

The Fruit of the Spirit Galatians 5:22-24

June 12 & 13, 2010
Steve DeWitt

These messages on the Holy Spirit have been really enjoyable for me, mostly because I see and hear how you are excited to learn more about the Spirit. Eager students make for happy teachers. Eager churches make for encouraged pastors. I think for many of us, and I include myself in this, the Holy Spirit has been a little in the theological shadows. Perhaps the old King James language contributed to that. If you grew up like I did, the third person in the Trinity – the Holy Ghost – sounded kind of scary. “Do you want to be filled with the Holy Ghost?” That’ll put the fear of God into any first grader.

This is unfortunate as He is also called, the Teacher, the Comforter, and Helper. As we have seen in 1 Corinthians 12, He is also the Giver of gifts. **The gifts of the Spirit are enablements for ministry given to each Christian to serve and bless the church.** We have challenged ourselves to ask, *What is my gift and am I using it to serve and bless the church?*

1 Corinthians 12:13 introduced us to **The baptism in the Holy Spirit, a summary term for the dramatic work of the Spirit at conversion which all Christians experience and which unites all of us in the one body of Christ.** This has wonderful and profound implications for Spirit baptism as we have a responsibility to show relationally what is true spiritually – we are one in Christ.

The past two weeks we have looked at **The filling of the Holy Spirit – to be filled with the Spirit is to daily surrender my flesh’s desire to control and the active pursuit of the Spirit’s control in my life.** In Ephesians 5:18, Paul draws an analogy from the permeating effect of alcohol on a person to the permeating effect of the Spirit on a person’s thinking, talking, acting, and perception of the world around him. A great example is the church at Corinth. They had spiritual gifts but no spiritual maturity. Paul calls them carnal and spiritual babies. The indication of spiritual maturity is not the gifts of the Spirit, but the filling of the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit. Since this is the case, we better know what the fruit of the Spirit is all about, hence today’s message.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 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. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:16-21)

The Apostle Paul is describing the inward struggle that Christians are all too familiar with. We have competing desires within us. We have desires that flow from our sin nature, the flesh. As sinners we have a basic inclination toward sin. Our flesh seeks to control and dominate our lives. We see from verse 18ff. what the flesh produces in us and it’s an ugly and destructive list. *Moral destruction:* immorality, impurity, sensuality. *Spiritual destruction:* idolatry and sorcery. *Relational destruction:* enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissension, division, envy. *Bodily destruction:* drunkenness, orgies, etc.

Upward. Inward. Outward. The flesh seeks to control and destroy all the directions of human meaning that God made to be enjoyed and treasured.

This explains a lot, doesn't it? What is really at the root of the family issue you are dealing with? The temptation you cannot overcome? The rift in a church relationship? You don't have to know much to know that if there is oil washing up on the ocean beaches, somewhere deep in the ocean there is a catastrophic failure. What will it take to clean up the Gulf? Do you just keep wiping off the beaches? No. You have to stop it at its source. Let me take it one step further. Imagine if you figured out a way to turn the oil that's gushing out of the current oil leak into a substance that cleaned the beaches and cleaned all the fish and birds and restored the glaciers and fixed the ozone layer, took all the calories out of ice cream and when applied to bald men made them look like Elvis. In other words, just stopping the leak would be great. But how wonderful would it be if the billowing plume was transformed into something wonderful and enriching? You'd be a hero around the world.

Look what the Spirit does in us. He not only stops the catastrophic leak, He transforms it. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* (Galatians 5:22-23)

Let's note a few things. First, what is striking is that **"fruit" is singular**. It's not fruits of the Spirit, but "fruit" of the Spirit. That's surprising given the following list of nine characteristics, you'd expect it to be "fruits." The gifts of the Spirit are plural. The fruit of the Spirit is singular. Why? We need to understand what this list really is. Unlike the list of spiritual gifts where we may identify one or two that we possess, the singularity of fruit means these all go together to portray what the Spirit produces in the life of a Christian.

Let me illustrate it this way. How would you describe a flower? Probably with lots of terms – *soft, vibrant, colorful, symmetrical, delicate, fragrant, beautiful* – all of these describe the characteristics of the one flower. The flower of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These qualities must be taken as a whole because when the Spirit is in control of a person's life, all of them are evident to some degree, not just some of them.

Secondly, **there is a reason it is called "fruit."** When in a fruit's development is fruit officially fruit? Fruit grows. Fruit matures. It is fruit when it is small; it's just not all that it can be.

This should be encouraging. Most of us probably look at this list and think, *There's no way I can live that way.* Yes, that's the point! We can't do these ourselves. I can do the flesh list quite easily on my own. But this fruit list seems unattainable. Let me encourage you, friends. God is patient. He is like a farmer who knows that it takes time to grow fruit. None of us epitomize these qualities and all Christians will fail. But God is patient to let His fruit grow in us.

John Stott tells a story about Pastor Charles Simeon from many years ago. He is admired to this day as a great and godly man but that wasn't always the case. In his younger years, he was proud and hot-tempered. One day he went to visit a family and the way he conducted himself was so atrocious that when he left, the family gathered and could only laugh at his boorish personality. The dad heard them laughing and called them to the family garden. He told them to pick one of the not-yet-ripe peaches. They were surprised because it wasn't ready for picking. The father said, *Well my dears, it is green now and we must wait; but a little more sun and a few more showers and the peach will be ripe and sweet. So it is with*

Mr. Simeon. He was right and Charles Simeon became known the world over for his humility and Christ-like character.

Thirdly, **these qualities are what the Spirit produces.** (John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, p. 103) They are the Spirit's fruit. They are supernatural. Our natural selves more resemble the works of the flesh. By ourselves, we will destroy ourselves morally, spiritually, and relationally. That's what sinners do.

But the Spirit does something in us and through us that only He can do. He turns the gushing oil into gushing goodness. The hate becomes love. The sexuality becomes purity. The words become healing. The anger becomes joy. It is the Spirit's fruit, not ours. This is what He does in us when He fills us, when He is in control and we want Him to be. The filling of the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit.

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. (John 15:4-5)

The Holy Spirit in us is this abiding relationship with Christ. Spiritual maturity is not being a Christian a long time. It is not great giftedness. It is not a great resume of service. Spiritual maturity is love, joy, and peace. It feels to others like goodness and gentleness. It is a life under control. It is the Spirit who produces these. Get the root right and you'll get the fruit right. Seek the Spirit's filling and you will bear the Spirit's fruit.

Nine Traits of the Fruit of the Spirit

There are nine, so we're just going to quickly survey them.

Love, joy, peace

Love is the headliner characteristic. That's not surprising. God is love (1 John 4:8) so where God is at work, love is evident. I am drooling over 1 Corinthians 13, the famous chapter on love. We are almost there. That might become a series all its own. What is love? As you look at 1 Corinthians 13, *love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious*, etc., what is striking is how close the definition of love is to the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. Love is first in this list for a reason. If selfless love is evident, the other qualities probably are as well.

This little word *joy* is a desirable fruit, isn't it? If love is the strawberries, then joy is the blueberries. Joy is our happiness in God creating God's happiness in us. It has nothing to do with life's circumstances or the subjectivity of human emotions. When we are happy in God, the celebrative joy of the Trinity is spiritually created within us, by the Spirit. God gives us joy.

If joy is happiness in God, then peace is contentment in God. Christian peace is contentment in all that God has been for us in Christ and all that He promises to us in Christ. "*The Holy Spirit puts God's love in our hearts, God's joy in our souls, and God's peace in our minds.*" (John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, p. 99)

Patience, kindness, goodness

The Hebrew word for *patience* is descriptive; it means to be long nosed. Looking around, some of you must be very patient. This is descriptive language for the common experience

of anger where one gets red in the face. To be long nosed means it takes a long time for your nose to get red. God has a long nose. It takes Him a long time to get angry. We might say, He has a slow fuse. So should we.

Kindness is well understood. It is a basic disposition toward helping others.

Goodness is a term for moral excellence. Goodness is what kindness expresses to others. Patience is slow to react against others; kindness is quick to do goodness to others.

Faithfulness, gentleness, self-control

Faithfulness speaks to trustworthiness. Tonight when we celebrate Pastor Chris' ten years here at Bethel, we are not only celebrating tenure but also character. Chris has shown himself to be a trustworthy man and worthy of celebrating. A faithful man or woman is a person whose word is gold. They do what they say. They are faithful in service. Why? God is faithful; so when He, by the Spirit, creates His life in us, we are faithful too.

Gentleness. This is a most interesting character quality because it is easily misunderstood. It is related to meekness. We tend to think of gentleness and meekness as weakness when it is really the opposite. It is power under control. We see it in few verses – Galatians 6:1 – *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness*. Weakness will not have the courage to confront a brother. That requires strength. Gentleness is the strength of character that allows us to be kindhearted toward even the erring brother.

I like the story of Chuck Norris who was shooting a movie somewhere and went to a local bar to relax. Chuck Norris is one of the most decorated Martial Art champions in history. He was sitting on a stool and a local yokel came up to him and said, "You're sitting on my stool and if you don't move, I'm going to move you." Norris quietly got up and went to another table. His friends were in shock and said, "Why didn't you just take that guy apart?" Norris said, "Now what would that have proved?" That's strength under control.

This leads us naturally to the final quality, *self-control*. There is a perception among some that to be filled with the Spirit is to be out of yourself, to lose control in a spiritual ecstasy. Actually, when we are filled with the Spirit, we are more in control than ever before. Our minds are renewed (Romans 12:2). Our wills are set on God. Our affections and emotions are Godward. A Spirit-filled Christian has his whole being submitted to the control of God. The self is under control.

Who has ever lived this way?

The Fruit of the Spirit is a Portrait of Jesus

Jesus was filled with the Spirit and perfectly displayed the fruit of the Spirit His entire life. He was *love* always. He was filled with *joy*. He said, "My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27, emphasis added) He was so *patient* as to allow Judas to walk with Him for three years. He displayed shocking *kindness* and *goodness* to the outcasts of society. He was *faithful* all the way to the cross. He cried out to the masses, "Come to me...for I am gentle and lowly of heart." (Matthew 11:28, 29) He was so *self-controlled* as to allow mere men to beat Him, spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him while holding all power at His fingertips. Is there a better description of the life and character of our Savior than the one before us? This should cause our hearts to weep and dance that we have such a Savior. His life was so stunningly beautiful. *Praise you Jesus for showing us how we were made to live.*

The fruit of the Spirit is the restoration of life as we were created for. We weren't made to live by the flesh. That lists sounds more like animal life than human life. We were made for so much more. You were made for so much more and Christ died on the cross to cleanse us from sin and its destruction and restore us to a relationship with our Creator. This comes when we as sinners repent and believe in Jesus as our Savior. Have you believed?

Christians, this is another part of salvation to rejoice in. The baptism of the Spirit begins our life in the Spirit in which the Spirit is slowly recreating in us the kind of life God intended for us to live. A Spirit-filled Christian is back in the Garden of Eden. A Spirit-filled home is family as God intended. The Church is the vibrant life and joy of God experienced in community, though imperfectly because the flesh retains its influence. But Christian, I want you to look carefully at this list.

Christian, Look Carefully. This is You (and Everyone Else) in Eternity

This rotten self-destructive flesh that you and I have, we will have until the day we die or Jesus returns. That's the bad news. The good news is that when we step from this world to the next, we shed the sin nature and all its destruction. We breathe the pure air of heaven and the only inclination we have is to love. Total love. Maximum joy. Perfect peace with God, others, and myself. Nothing but patience, kindness, and goodness toward others. Everyone good and gentle toward one another. Everyone under the Spirit's leadership. Every second of every minute of every hour of every day for all of eternity, we will experience the fruit of the Spirit to the max.

Think of what that will be like! I can't wait to meet the future version of some of you. I might not recognize you. You might not recognize me. We will likely be saying to each other, "What happened to you?"

Here's the thing. Whenever we express the fruit of the Spirit now, we are bringing the life of heaven to earth. It's a little whiff of the heavenly air. It's heaven on earth. Have you noticed? When we love each other in spite of failure, when we give of ourselves, when acts of kindness are felt, there is this inward sense of something. It's hard to put your finger on it. It's a sense that this is the way things ought to be. This is right. This is good. This is the life of heaven, by the Spirit, producing fruit in us.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address (www.bethelweb.org) on the copied resource.