

The Fruit of the Spirit - Effect & Evidence

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're now going to turn to God's word and we're going to read in Galatians chapter 5 because as many of you will know, we are currently working on a study on the fruit of the Spirit.

So we can read again from Galatians chapter 5, we'll just read verses 21 and 22 which are on the screen before you there.

So the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law. As I said, we have recently begun a study on the fruit of the Spirit and I know some of you have not been here for the first couple of sermons in this study but don't worry, I'll just do a very, very quick recap of what we've learned.

In the first week we emphasise the fact that as Christians, the Holy Spirit dwells in us. That's a clear biblical doctrine. If you trust in Jesus Christ, God himself comes and dwells in your heart and that indwelling spirit has an effect on you.

[1 : 1 8] It means that you don't just live your life doing whatever you want, that's what Paul means when he talks about living according to the flesh but instead we live according to that spirit dwelling in us which basically means we strive to live in the way that God wants us to live.

We have been set free from the law and from its crushing curse but that freedom is not an opportunity just to live as we please, it's not an opportunity for sin, it's a wonderful opportunity to live a new life of obedience whereby we bear fruit for God.

So these verses emphasise the fact that the Holy Spirit in us should have an effect. In the second week we just paused to highlight a kind of wider but really important point that emphasises the fact that when we read about the fruit of the Spirit we are not just being told about how we should be, we are first and foremost being told how God really is because if this is the fruit of the Holy Spirit that means that it is the fruit of God himself and so God is the God of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control.

All of these things reflect the character of God. This is how we should view God and it reminds us that God is not a cold taskmaster, God is not a strict headteacher, God is not a ruthless police officer, God is a wonderful God, God is a loving, loving Father.

This week I want us just to spend a few minutes finishing off our introductory thoughts and from next week we will start looking at each one of these in more detail one by one.

[3 : 1 2] But our focus today is on a point that we have already hinted at in many ways. That is that the fruit of the Spirit tells us what God expects to see in us as Christians.

This is what God expects to see in us. And this is where we come to the practical real life emphasis of these verses because if we stand back and ask the very basic question, what is fruit?

We see that fruit is the outward manifestation of an inward reality. Isn't that true? The reality of a tree being an apple tree is confirmed by the fact that there's apples on it.

And that's a very simple point but it's a very, very important point because Jesus makes it very, very clear that this principle applies to Christians.

Luke chapter 6, for no tree, no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit.

[4 : 21] For things are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The evil person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good and the evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I tell you? Jesus is clearly emphasizing here each tree is known by its own fruit.

Bad tree bears bad fruit, good tree bears good fruit. So Jesus here is making a direct comparison and correspondence between the inward and the outward in our lives.

What we are on the inside is reflected on what we are on the outside. Now that's very, very simple but that's a really, really important point that's being emphasized by this whole concept of fruit.

And it's highlighting to us that when it comes to being a Christian there are certain outward realities that God expects to see.

[5 : 29] Christianity involves an inward element, absolutely, an inward saving faith where you trust in Jesus but it is not all inward.

From that there should be outward realities as well. And this was really, really important in the context of the letter to the Galatians because the Galatians were being told by certain people that the outward mark of being one of God's people is circumcision.

But Paul is saying no, the outward mark is not circumcision because neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything as he says in verse 6 of chapter 5.

The outward mark is not circumcision, the outward mark is the fruit of the Spirit. And so Paul is saying these are the things that God expects in our lives and in many ways it makes perfect sense.

That's one of the things about the Bible and I always want you to remember this. The Bible makes perfect sense and it fits together perfectly. Back in Mark's Gospel Jesus told a parable to explain what it's like for people when they hear God's word, the parable of the sower.

[6 : 53] Listen, behold, a sower went out to sow and what Jesus is meaning here is that that sowing of seed is describing the preaching of the Gospel.

A sower went out to sow and as he sowed some fell along the path and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it did not have much soil and immediately it sprang up since it had no depth of soil.

When the sun rose it was scorched and since it had no root it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it and it yielded no grain and other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain growing up and increasing and yielding 30 fold, 60 fold and 100 fold.

One of the points of that parable is the fact that many people will hear the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Some don't respond at all, some respond initially and then fade away, some respond but then after a while they are choked by concerns and care.

But some hear the word and that word is implanted in them like a seed being planted in the ground and it will take root and it will grow and ultimately it will bear fruit.

[8 : 13] And you can see why what Paul is saying in Galatians 5 fits in perfectly with what Jesus is saying here. The word is like a seed that grows ultimately resulting in outward fruit in our lives.

This raises an important point regarding eldership that I just want to mention very quickly. In 1 Timothy 3 Paul gives a list of qualifications for eldership and one of them is in verse 6 where it says an elder must not be a recent convert.

And that can sometimes be hard to understand that phrase because how long does it take for you to not be a recent convert? Is it weeks? Is it months?

Is it years? Is it decades? It doesn't actually say in 1 Timothy so it's easy to think well what exactly does that mean? But the word that Paul uses for recent convert is the word a neophyte which literally means newly planted.

So it's again a language of sowing a seed. So it must not be somebody who is newly planted. And what that's telling us is that the answer to the question how long does it take to not be a recent convert is not found in terms of time.

[9 : 34] The answer is found in terms of fruit because that newly planted seed is sown and it should grow and somebody is ready for the opposite of eldership if you can see the fruit being born in their lives.

So when it comes to considering who should be an elder the question is not how long have they been following. That's not the most important question. The most important question is can I see the fruit of the spirit in this person's life?

That's the really important question. And we are very very blessed that we have men of whom that is true. The key point is that fruit this concept of fruit tells us that there should always be an outward manifestation of the fact that we are in Christ.

And there's two important points arising from that that I want to just spend the rest of the time thinking about today. Number one the fruit of the spirit is the outward effect of having Jesus in your life.

That's exactly what we've been saying the outward manifestation of the fact that God by his Holy Spirit now dwells in you and that Holy Spirit has a wonderful effect. It's transforming you in a wonderful way and the word that we used to describe that is sanctification.

[10 : 56] Now sanctification we have a good definition of that in the Catechism. What is sanctification? Sanctification is the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man, the whole person after the image of God and we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness.

That basically says that sanctification is the process by which God makes us more and more and more like himself. And that's a wonderful privilege for the people of God.

In Galatians chapter 5 and in verse 24 Paul uses a wonderful phrase to describe Christians. He says those who belong to Christ Jesus and that emphasizes the fact that as Christians we are now God's property.

We belong to him and if you belong to God then you are never going to be neglected. He's never going to be casual about his possessions.

I have to hold my hands up and say that I'm one of these people who is guilty of not really looking after my things that well. My car probably gets washed once a year. I'm not really very good at that sort of thing.

[12 : 11] God is not like that. If something is God's he cares for it. And so you as a Christian or if you become a Christian you are God's very own possession.

He will work in you. He will shape you. He will help you because he wants to make you like himself because that of course is what we are created to be.

And so we are influenced by the Holy Spirit and that shapes the outward way in which we live our lives. The inward reality of our faith has a wonderful outward effect.

And we can prove that that is true because how many times have you seen somebody whose life was a mess or maybe they were not a particularly nice person and they come to faith and there is a wonderful, wonderful change.

However, these changes and the process of sanctification does not come without a struggle. And Paul emphasizes this in Galatians chapter five.

[13 : 19] But I say walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Now Paul in that phrase is throwing a contrast. Desires of the flesh is referring to sinful, evil behavior.

Walking by the spirit is living in God's way. I say walk by the spirit you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For 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 to do. And Paul is emphasizing that there is a battle going on in the heart of every Christian between our flesh and between the Holy Spirit.

And that is not just a theoretical doctrine from the Bible. It is a daily reality for all of us as Christians. And it can be really hard because there are temptations around us, pulling us in the wrong direction and there are weaknesses within us that can also be pulling us in the wrong way.

And I am sure that all of us can relate to what Paul is saying there. It's a battle very often between the spirit and the flesh.

[14 : 30] But what advice does Paul give to help us? Well if you notice in verse 16 Paul makes a really important distinction.

He emphasizes, well he says, walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. And in saying that he is emphasizing that there is a difference between having desires and gratifying those desires.

Paul is not saying don't have desires of the flesh because he knows that we will all face temptations. That's exactly what temptation is, a kind of drawing towards something.

And even Jesus himself faced that same challenge. Paul is not saying don't have desires because he knows we will. But what Paul is saying is don't gratify those desires.

Now that word basically means fulfill. Don't fulfill those desires. And again this makes perfect sense because that word gratification it speaks for the idea of feeding something that's hungry.

[15 : 42] If you feed something it will only get stronger. If you want it to go away then you should starve it.

Isn't that true? How many of you have had a seagull landing outside the house and you throw food to it? And then it just comes back and comes back and comes back and comes back.

I remember when we lived in Kerkodi while I was studying in Edinburgh there are thousands of seagulls in Kerkodi and they scavenge all around the town. And a friend of mine had one that used to come and knock on his window.

And of course the more they fed it the more this seagull came back because it was getting gratified. And if we gratify a sinful desire it won't make it go away.

It will actually make it come back even stronger. And I'm sure you can think of examples of that in life. Sometimes you think to yourself oh there's something here I know I shouldn't do but I'll just do it this once.

[16 : 43] I'll just do it this once. And of course that just makes the desire all the stronger. And it's very, again it makes perfect sense, if you think of a midgy bite, if you scratch it it just gets itchier.

The answer is to starve these desires. That's why Paul is saying walk by the Spirit. That means you're going to starve the desires of the flesh and as you starve these desires they will get weaker and weaker and weaker.

That's why James says resist the devil and he will flee from you. And so God by his Spirit is helping us to overcome this battle with sin.

Remember always what John wrote in 1 John 4 verse 4. Little children you are from God and have overcome them. He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

And we must all and I speak to myself as well. We must try and try to remember that when we feel the pressure of sin tempting us. So being a Christian means that you are being transformed from the inside leading to a transformation on the outside.

[17 : 58] And this raises another really, really important point. It emphasizes the fact that you as Christians you are the source of hope for this world.

Because the world is not free from sin. The world is full of the works of the flesh. The world is full of sinful living. And Christianity is the hope for transforming this world.

And that is why the world needs our message so desperately. That's why our message is the most relevant message of all. The most urgently needed message of all.

Because if somebody's life has been ruined by sin more than anything else they need Jesus Christ and the power of his gospel working in their lives.

And that's why the Christian church is always meant to be something that is wonderfully different from the world. The church should always stand out as the place where the fruit of the spirit dwells.

[19 : 06] And that is why Paul emphasizes that there is absolutely no place for things like jealousy or division or strife or criticism or selfishness or any other of these works of the flesh in our church.

These things do not belong here. And when we do these things we are grieving the Holy Spirit. As Paul says do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in Ephesians 4.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you are sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgives you. All of these things, these are worldly things and they don't belong in the church.

It's really, really important that we have an accurate understanding of what the world worldly means. Because often we can think that the word worldly refers to things like football or music or singing.

[20 : 26] And that's not how the New Testament defines worldliness. The New Testament defines worldliness as sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these.

That's the work, the works of the flesh. And so again, it all makes perfect sense. Because how many times have we heard people say, I don't go to church because I've seen Christians criticising each other.

I don't go to church because I've seen them gossiping or I've seen rivalries or divisions or strife and infighting. People who are outside the church are put off when they see jealousy, division, strife, rivalry.

The reason they are put off is because they are looking at the church and all they are seeing is worldliness. And they're thinking that church is no different to everything else.

And that's why people are put off. And it makes perfect sense. And it's a reminder of the fact that these things must be avoided at all costs.

[21 : 55] Because as Paul says in Galatians 5, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Even a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

A small failure in the fruit of the spirit can have such a bad effect. Now in a way I'm reluctant to speak like that because I don't want to sound like I'm giving people a hard time.

I'm not at all. I'm trying to point out really that what the Bible teaches and what we see in our own circumstances makes perfect sense.

The Bible is saying as a church we should stand out as being different because we are characterised by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And when the world sees that it sees something wonderful and it sees something attractive. And that's why Christianity gives the world a wonderful alternative to everything else that is wrong.

[23 : 02] You will find these things everywhere. That kind of strife and controversy you'll find it everywhere. Whether it's common gracing or football or clubs or voluntary organisations, it's everywhere.

It should never be here. And that's a great challenge for us. But if you think about it, somebody might wake up in the morning and they might turn on the news and they might think to themselves, what hope is there for this world?

But then they go to work and they meet you as a Christian. And in you they see the fruit of the Spirit and they think, wow, there is good in this world after all.

That's because you as a Christian are a ray of hope to the people that you will come in contact with this week. And so whatever you're doing tomorrow or the next day, you are a ray of hope to the world that you are in because it is a broken world.

It is a hurting world. It is a desperate world. It's a world that needs Jesus. And it's also reminded that becoming a Christian will not make you a sad or solemn or anti-social person.

[24 : 33] It means that you will become a place where God brings forth his fruit, like an allotment where God bears the fruit of his Spirit.

So don't ever think that becoming a Christian is going to spoil your life. That's one of the devil's biggest, biggest lies. If you go home and read Galatians chapter 5 and you compare the works of the flesh to the works of the fruit of the Spirit, ask yourself, which one of the works of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit, ask yourself, which one do I want?

And it really is a no-brainer. Being a Christian has a wonderful effect on your life. So that's the first thing. The fruit of the Spirit is the outward effect of having Jesus in your life.

The second thing, and more briefly, is that the fruit of the Spirit is the outward evidence of having Jesus in your life. Let's ask another question.

How are people going to know that you're a Christian? How are people going to know that we're Christians? What's the answer to that question? Is it because you go to the prayer meeting?

[25 : 41] Is it because you go forward at a communion weekend? Is it because you stop watching TV on a Sunday? Is it because you say the right things?

Well, what did Jesus say? You will recognize them by their fruits.

And again, it makes perfect sense. The inward reality is evidenced by the outward fruit. And this is what Jesus, one of the things that Jesus emphasizes in John chapter 15, which we read.

In that chapter, Jesus tells us that he is the vine and we are the branches. And that emphasizes that as Christians, we are united to Jesus Christ. We are engrafted into him.

We are joined in a wonderful bond. He is the vine. We are the branches. So John 15 is teaching us that as Christians, we are connected to Christ in a beautiful union.

[26 : 40] But it is also teaching that we are also connecting Christ to the world. Because if you think about it, fruit is a means of connection.

Our fruit shows that we are connected to Jesus as the vine. Because it is by being in him that we bear fruit, 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.

So if as a branch, we aren't connected to the vine, we can't bear fruit, which makes perfect sense. You break a branch up a tree, you won't get any more fruit. So our fruit shows that we're connected to Jesus.

It's from him that the fruit comes. But the fruit also shows that we are connected to the world. Because who is it that sees our fruit? And who is it that tastes our fruit?

It's everybody around us. And if you think about it, fruit is always to the benefit of others. Isn't that true?

[27 : 40] It's not the apple tree that gains from the apple, it's grown, it's me who picks the apple and who eats it. Or us who look at the apple tree and see the beauty of the fruit. Fruit is all about something that's benefiting others, which is why in John 15 and in Galatians 5, the primary emphasis is on love.

The whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. And so our fruit as Christians is the primary point of connection between the world and ourselves.

Our fruit is the evidence that shows Jesus and his love to the world around us. And that's why bearing fruit is what Jesus wants us to do.

As he said, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit. If you ask the question, what does Jesus want from his people, that's the answer.

To go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the father in my name he may give to you, these things I command so that you will love one another.

[28 : 48] And so as Paul emphasises love in Galatians 5, he's simply echoing what Jesus taught in John 15. Now for this reason, this is where our witness to the world begins.

We often talk about how it's important for us as Christians to be a witness. And that is true. It's really important, but it's of course quite daunting because we think I'm not a very good witness.

How do we go about witnessing what exactly do we do? It's a big, big challenge. All of this is showing us that this is where our witness begins because we are saying the fruit of the spirit is the evidence, the biblical evidence of our faith.

And again, it makes perfect sense because evidence and witness go together, don't they? What exactly does a witness do?

He gives evidence. And the fruit of the spirit as the evidence of our relationship with Jesus is the substance of our witness and testimony on behalf of Jesus.

[30 : 06] You ask the simple question, how is anybody in Karel we're going to see Jesus? Through his people bearing fruit. Now I hope you all understand, are seeing that.

To make it simple, I can never resist the temptation to draw a diagram. And I've got a diagram here to show you exactly what I mean. It is a very clear logical progression in all of this.

Jesus is the vine. There he is, central. That's the image that he presents. We are the branches connected to that vine.

It's not the best picture of a vine, but you know exactly what I mean. We are connected to Christ as part of that vine. Okay, then we have the rest of the world who are not connected to that vine.

And we have to ask the question, how is there going to be a link created between the vine, the branches and the world?

[31 : 09] The answer is by fruit. That's how it works with a tree. And that's exactly how it works in the kingdom of God.

And you can see that there's a progression from Christ to the world through us and through our fruit.

Through the fruit of the Spirit manifesting itself in our lives. It's a very simple diagram, but I hope it shows the connection and the logical progression that lies behind all of this.

But I also hope it emphasizes the fact that if you take the fruit out of that diagram, then the whole thing ceases to function.

And it reminds us as Christians that the fruit of the Spirit is not an optional extra for us. It's not just an add-on.

[32 : 14] It's not something that is just for some people. It is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.

And it is by this that we glorify God. Jesus said in John 15.8 we read it, by this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

The fruit of the Spirit in your life and in mine is the vital link between Christ and the world. And as we bear that fruit, it brings glory to God.

And that's what being a Christian is about. Living in God's way. Living a life that bears that fruit.

That's not what makes us a Christian. You become a Christian by trusting in Jesus. But that is how you are to live as a Christian.

[33 : 21] All of this means that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are everything to us.

They must be everything in us and in our lives. Amen. Amen.