branch of botany that studies fruits and their cultivation. And someone who researches and practices the science of pomology is called a pomologist. For the next few minutes, we're all going to be spiritual pomologists. We're going to go out on a limb and carefully inspect what Galatians 5:22 describes as the fruit of the Spirit. Before we do so, I think it will be helpful for us to keep some basic growth principles in mind. Every farmer who has an orchard would tell you these principles are very important:

- Fruit is the byproduct of life and health

The fruit that we see hanging on a branch is evidence that a tree is healthy. It is a consequence of life flowing from the tree to the branch and is a sign of health. Where there is no life, there will be no fruit. We don't find any fruit hanging from dead tree limbs. No life, no fruit. No health, no fruit. The fruit that we see on the branch comes because there is a healthy root system under the ground, beyond the realm of observation. Fruit isn't manufactured, but is produced.

- Fruit grows over time

Another thing to understand is that fruit grows slowly and over time. It doesn't emerge overnight like a mushroom in the yard. Fruit is seasonal and can take months to arrive on the tree. And once it bursts forth from bud to blossom to fruit, it has to ripen. All of that requires time and patience.

- Fruit is observable

You can easily identify fruit hanging from a branch. It is observable and visible. It isn't hidden or secret. If you've ever been to an orchard at harvest time, you know what I'm talking about. You just walk by and can immediately see all the fruit. The trees are weighed down with their fruit, ready for harvest.

- Fruit is beneficial to others

Not only is fruit visible, but it is intended to be picked and enjoyed. In fact, the English word 'fruit' comes from a Latin word that means delight or pleasure. There's something delightful about sinking your teeth into a juicy apple! Fruit isn't to be kept on the tree, but is to be harvested. When I was thinking through this thing, I thought about the grumpy apple trees in the Wizard of Oz. Do you remember when Dorothy sees all the red apples hanging from a tree? She picks one, only to have her hand slapped by the talking tree, "What do you think you're doing? [She says, "I was hungry!"] How would

you like to have someone come along and pick something off of you!” The point is that fruit is meant to be picked, except in places like Oz. The fruit of the Spirit is something that is to be ‘picked’ from my life and yours, something that exists for the glory of God and the benefit of other people. Fruit is proof of life, it takes time, it is visible, and it is beneficial.

And so think about how all of this applies to the fruit of the Spirit. In the same way a physical tree is known by its fruit, spiritual fruit is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in God’s people through reproducing and refinement of their character. The man or woman who is walking by the Spirit will radiate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These character traits are spiritual qualities that are observable in the lives and relationships of a Christian. And these traits are not a result of works, but are the result of abiding in Christ. It is His Spirit in the believer that is producing such virtue as we are filled with and walking by the Spirit in our daily lives. It doesn’t happen in a microwave, but over the course of our lives as we’re walking with God. And it will be observable to other people. There ought to be a noticeable difference in our character and disposition. The fruit of the Spirit isn’t simply for our benefit, but for the benefit of others so that it will flavor all our relationships.

With that being said, I want to point out to you a few things in general about the fruit of the Spirit before we’ll consider these nine virtues which are mentioned in verses 22-23.

1—PLANTING the seed (3:3)

“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

Paul has been driving home the point in Galatians that the flesh profits nothing in the believer’s salvation. The church had been led astray by those who argued that before they could be Christians, they had to physically become Jews through circumcision. It was a denial of the basic doctrine of justification by faith. And so Paul reminds them

that the Christian life begins in the Spirit and isn't perfected by the flesh. Rather, the Spirit who implants life within a person will also produce the fruit of Christ-like character. When a person is saved, the Spirit moves in and begins a process of transforming that person's life and character. So that he or she is changed, and is also being changed.

There can be no fruit without there first of all being a seed that has been planted. That may seem obvious, but it is a very important principle. Again, remember that fruit is the evidence of life. The seed of that life has to be planted in the soil before it will ever spring up and grow into some fruit producing tree. It won't be long before we're in the season for planting, and those of you who have gardens know this principle as good as anybody. But even before you plant the seed, you've got to prepare the ground. Clods of earth have to be busted up. Fields are fertilized. And once all of that is done, there is planting which must come first before there will ever be a harvest.

In a similar way, the seed of the Word must be planted in the soil of our hearts by the Spirit of God. The Bible says:

James 1:21 — “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

Jesus used this same illustration where He described the Word of God as being seed which is scattered and sown before fruit is ever produced. In the parable of the sower, He compares the Word to seed that falls on various types of ground. For example, He explains the meaning of the parable by saying:

Luke 8:11 — “Now the parable is this: the seed is the Word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their

way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

When the seed of the gospel is received in a person's heart by faith, and its germinated by the power of the Spirit, only then does spiritual life begin. Fruit doesn't grow on a dead tree. Scan the horizon and see for yourself. A dead tree is brown and lifeless. Apples don't grow on fence posts.

W.A. Criswell — *“Dead posts produce no fruit. The beautiful graces cannot be outwardly hung upon a tree like toys and ornaments upon a Christmas tree. Fruitage in the Spirit requires rootage in the Spirit.”*

Where there is no root, there will be no fruit. The fruit is the outward proof of an inward life that goes deep beneath the surface. Just as clusters of grapes grow on a living vine, the fruit of the Spirit is produced in the life of the man or the woman who is rooted in Christ. The miracle of life change occurs when a person comes to faith in Jesus. The proof will be in the way he or she talks, the way he or she walks, and the way that they relate to other people. Where there was once deadness, there is now new life bursting forth everywhere. It reminds me of a story that I heard about a little boy who was having a conversation with his mom about what it means to invite Jesus into his heart. And he said, “But my heart is little, and Jesus is so big. If I asked Him into my heart, wouldn't He just poke out everywhere?” That might be the absolute best theology I've ever heard!

If the seed of God's Word has been received in the soil of faith, the Spirit will produce life that 'pokes out' everywhere. Jesus said that the test of any life is its fruit. Just as trees are known by the fruit they produce, a person is known by the fruit of character produced in their life. It isn't charisma or charm that He's interested in, but godly character. The Lord warned His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount to be on guard against those who masquerade as sheep, but are counterfeits:

Matthew 7:15-20—“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

He goes on to say that not everyone who one day says to Him, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” The line will be long and full of people who make their claims to have done spectacular things in His name only to hear Him say, “Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you.” The fruit of Spirit-produced character is missing from their life. The fruit isn’t there because the seed was never received in faith. And so when you keep what Jesus says about fruit in mind, you will see that He doesn’t ask us to examine Christians on the basis of their giftedness, but on the basis of their gracefulness. You will know them by their fruits. Planting the seed results in life and growth, and then a second thing we need to understand involves:

2—CULTIVATING the vine (5:16, 18, 22, 25)

“But I say, walk by the Spirit...but if you are led by the Spirit...the fruit of the Spirit...if we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

Something else to keep in mind about fruit growing is the tedious work of cultivation that is involved. If we go back through these verses, notice the responsibility that we have as believers to walk in the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and to keep in step with the Spirit. And yet at the same time, it is the Spirit who produces the fruit within our lives. The fruit isn’t manufactured by us, it is produced by Him. There is a difference in something that is manufactured as opposed to something that is produced. (plastic bowl of fruit illus.)

Fruit is the result on the outside of your life of what is on the inside. The word 'fruit' is used in several different ways in the New Testament to describe the various expressions of the Christian's life. For instance:

- Giving is described as fruit

Philippians 4:16—“Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”

- Praise to God is an example of fruit

Hebrews 13:15—“Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

- People won to Christ are pictured as fruit

Romans 1:13—“I often planned to come to you but was hindered until now, that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.”

And then here in Galatians 5:22-23, Christ-like character is described as fruit. It is the outward proof of an inward life, and that life is working its way out in our relationships and in our disposition. The fruit is produced by the Spirit, but don't think that this means we have no responsibility as far as our character is concerned. What is interesting is that these same virtues mentioned here are also commanded of believers in other places. We're commanded to love, to be patient, to rejoice always, to be faithful. For instance:

2 Peter 1:3-8—“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us into His own glory and excellence by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that though you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

For this reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peter says “His divine power has granted, so make every effort.” Love is produced by the indwelling Spirit, but I am to make every effort. Joy is produced by the Spirit, but I am rejoice and give thanks in every circumstance. Peace is produced, but I am pray at all times and strive to be at peace with all men. And so it is in this sense that the fruit of the Spirit is intentionally cultivated in your life. One has said it this way, “The Holy Spirit’s operation demands the believer’s cooperation.” We have personal responsibility.

Cultivating fruit understands producing, but it also demands pruning. Fruit grows in the wild, but fruit is harvested in an environment where there has been a process of pruning or shaping. In an orchard, the trees are planted in a row and spaced apart so that measured growth and maximum yield will be ensured. Or in a vineyard, the vinedresser will be in constant work pruning and tending to the health of the vine so that the branches produce their grapes. Pruning takes time, energy, and skill. The skilled pruner will know how to make necessary cuts with sharp tools, and this is essential for growth and a higher production of fruit. For without this very important process of cultivation, the branches will not yield their fruit in abundance.

I remember when I was a child, we had an elderly couple who lived up the hill from us, Mr. And Mrs. Stroupe. They had a grapevine that they tended below their garden, just up above our house. As long as they were able, they kept the vine cultivated and pruned. But as they both got older, they were no longer physically able to get down on

their hands and knees and prune the vine, so it began to grow wild. It yielded fewer grapes until one year it yielded none.

Branches must be pruned and the vine must be healthy for it to yield fruit. There is a big difference between fruit and simple leaves. For instance, I'm thinking about the account in Matthew 21 where the Bible says that Jesus curses a fig tree. The Bible says that He was returning to Jerusalem from Bethany and was hungry. He passes a fig tree by the wayside, but found nothing on it but leaves.

Matthew 21:19—“And He said to it, ‘May no fruit ever come from you again!’ And the fig tree withered at once.”

It was a very important lesson for the sake of teaching His disciples about faith.

Throughout the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was described as being a vine, or a fig tree. For example, God says in:

Hosea 9:10—“Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers.”

Jeremiah 8:13—“When I would gather them, declares the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.”

God intended for Israel to be a fruitful vine, or a fig tree ripe with fruit. But a vine with no grapes and a tree with no figs is worthless and pitiful. Leaves aren't enough when God is interested in fruit. Leaves might decorate the tree, but they will never satisfy the hungry.

Not only did Jesus curse a barren fig tree, but Jesus once told a parable about a barren fig tree:

Luke 13:6-9—“A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years

now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’

In other words, give me a year to cultivate it and to prune it, a year in which I can put it through a rigorous, even painful process. Perhaps then it will bear fruit. But if not, then you can cut it down. The point is that Jesus is looking for fruit in your life and mine. When He looks, what has He found?

3—HARVESTING the fruit (5:22-23)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Planting the seed, cultivating the vine, and then harvesting the fruit. The work of the Holy Spirit in your life involves the production of a bountiful supply of fruit. As you and I yield to His influence and control, as we seek to be filled with the Spirit and walk by the Spirit, keeping in step with the Spirit, we can expect the fruit of the Spirit to be on display in our lives. We won’t get to these these this morning, but these nine virtues which are listed can be arranged into three categories. The categories involve our major relationships in life, such as with God, with others, and with ourselves. I have heard it described as upward fruit in relationship to God, outward fruit in relationship to other people, and the inward fruit in relation to our individual heart.

- Upward—Love, joy, peace
- Outward—Patience, kindness, goodness
- Inward—Faithfulness, gentleness, self-control

The Holy Spirit is not stingy with these graces. Friend, He wants them to be found in abundance in your life. God the Spirit wants our lives to be weighed down like

branches on which is found the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, and so on. And this fruit serves as evidence of the life of God that is possessed within our hearts. The good news is that the Lord is ready and willing to come into your heart. The only thing that is required is for you to invite Him in, to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior. There is no life too barren or too far gone that He can't transform!

My friend, the fruit that He is looking for is also the fruit that He produces. And I can tell you now that the will of God for your life involves you bearing the fruit of the Spirit. God will not let you keep getting by without this fruit being produced in your life. For those Christians who have taken their walk with God for granted, He will place them under the pruning knife. He will cut away from our lives all that is not pleasing to Him. He disciplines the one that He loves!

Hebrews 12:11 — “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

John 15:1-5 — “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing...By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples.”

The branches don't produce the fruit, they bear it. It is the vine that produces the fruit. Life from the vine flows to the branch, producing the fruit which the branch simply bears. It is all about being connected, which is why Jesus tells us to simply 'abide' in Him. It means to stay close, to enjoy close and intimate fellowship. We don't produce the fruit of the Spirit, we just bear it. And He wants there to be 'much fruit' in our lives.

Have you been under the pruning knife lately? Perhaps there have been some painful cuts in your life. But while the enemy means for you to bleed out, God intends for you to bear fruit.