



The Fruit of the Spirit

Part 1

June 21, 2020

Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is not a random list of virtues, but the character of Christ himself. It's grown within us by the revolutionary presence of the Spirit within us. This is God's vision for our lives. "He predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). The fruit of the Spirit is what that looks like.

The heavenly outpouring

The background to the fruit of the Spirit is Pentecost. In Acts 2, the Spirit is poured out on everyone in the church—men and women, boys and girls, young and old. And he is poured out in fullness because Jesus "gives the Spirit without limit." This changes everything. This is the beginning of the New Covenant era and the beginning of the end of the world. The future has broken into the present and marked us as people of the age to come—radically inclusive of every tribe and nation, and radically free to pursue God in the new way of the Spirit. God dropped Sin from our operating system and installed the Holy Spirit.

The earthly predicament

But the problem is our flesh. We still live in a fallen world; we still inhabit not-yet-resurrected bodies. True Spirituality is "the life of God in the soul of man," but the Flesh is "the life of the soul in itself." The sad reality is that despite having the Spirit, we so often live according to the flesh. We live out of our own strength, by our own values, for our own ends.

In Galatia, "fleshy" living took two forms, just as it does in our world today. There is sensuality and self-indulgence on the one hand, and religiosity and self-righteousness on the other. License and Legalism. The pagan past of the Galatians drove the license. The Judaizers drove the legalism, trying to "disciple" New Testament Christians into the Old Testament ways of Moses. They wanted them to be circumcised, eat kosher, and keep Sabbath.

Paul countered both legalism and license with love. "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (5:6). "But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, rather but serve one another humbly in love" (5:13). Love—and the other fruit of the Spirit—is the answer to the works of the flesh.

The community project

We cannot yield the fruit on our own. We need the Spirit and the community of believers. That's the whole point: an individual is not the sign of God's reconciling love, a body of believers marked by his character is. So we are called to yield to the Spirit and not bite and devour each other. Don't eat each other alive! (5:15) Rather, eat up the fruit of God's Spirit—his love, joy, peace—and let it metabolizes into those same qualities in us. "You are what you eat." Or as Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh is no help at all. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life" (John 6:63).

God gives Spirit and Life through his words. So...Read them. Pray them. Memorize them. Live them.

Discussion Questions

1. Acts 2 teaches us how the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers as the sign of the end of the world.
 - On a scale of 1 - 10, from “utterly ridiculous” to “entirely believable,” how much do you buy this? Why is it hard to believe?
 - In what sense is the outpouring of the Spirit a sign of the last days?
 - How do you experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life? When have you experienced him most?
2. Many individuals and churches hardly experience the Spirit at all. It’s our *earthly predicament*: living according to the flesh. Some of the “works of the flesh” are licentious; others are legalistic.
 - To which are you more prone: license or legalism? How does your personality and upbringing play into that?
 - Look at the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. What is your greatest concern for yourself? For our church? For our world?
 - Paul warns that “those who live this way will not inherit the kingdom of God”? What does this mean? If you’re bad enough do you lose your salvation? Explain.
3. One Bible scholar said of the fruit of the Spirit:

“We cannot nourish this on our own. We should stop thinking and speaking as if these can be embodied or sustained on our own. The fruit of the Spirit is rooted deeply in the dynamics of a community; they are reflected and sustained in our common life. Nurturing individual fruit in individual lives is not our ultimate goal. Instead, the church is called to embody before the world, in all its relationships, the kind of reconciled and transformed life that God desires for all creation.”

 - How does this help those of us who are prone to a private, individualistic faith?
 - Think about David Couper, the Madison police chief (and Christian) who pioneered the Madison Method of crowd control. What issues might we be able to address with creative solutions if we cultivate the fruit of the Spirit together?
4. John 6:63 offers a path forward in cultivating life and fruitfulness in the Spirit: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.”
 - What does this say to you? What is one good “takeaway” for you from this verse, and this study?

Close with John Stott’s prayer:

Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in your presence and please you more and more.
Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you.
Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.