

The Fruit of the Spirit - Introduction

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[0 : 00] Well Asa, I'm sure you can see from the bulletin, today we are going to begin a study on the fruit of the Spirit. Let's read again in Galatians 5, verse 22.

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

Now these are a wonderful topic to look at and we're going to spend time over the winter months going through the fruit of the Spirit and I love giving homework so your homework for this day is to memorise these two verses and I'll have to tell myself to do that as well because I don't think I could tell you from memory but that's a good bit of homework for us all to do that we would have these fruit of the Spirit memorised and permanently set in our minds. They are no doubt familiar to us because we have heard of the fruit of the Spirit being mentioned often but it is good to take the opportunity to study this great teaching in more detail. But first of all it's important to remember that this is the kind of verse that it's quite easy to just dive into. You can come to Galatians 5 and go straight to verse 22 and read about the fruit of the Spirit and it's probably something that we have heard often but when we are reading the Bible and when we are trying to get taught from Scripture it's important that we don't just dive in and take verses in isolation.

We must always read God's word in its context. We must bear in mind what the whole of the letter to the Galatians is saying and so when we come to a verse like this we have to ask ourselves well what exactly is going on? Why is Paul saying this and what is he emphasising? And so today we're going to just spend a wee bit of time getting out bearings so that we can approach the fruit of the Spirit with perhaps a better understanding of the background and the context that lies behind these great verses. So we have to step back and look at the letter to the Galatians as a whole.

Now Galatians is an interesting letter because it was not written to a church because things were going well. It was written to a church where there were serious problems and in particular there was a serious problem about the issue of circumcision and even in the chapter we read Paul mentioned it and basically what was happening was Paul had gone to the Galatians, he had preached the gospel to them, they had believed but other people had come after Paul and they had said hold on a minute.

[3 : 05] If you want to be a Christian, if you want to be saved, you've got to keep the Old Testament law and in particular you have got to be circumcised and that was the big, a big issue that affected a lot of the areas in the New Testament period. What we call Judaizers, people who were kind of trying to turn the gospel back into a sort of Jewish form were insisting that male members of the Christian community had to be circumcised and Paul is writing to correct this error and when you read the letter to Galatians it's got a real urgent tone, it's almost quite distressed at times. You look at verse 1 of chapter 3 Paul says, oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Paul is really, really concerned about what is going on and he is addressing this false teaching that male members of the Christian community have to be circumcised and the whole problem arose because of the issue of how to understand God's law. The people who were coming in were saying for generations ever since Abraham all Jewish children, male children have been circumcised, we can't just abandon that, we're supposed to keep doing that and so the big question that's being raised in all of this is what role does the law have in our Christianity? What role does the Old Testament law have?

And the troublemakers in Galatia were saying that keeping that law and especially keeping the law of circumcision is essential if you want to be saved and Paul is saying, no it isn't. He says, we are not saved by works of the law, we are saved by faith. He says that in chapter 2, we ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. So Paul is saying, I'm a Jew, I was circumcised, yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. He's saying, it's

not my circumcision that's saving me. So we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law because by works of the law no one will be justified and that's a fundamental principle of Christianity.

We are not saved by keeping the law. We don't come to God and say, I've done this, this, this, this, this and I've never done that, that, that, that and that therefore you should save me. That is not how Christianity works. By works of the law no one will be justified. It is by faith that we are saved. And so Paul goes to great effort to explain how we are to understand the law and he uses a very, very good image because he tells us that if we are trying to be saved by works of the law, he says that we are then under the law. Chapter 4 verse 5 is an example of that when he talks about being under the law. Now that's a really good image because you can imagine being under the law. Imagine the law is like a cloud over you and wherever you go, whatever you do, that law is over you and it's examining everything that you do. You can't hide from it, you can't escape from it, you are under the uncompromising scrutiny of the law. Now to take a moment and an example of that, imagine your driving was under the scrutiny of the law at every moment.

So every single time you get into the car, everything that you do is being watched by the police. Now maybe you are different from me and maybe you always go at 40 miles an hour through car away and maybe you never rush over the barbersmere at 80 miles an hour like I do sometimes. If our driving, just our driving, was scrutinised in every detail, I'm pretty certain that we would all be law breakers. The only people who wouldn't be law breakers would be those who don't have driver's licenses but we would all be found guilty. Now driving is just a small example.

[7 : 54] Remember that God can see everything, remember that God knows everything and therefore you have to imagine your life, every aspect of your life under the scrutiny of God. And just imagine that I could put on that screen everything that you've done in your life. And imagine then I put, I displayed God's law beside it and we just scrutinised it at every point. Now if I imagine that for myself, I think I would emigrate and so that you would never see me again because if every detail is scrutinised then we fall short. And so Paul is using this image of being under the law and the point he is making that anybody under the law is going to be crushed by the law because you can't escape the fact that it will catch you out. That's why he says in Galatians 3, all who rely on works of the law are under a curse for it is written, cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them. If we're putting ourselves under the law we're cursed and it's burdened, we'll crush us. And so that's why Paul says in chapter 3 that we are captives under the law. On our own, on our own strength, faced with God's law we are utterly helpless because we can't keep it on our own. Now a lot of people don't want to hear that and don't like to be told that. But if we ask ourselves the question, if anybody in this world asks themselves the question, have you put a foot wrong in your life? And I think there's barely an hour that goes by in my life that I don't put a foot wrong. God's law is perfect and unless we can claim perfection in every single area then we are under the law's crushing curse. Paul emphasizes that the law comes as one package. Every man who accepts circumcision is obligated to keep the whole law. You start insisting on circumcision, you're insisting on everything. The law comes as one and so we are slaves to the law, we are helpless, we are under the law. Now when you have that image in your mind it becomes much more understandable when we see that Paul's great message to the Galatians is that Christ has set you free.

That's his message. Paul is saying for freedom Christ has set us free. That's how he starts chapter 5 and that's what Paul is emphasizing. On your own you are under the law, you are crushed but the good news is so good because Christ has set you free. You are not under the law anymore, you are not going to be crushed anymore, you have been liberated from the law and the reason you are free from being under the law is because Christ has gone under it in your place.

That's what he says in chapter 3. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. So instead of us being cursed and instead of us being crushed Christ went under the law in our place and he took the burden, he took the curse, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities and that's why the good news is so good because Christ has set us free. We are no longer captives to sin, no longer slaves to the law, we are now free and as those who have been freed we are now the children of God. Galatians 4, when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and because you are sons God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave but a son and if a

son then an heir through God. Paul is saying if you put your trust in Jesus Christ you stop being a slave under the law you're set free from it and you now become an adopted child of God and as a child of God you are free. God's children are not slaves, the law cannot crush God's children, the law cannot hold

God's children captive, God's children are free. You think of Prince George the Queen's great-grandson heir to the throne, he is free because he's a son of the king or royal son and that's what you are as a Christian. You are part of that royal family, you are free from the crushing burden of the law and that's confirmed by the fact that the Holy Spirit now dwells in your heart if you are a Christian. So that's the great message of Galatians, through faith in Jesus Christ you are free from the crushing pressure and burden of the law. Now before we go on from there I want to just stop and ask a question, a really important question. Is your sin crushing you?

Is your sin crushing you? Because very often that can be our experience when we are aware of the fact that we are guilty before God, aware of the fact that God is perfect and we are not and it can feel like your sin is crushing you. You make so many mistakes and you do so many things wrong and you wish you were different and you think I try and try and try to be different and I keep on failing and I keep on failing. If you feel like that Jesus is message to you, is come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, all who are crushed by the burden of the law and I will give you rest. Jesus will free you from that burden and all you have to do is trust him and the crushing burden of the law will be taken away. So if your sin is crushing you, just run to Jesus, run to him. Paul's great message is that we're now free from the burden of the law and I hope I've made that clear, the idea of it crushing you but you're free from that now.

[15 : 35] But a question arises from that. If you are not under the law anymore, if you're free from the law then does that mean that you can just do what you like? Does that mean that we can live as we please?

We're not under the scrutiny of the law anymore so we can do what we want surely. It doesn't matter. That's the question that Paul anticipates. Paul does this at various times. We see the letter to the Romans as well. Paul said if you're free from the law, does that mean that you can just do whatever you want? Well I'm sure you know that the answer to that is no and Paul gives us a beautiful clear answer to that in chapter 5. This is really the question that Paul is answering. Can we just live as we please? He's saying no and here we see why.

We'll read verse 13 to 16. For you are called to freedom brother. That's exactly what we've been saying. You're free from the law. Free. However only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbour as yourself but if you bite and devour one another watch out that you're not consumed by one another but I say walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Now let's look at that together for a moment. Paul is saying that our gospel freedom is an opportunity. He uses that word opportunity. Do not use your freedom as an opportunity.

Now that word literally means starting point. So Paul is saying if you hear the gospel you trust in Jesus that's a starting point and from that starting point there are two options.

[17 : 35] Option one is to live according to the flesh which is what Paul is telling us not to do and when he says flesh he basically is referring to our sinful nature the fact that naturally we are prone to go towards sin but Paul is saying if you do that you are showing that you have not been properly liberated. That's why he says in chapter two if I rebuild what I tore down I prove myself to be a transgressor. Now sometimes I've often found that a difficult verse to understand but basically what Paul is saying if we use the gospel as an excuse to do whatever we like and as an excuse to sin then we are just proving that we are still slaves to sin and that we are not free and that the gospel has not had the effect upon us that it should have had.

Maybe it would help to use an illustration right. Imagine an alcoholic who has gone into rehabilitation okay so this person has struggled with addiction to alcohol and they go into rehabilitation and after many months they managed to get into a good routine and they seem to be recovered and so instead of being confined to a rehab centre or a hospital ward they are allowed home so they are free aren't they? They come out of rehabilitation they're free but if that person uses the freedom that they've been given to go straight to Tesco and to buy a carry out then that person is not proving that they are free that person is proving that he is still an alcoholic and so Paul is saying do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh because if we use that as an opportunity for blatant disobedience of God's law then we are raising serious questions as to

whether we have been saved at all and that is why Paul uses such strong language in this chapter. Now we'll read this really carefully and I've underlined it. The works of the flesh are evident, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, socially, 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. Now Paul's language could not be stronger. He is saying those who live according to the flesh, those who have the, doesn't matter how I live my life, I'll do whatever I want, I'm free, I can sin as I please, they are proving that as they stand they are not believers, they are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. It is only children who inherit the kingdom of God and that makes perfect sense, doesn't it? Because an inheritance passes to the child and so it is the children of God which is what Paul has been talking about in chapter four. Those who are adopted into his family, they are the ones who will inherit the kingdom of God and the children of God are those into whom the Holy Spirit has come to dwell. That's what he says, the spirit of adoption comes into you by which we cry out Abba Father, we are adopted through the Holy Spirit coming and dwelling in us. And so that brings us to option number two. Remember we're at a starting point, option one is to go and live according to the flesh, do what we want. Option two is what Paul wants us to do, to live according to the Spirit, to live according to that Spirit which now dwells in us and that has made us children of God. And Paul is making a very clear connection between being a child of God and having the Spirit of God in you. If you are a child of God you are an heir, you are saved, you are part of God's family and the proof of that, the evidence of that, the confirmation of that is the fact that the Holy Spirit now dwells in you. Christ has sent his spirit because we are now like him, fellow children of God. And that's the whole aim of this gospel freedom. Go back to Galatians 3.13.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, cursed is everyone who's hanged on a tree. That was what we were saying, Christ went under the law for us. So that in Christ the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. So as a believer the Holy Spirit dwells in you.

[23 : 04] And that Spirit will have an effect on you. And the effect is described by Paul as fruit, the fruit of the Spirit. And so Paul is saying, if we are led by the Spirit we're no longer un-by-under the law. We're no longer being crushed by it. Instead we are actually fulfilling the law because by the Spirit's influence upon us we live in a new way and we start to do these things against which there is no law. Paul is saying there's no law against love. There's no law against peace. There's no law against patience. If you are patient the law is not going to condemn you.

There's no law against these things. These are the very things that the law wants you to be doing because they are a fulfillment of what sums up the law that we are to serve one another through love, which is what Paul emphasizes in verse 13. He is saying that with the Spirit dwelling in us it'll have an effect on us and therefore we are to be different and to live in a different way. Now that doesn't mean that we're perfect as Christians. And Paul emphasizes in this chapter that there's still a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit. 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. Now every single person in here knows what that is like. That battle between what you know you should do and between what so often you end up doing and it's a battle we all struggle with. So Paul is not saying that we are perfect, but Paul is saying that the fruit of the Spirit is not an optional extra for the Christian.

Rather he is saying that these things are utterly essential and they are totally non-negotiable for us as Christians. Paul is saying that if these things are not in our lives there is something seriously wrong with us and that's why this is a really, really important thing to study.

Because when anyone looks at a Christian that's what they should see. And this is the kind of verse that is incredibly inspiring and also immensely challenging.

And you look at that verse, I look at that verse and I think that's how I want to be. And at the same time I look at a verse like that and I think so often I'm not that.

[26 : 33] And my great desire as we study these various elements of the fruit of the Spirit together is that it would encourage us and enable us to cultivate this fruit in our lives so that people would see this fruit in us more and more so that we would understand what exactly it means by gentleness, what exactly it means by faithfulness and all of these different things and so that we would bear this fruit more and more in our lives. I want it to be something that will be really helpful to us. It's inspiring and it's challenging but we must remember one vital thing.

You're not doing that on your own. The Holy Spirit is in your heart if you are a Christian and He will help you and He is there with the great desire that all of these things will be in your life. So take confidence and take encouragement from that. And the last thing I want to emphasize and I'm going to stop here because I had much more I wanted to say but we'll just pick it up again next week. The last thing I want to emphasize for now is this that this is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. This is at the heart of it. Now if you are maybe not sure about how you stand before God and if you are worried by the question what is becoming a Christian going to do to me? What kind of person am I going to become if I become a Christian? If I start going to the prayer meeting or if I if I publicly profess faith or if I really once and for all say yes I do love Jesus Christ. If I make that stand what's going to happen to me? Am I going to become a serious person? Am I going to become a miserable person? Am I going to become an anti-social person? Am I going to go backwards? Of course you're not because this is how God wants us to be. He wants you to have a life full of love, a life abounding in joy, a life of perfect peace, a life whereby you go from each day with greater and greater patience, a life where kindness is at the heart of everything that we do, a life where you enjoy so much goodness and where you express so much goodness, a life of faithfulness where you are faithful to God and he is faithful to you, a life of gentleness where there is just such, I love that word gentleness, it's just what we all need is for people to be gentle with us and for God to be gentle with us and that's exactly what he wants and a life of self-control nobody nobody looks back on their lives and thinks I'm so glad I had no self-control at that moment. Nobody thinks like that. Self-control is a wonderful thing. These are the things that God wants us to have. That is what being a Christian is all about. So let's all go for it together. Amen. Let's pray.