

The Fruit of the Spirit - Conclusion

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as I mentioned when we are reading today, we are coming to the conclusion of our study on the fruit of the Spirit. We have spent the last number of months looking at the great words of Galatians 5, 22 and 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. We have been looking at these verses for the past six months and I hope that we have all learnt many, many things and I hope it has been a help and an encouragement to us. And today I want us to spend a wee bit of time to bring together some of the key points that we have learned and also for us to think a little bit about how we can take what we have learnt and apply it all to our lives. That is a principle that applies to everything that we seek to do as a church. Doctrine and application go hand in hand.

What we learn and what we believe should shape the way that we live. So first of all, I want us to briefly ask ourselves what have we learnt. And there are many, many things that we could see here but I want us to focus on three key theological lessons that we have taken from these verses. The first of these is that these verses have taught us a great deal about the character of God.

When you look at the fruit of the Spirit, it is very easy to launch straight into the fact that these are very, very practical verses, shaping our conduct and instructing us as how we should live our lives. And of course these words are describing what Christians should be like. But first and foremost, these verses are not teaching us about ourselves.

They are teaching us about God because the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of God, the Holy Spirit. And so as you read each of these nine elements of the fruit of the Spirit, you are learning what God himself is like. And it's so worthwhile reminding us of these things. God is loving. At the very core of God's nature as a triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, he is loving. And his love is shown not just in what he says but in how he acts towards us across all the ages of history.

God is joyful. It's maybe easy to forget that, that God rejoices. He rejoices in himself in Father, Son and Spirit. He rejoices in his people. You, as a Christian, you are an absolute joy and treasure to God. And God rejoices whenever a sinner repents. And so if anyone was to become a Christian right now, then there would be joy, amazing joy, bursting throughout heaven. God is the God of joy. God is also the God of peace. God takes chaos and he turns it into peace. You see that in so many instances in the Bible where he comes into a chaotic situation and he brings peace. And we see it in our own lives as well when we are under strain, worrying, struggling and we feel like we're in turmoil.

[3 : 4 4] And God turns that trouble into peace. God is patient. And you'll remember that that word in Greek basically means to have a long term view. God has a long term view of you and of me, which means he's not going to turn us back on you the moment you make a mistake.

He's not going to give up on you the moment you struggle. He is not going to turn you away if you stumble. God has a long term view of you and of your circumstances. God is kind.

And we know that that is true in so many ways. Every day we are blessed in countless ways and yet the Bible teaches us that there is immeasurably more still to come. God is good.

A vital point. God is always good. That was the very first thing that the devil tried to deceive in the mind of Eve. Tried to make Eve think that God wasn't good. And of course the consequences were terrible. God is never, ever anything other than good. And he is always good to us. God is faithful. Utterly faithful. Always, always, always totally committed to you. Totally, totally committed to you. It's never a moment when God's interest in you diminishes. It's never a moment when God's commitment towards you lessens. There is never a moment when God is never anything other than absolutely and completely for you. And that's why we can depend on him and rely on him. God is gentle. And so even though God is the strongest of all, even though God holds the oceans and the mountains of the world in the power of his hands, even though God's power is beyond measure, yet he is gentle.

And with all that strength that God has in his hands, he's using it to hold you, to protect you, and to keep you safe and secure. And God is self-controlled. That means God is never rash. He's never irrational, never inconsistent, never unstable, never capricious. He is always steady, always consistent, always fair. God is all of these things, which is one of the many reasons why God is so amazing. And all of these features are seen perfectly in Jesus Christ. You look at Jesus, he loves the most unlovable of people. He rejoiced to serve his Father and to be with his friends. He brought peace into so many lives. He was patient even when people messed up hugely in their lives. Jesus was patient. Jesus was kind. You think of the people who came to Jesus in such desperate situations, they said, are you willing to help? Yes, I am, he said. Jesus is good, perfectly obedient, perfectly righteous. There was never a glimmer of moral compromise in Jesus' life. He is faithful, faithful to the very end, faithful to the point of death in terms of helping his people. He is gentle, so gentle so that a bruised reed he will not break. If we come to him, even if we're laboring and are heavy laden, he will give us rest. And Jesus is always self-controlled. And so he's the perfect example of these things. And so I hope that first and foremost, our study over the past six months has taught us or reminded us about what God is like. The second key theological thing that we've learned is that the fruit of the Spirit and indeed the whole of the letter of Galatians is teaching us that we have been set free from sin as

[8 : 17] Christians. That's the great message of Galatians, that the Christian has freedom. Freedom from sin, freedom from the law. And we are being reminded by Paul in the whole of this letter that without Christ, the law is over us. It's over us and it's crushing us. It's like every move we make, the law is condemning us. You may remember at the very beginning, we were saying, it's a bit like if you were driving a car. Imagine you were driving a car and there was a drone, a little flying thing above you from the police watching your every move.

So every time you went over the speed limit, every time you failed to put your indicator on, every time you crossed the white line, every time you picked up your phone while you were driving, they saw it, they noticed it. And for all of us, that law would be crushing us because we would constantly be failing. And that's the image that we should have in our minds. Paul is saying that on our own, God's law is a burden over us and we are crushed by its weight. But the great message of the gospel is that Jesus has come under the law with us and Jesus has taken the penalty of the law for us and he has set us free from our slavery, taken that crushing burden away and he has brought us into a new status as children, adopted children in the family of God. And for that reason, sin is no longer master over us. We are no longer slaves to sin. We're no longer under its crushing burden and scrutiny. And that means that as Christians, we are not helpless slaves to sin. We can turn away from sin. Jesus has set us free. That's really what repentance is all about, turning away from sin and going in a new and better direction. So we have freedom from sin and from the law. And the third great theological truth that we have been highlighting by all of this is the fact that as Christians, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit himself.

That's the extraordinary privilege of being a believer in Jesus Christ. God himself, God himself comes to dwell in you by his spirit. Galatians 4 talks about this, because your sons, God has sent the spirit of a 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. So God himself has come to dwell in our hearts. And the point we've been trying to make is that that indwelling presence has an effect. Paul describes us as a new creation. We have been changed, transformed and we are being sanctified and made more and more like Jesus. And so that Holy Spirit dwelling in us has an effect. And part of that effect is that we bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. But not only is it the effect, it is also the evidence. The Holy Spirit is the effect of having God in our lives, but it's also the evidence because other people can see it. And as we said in one of our early sermons, fruit is a means of connection. And we had a diagram that we can look at again. We looked at this about four months ago, five months ago, I think back in January. Here you have Jesus as the vine, or if you want to think of it a bit like a tree trunk, not the best word to use, but vine is the more biblical term to use. You have Jesus as the starting point. As Christians, we are connected to Jesus as branches. We are united to Christ by faith. And that union with Christ has an effect upon us. Now, we are connected to Christ. And we are also connected to the world because we are Christians and the world can see us. They can watch us. They see our daily lives.

And the question is, what is it that is going to show the world that we are connected to Christ? How is the world going to see that we are branches connected to Christ, the vine?

The answer is, by our fruit. And it's also beautifully simple. How do you know that an apple tree is an apple tree because it's got apples on it? And so the world knows that we are Christians if we are bearing fruit. And so we are connected to Christ and we are connected to the world. Jesus is our brother, the very same spirit that he has now dwells in us. And it shapes us. It enables us to bear fruit. And the whole world can see Christ in and through us. And that's why the fruit of the spirit is such a key part of our witness as Christians. So the fruit of the spirit, it is a thrilling devotional topic. It teaches us about God. It is an empowering message of liberty. We're not slaves to sin anymore.

[14 : 01] And it is also an immensely important word of instruction because this is what every single person should see when they look at us. And I hope for that reason that when we read about the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5, 22 and 23, I hope that every one of us thinks to ourselves, that is how I want to be. I desperately want that fruit in my life.

But of course, that desire raises our final question. How do we get this fruit in our lives? We all want love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control to be what characterises us. But how do we do it? How do you get the fruit of the spirit in your life? Well, here is an example of where Scripture teaches the most profound and vital truth by being incredibly simple. Because how do you get fruit to grow?

If you want some fruit, what's the first thing you have to do? Well, the answer is very simple.

How do you get fruit to grow? You sow. And that's exactly what Paul tells us to do. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But the one who sows to the spirit will from the spirit reap eternal life. And so the principle is really very simple. Our fruit is a direct result of what and where we sow. And that of course is a very basic principle of agriculture. If you plant an apple tree, you are not going to get any oranges. Likewise, if you put apple seed in the middle of the road out there, nothing is going to grow. And that's really what is being emphasised by the phrase, God is not mocked. And the word therefore mocked literally means to turn up your nose at somebody.

And it's the idea of treating somebody with contempt, ridiculing what they have said. So for example, if I was to say to you today, if you come to Lewis in July, it will be 30 degrees every day. Now if only that was true. But if I said that to you and then you came in July, you could treat me with contempt. You could mock and ridicule what I had said.

[17:17] Because sadly, I don't think there's any chance of that being true at all. So the point Paul is making is that God's law of sowing and reaping will never ever ever prove to be contemptible.

A farmer will always always reap what he has sown. And so that's true in agriculture, but it is also true spiritually. In our battle with the sinful flesh, if we sow to the flesh, then we will grow a harvest of the works of the flesh, which Paul lists in chapter five.

But if we sow to the spirit, we will bear the fruit of the spirit in this life. And we will enjoy the richest of harvest in the life to come. And Paul makes the same point in Romans six. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed for the end of those things is death? Now, we know exactly what Paul is saying there. You think of the daft things that you've done in your life. Probably for most of us that might be thinking of our teenage years, daft things that we've done. What fruit did we get from those kind of things? Well, I'm pretty sure in my own case, it's things of which now I'm ashamed. And for many of us, that may be true. And so when we sow to the flesh, when we follow the ways of the world, the end result is never great. But now that you've been set free from sin, remember the message of liberty that Paul is proclaiming, now that you become free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. If we sow to the spirit, we will reap a wonderful and precious harvest. So Paul's great point is that we need to sow. But of course, we need to ask how do we do that? And Galatians highlights three simple steps for us. First of all, if you want to sow, you need to make a decision to invest. Imagine you've got a seed in your hand, a really precious seed, a wonderful seed. What's the best thing to do with that seed? You think, oh, well, this seed is really precious. I'm going to keep it. I'll lock it away in a cupboard and I won't let anybody need it. I'll leave it in that cupboard so that it's safe. And if you go back after months or years, what are you going to find? You'll find that your seed is rotten. And the precious possession you had has been lost. And so you don't want to put a seed in a cupboard and lock it away safe. What's the best thing to do with a seed? You need to plant it. And the key point is that planting a seed is not a loss. Planting a seed is an investment. You plant a seed, you're going to reap a harvest and you'll end up with even more seeds, which you can grow and grow and grow. Planting a seed is a wonderful opportunity to make your situation better. And that's what Paul speaks about in Galatians 5 verse 13. He says, you were called to freedom, brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Now, one of the key words in that verse is the word opportunity, which basically means starting point. And Paul is saying that as Christians, we are at a starting point. And we have this opportunity where we can either go right back where we came from and go back into the ways of the flesh and into all the mess of sin, or we can follow God's ways. We can use our freedom as an opportunity to live life in a wonderful new way where first and foremost, we love one another, which is what Paul emphasises in verse 13. And through that transformed way of living, we are bringing the hope of

Jesus to other people, and we are being used by God to draw others into God's family. So that means that even as Christians, we have a choice every day as to how we are going to invest our energy, our time, our attention. And Paul is urging us to think clearly about this. And at the heart of that is the fact that we need to think clearly in terms of consequences. That's what he's highlighting in the verses that we read a moment ago. Whatever one sows, he'll also reap. Sow to your flesh, you'll reap corruption, but sow to the spirit, and you will reap eternal life. So every day, tomorrow morning, we get up in the morning, and we have that opportunity to either sow to the flesh or to sow to the spirit. And so if we sow to the flesh by being impatient at work, or being selfish in our home, or refusing to show kindness to other people, or being wasteful with our time, or losing our self-control, or treating others unfaithfully, or criticising, or gossiping, or indulging our sinful nature, if we do these things, then we should not be surprised if we reap a rotten harvest, corruption. But if we sow to the spirit, if we make the fruit of the spirit our goal for every day of our lives, it will be no surprise when the harvest is beneficial both for us and to everyone to whom we are in contact with. Paul is emphasising that we are a new creation, we are part of God's great plan to put things right again in the world, and our conduct every day is an opportunity to bring great blessing. And

I think this is highlighted by the word sows in verse 7, or verse 7 and in verse 8. If you look at that word sows, past tense, present tense, or future tense, which is it? Present.

[23 : 36] So it's something that we need to be doing all the time. I don't think that Paul is emphasising here the one-off decision of following Jesus. I think his message here is focusing on those who have already made that commitment to follow Jesus. He is highlighting the fact that as Christians every day we can sow foolishly, or we can sow wisely. So first of all we have to make that decision to invest, and it's a decision we take every day. Secondly, you need to then nurture your investment with wisdom and perseverance. Isn't that true?

When you plant a seed you don't just throw it in the ground and leave it there, you nurture it in order to help it grow. And that of course requires wisdom to give the plant what's good for it, and it requires perseverance because plants don't grow overnight. And the same of course is true spiritually. We must take constant care to maintain and nurture the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. And that's a really, really important point. We don't just sit and think, oh well the fruit of the Spirit will come all by itself. We are to nurture and maintain the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives. Paul makes this clear with a very, very interesting comment at the end of chapter 5. He says, if we live by the Spirit let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Now I think that's a really, really interesting sentence because it's implying something very important. It's implying that you can live by the Spirit. In other words, you can be a Christian but you can be out of step with the Spirit. So being a Christian means you've been made alive by the Spirit absolutely, but it's not a guarantee that you will always keep in step with the Spirit. That's why

Paul is saying, if you are a Christian, if you live by the Spirit make sure you keep in step with the Spirit. And we know that's true from our own experience as Christians because we know we are saved and yet we make mistakes and we often do things that are unhealthy and unwise. And that's part of what Paul speaks about elsewhere when he describes us grieving the Holy Spirit. And Paul then applies this principle in two ways where we have to nurture the Spirit's influence in our lives. The first area is in terms of individual accountability.

That's what he highlights in verses 3 to 5 of chapter 6. Notice the individual focus here. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself but let each one test his own work and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour for each will have to bear his own load. And Paul is highlighting the fact here that we are all individually accountable for our own conduct. And this is reminding us of the vital truth that rather than fooling ourselves into thinking that we are great and that we have a sort of inherent right to scrutinise others, Paul is saying that we need to scrutinise ourselves and we need to remember how helpless and dependent we are. That of course applies to us as individuals. It's so easy to be blind to our own faults and yet to be pin sharp at finding the faults in others. It's very, very easy to see something in someone else and yet to ignore many of the things that are in ourselves. So we all and I say to myself more than anybody else, we have to watch that. But I think that that principle does apply as a church as well because it's easy, very, very easy as a church to become proud. Very easy to think that we as a congregation or that we as a denomination are in a good state and we can be proud of ourselves and we can perhaps pick out the faults and failings in others. I think a very, very, very clear example of that is ahead of us in the next few days. There's two general assemblies in Edinburgh this week. General

Assembly of the Free Church and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. I don't need to say any more details other than the fact that we know that the Church of Scotland has had challenges, huge challenges over recent years. Our role is never to proudly sit and think, I'm glad we're not like them. First and foremost, we should pray for them. Secondly, we should keep watching ourselves. And so Paul is emphasising this. We each have to bear our own load and so we shouldn't be devoting our time to scrutinising the load of somebody else. We should watch our own conduct. But he also highlights the fact that alongside individual accountability there is collective responsibility. And this is one of the strongest themes in Galatians 5 and 6, a constant emphasis on doing good to one another. Verse 13, you are called to freedom, brother. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Verse 15, if you bite and devour one another, watch out, you're not consumed by one another. Isn't that interesting?

[29 : 43] That's a really clear illustration of the sowing and reaping principle. Biting and devouring one another is sowing. The harvests you will reap is that we consume each other and fall apart. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Into chapter 6, bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. Verse 10, so then as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Paul is reminding us that at the heart of bearing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives is the fact that we are to do good to one another. Of course, that's a logical consequence of the elements of the fruit of the Spirit. If we do these things, then we will be a wonderful blessing to each other. And that of course is exactly what we should be as a church every week. When we come together, we should be a huge blessing to one another, where we all benefit from one another's fruit. We are here to share the fruit of the Spirit with one another. And this is a vital biblical principle. This is the reason why when you read through the New Testament, and especially in Paul, there is such a massively clear emphasis on how utterly wrong it is for there to be hostility or criticism or coldness or division in the Christian church. Because all of these things are in total contrast to the fruit that we should bear as God's people. Paul is emphasising that we have such an enormous collective responsibility to love one another. And so you read those nine elements, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. That's how we should be to one another. That's how we must be to one another. And of course, it's all too easy, and I'm guilty of this myself, it's all too easy to think of people and think, or they could do with becoming a bit more like that. But of course, if we think like that, then we're missing the point. The question we must ask is not are other people doing that. The question we must ask is, am I doing it? And all of this is exactly what people should see when they come into this church. And that's what we'll make them see. I want to be part of it. And that's exactly what Jesus taught in the words that we read at the very beginning. Jesus said, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you so that you will love one another. Now see when Jesus says there, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he'll give it to you. It's so easy to think that that's going to be referring to maybe material blessing or success in our career or something like that. I think that if we read the verse more wisely, we will see that it is far more likely that Jesus is talking about fruit. Whatever fruit you ask for, he will give it to you. He will help you to bear fruit because that's the whole reason he chose you and appointed you. So bearing fruit and loving one another, go hand in hand. Which of course means every time Christians fail to love one another, they are fertilizing the flesh. But every time we show love to one another, even in little ways, we are nurturing and cultivating the good fruit that we long for in our lives. So we have to make an investment, we have to sow wisely. We have to then nurture that investment, nurture so that we grow and develop. Thirdly, finally and briefly, what else do you need to do? What else do you need to be when you sow a seed? You need to be patient. And that's what Paul says in verse 9, let us not grow weary of doing good. For a due season, we will reap if we do not give up. It's a fundamental principle of sowing and reaping. You must be patient. Now that doesn't mean doing nothing.

If you look at a farmer, they sow their seeds in the spring, they don't just sit at home and relax all summer. They are constantly working to bring on their crops, but they have to be patient. And all of this is reminding us that we should not be discouraged and you should not be discouraged if results are not instant. Now as we talk about the fruit of the Spirit, it's really easy to listen to it and to think, I'm nowhere near where I should be. I don't have the fruit of the Spirit in my life in the way that I want to be. I'm a failure. But Paul is saying, do not give up. Do not grow weary. Keep going. And so we are to keep going sowing to the Spirit. And it might seem like very little is happening, but we should never, ever, ever be surprised if we have to wait for a harvest. Always have to wait for a harvest. That of course applies to us as individuals. And sometimes I get frustrated myself in my own shortcomings in this area. I want to be more patient. I want to be more self-controlled. I want to be more joyful. I want to be more gentle. But progress is slow in my life. And I'm sure it's possibly the same for you. But Paul says, do not grow weary. Keep sowing to the Spirit. It applies to us as a congregation. We want our congregation to grow. We want our congregation to become closer together. We want to develop closer friendships. We want to have greater accountability. We want to be better at bearing one another's burdens. We want to increase our love for one another. And maybe you feel like progress is slow. And maybe you feel like you're not developing the friendships that you hoped you would in this congregation. Paul is saying, do not grow weary. Keep sowing to the Spirit.

And it applies to our relationship with people who are yet to come to faith. And maybe you have been praying for a friend or a family member for a long time and nothing is happening.

Maybe you are longing to build up closer ties with friends or colleagues or neighbors. Or maybe when it comes to witnessing you think, I don't even know where to start. Paul says, do not grow weary. Keep sowing to the Spirit. And so we want to keep doing that. Keep on every day sowing to the Spirit so that our own lives are transformed into a Christ likeness.

[37 : 24] So that our fellowship as Christians grows stronger and stronger. And so that we see the fruit of the Spirit drawing others to come and put their faith in Jesus Christ to leave the world behind and to start bearing the fruit of the Spirit themselves. Paul says, do not give up. Do not ever grow weary. So that's it. Six months later we have reached the end of our study on the fruit of the Spirit. It is a glorious topic. We have spent the last few months seeing the fruit of the Spirit by looking at the Bible. Now may God grant that everyone we meet will see the fruit of the Spirit by looking at us. Amen. Let's pray.

God we thank you for all that your word teaches us and for the amazing transformation that Jesus Christ has brought in our lives, that you, O God, have brought in our lives. And so we thank you that you have delivered us from the clutches of sin, from the sentence of death that we were under, and from all the chaos and horribleness that sin brings.

We thank you that you have set us free in Jesus Christ and that you have come to dwell in us, God, by your Spirit. And we pray, O Lord, that that would bear much, much fruit in our lives. We are conscious, Lord, of the mistakes that we have made in our lives, and we're sorry for all the times that we fall into that temptation to sow to the flesh.

But today is a new day, a new opportunity, and all the days that may lie ahead of us are an opportunity whereby we desperately want to sow to the Spirit and to bear that fruit that will bring glory to your name. Thank you for all that we've learned. Help us to keep it in our hearts, that your word would be written on our hearts, and that you, O God, would shape our lives every day. And we ask, Lord, above all else, that every one of us would know that indwelling of the Spirit that comes through faith in Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.