

Understanding the Fruit of the Spirit

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[0:00] If you would, would you please turn in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 5. Galatians chapter 5. Galatians chapter 5. Today we're going to start a very short five-week series on the fruit of the Spirit.

And in a very rough way, it's taken from a book called The Fruit of the Spirit Is. It's by J.V. Fesco. And it's a very rough, I don't think you could really go to this, and get the exact same thing. But what I like about that book, and what I found so helpful, is that it takes this topic of the fruit of the Spirit, and it puts it in its wider biblical context.

It puts it in its wider biblical context, and it explains how this idea of the fruit of the Spirit connects with a lot of other things in the Bible, a lot of passages in the Old Testament, and shows that Paul didn't just come up with this term and this idea out of thin air.

Instead, it was as he meditated on the Scriptures, as he meditated on the Old Testament, this was an idea that naturally comes out of the Old Testament. And so it shows its interconnectedness with the rest of the Bible and the rest of our experience.

[1:20] Now, we have the tendency, I think we do anyways, we have the tendency to have a very limited view of the fruit of the Spirit.

And what I mean is, we go to Galatians chapter 5 and verse 22 and 23, and we go to the verses, and we say, okay, this is what God wants of me, this is what I need to do, and so this is what I need to work on.

Or we look at it this way, we say, well, I'm pretty good in these certain areas, but I really could use, I need to put some more effort into one of these.

You know, I'm really kind, but maybe my faithfulness is not so good. And so we say, I need to work on my faithfulness. Now, that's not altogether wrong, and I don't want you to think that I'm saying that that way of looking at it is altogether wrong, but it fails to take into account what Paul is actually doing in this passage.

It kind of misses Paul's point altogether. And so let's just begin by looking at it. Look at Galatians chapter 5 and verse 22, and it says this, And we have the tendency to say, well, I'm pretty kind, but maybe I really need to work on my patience.

[3:00] And we have a tendency to divide it up and then try to get to work on one of them. And I think that is really the wrong way to at least initially start out, to come at it.

It's the wrong way to look at it. Maybe it initially makes sense to look at it that way, but there's a number of problems that come up.

There's a number of problems with that way of looking at it. And so today I want to kind of get a good start on this. And I want to clear away some of the debris and some of the mess and get our perspective right on the fruit of the Spirit and the way that we should look at it.

And so if you go into a room and it's a mess, and there's all sorts of stuff there, and this is my life, I have three kids, and so you go into the room, and if you want to clean it up, one of the first things that you need to do before you even dust, before you sweep, you've got to take out the stuff that doesn't belong.

You've got to put that stuff where it belongs. You need to get all the stuff out of there that doesn't belong there. And so you've got to get the socks out that don't belong there, and the books need to be put away, and the markers need to be put away.

[4:12] And that's kind of what I want to do this morning. I want to get rid of some of the mess, some of the debris that we have a tendency to bring to this passage on the fruit of the Spirit. And I think part of the mess is that we have the tendency to instantly go to dividing it up, and then getting to work and saying, this is what I need to do.

Now, what's wrong with that way of thinking? Well, let's begin just with this, with a question. Is Paul's statement in Galatians 5, 22 and 23, is it an indicative, or is it an imperative? Is it an indicative, or is it an imperative? Remember, what's the mood? Remember, indicative is stating a fact. Imperative is giving a command. It's telling us something to do. So which one is this? Indicative. It's an indicative. Indicative. Now, it's stating a fact.

It's stating a gospel fact. It's not initially telling us to do anything. It's telling us something that is true because of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 27] And now, Paul uses this method again and again in the way that he presents and the way he writes. He uses indicative and imperative. And we've talked about this. I've talked about this before. And so, indicative is the gospel, generally.

So, Paul states something that's true about the gospel. That's indicative. And then he says, therefore, now go and do this. That's imperative.

So, since this is true, therefore, do this. And we saw this, if you were in Sunday evening, you saw this in the book of Colossians. Since then, we have been raised with Christ.

Indicative. Saying something that's true about us. Saying a gospel truth. Therefore, therefore, set your hearts on things above. That's imperative. Command. Duty.

Something to do. Now, Paul isn't afraid of imperative. He's not afraid to just straight out tell someone what to do and then expect obedience.

[6 : 31] Some people are teaching that all we do is, all we need to focus on is the indicative. And they say, if you focus on the, I have the indicative over here, don't I?

All you do is focus on the indicative. And if you just go to imperative, that's legalism. And Paul doesn't see it that way.

Jesus doesn't see it that way. Jesus wasn't afraid of talking about duty. And neither was Paul. But it is when we unhinge, when we break the connection of the indicative and the imperative, the truth and the duty, that we do fall into legalism.

It's when we don't remember the gospel and we just set about doing the imperative that we inevitably do fall into legalism. But Paul is always connecting the two.

Now, so what is Paul saying here? In Galatians chapter 5, 22 and 23, when he's talking about the fruit of the Spirit. Well, he's giving us gospel truth.

[7 : 33] He's telling you something that is true about you or could be true about you because of who Jesus is and what you have in Jesus Christ. He's giving you a gospel truth.

This is not a command. He does not say love. He does not say be joyful. He does not say be peaceful, be patient, and so on.

Instead, he's beginning with this truth. He's proclaiming this gospel truth. Now, in this passage, in this wider passage, there is command.

And that's what I want to look at right now. So I'm going to read verses 16 all the way to verse 26. And as I read through it, look for the imperatives.

Look for the thing that Paul says, now this is what you need to do. So as I read, look for the imperatives. And you should see one right away.

[8 : 32] So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. You will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with each other, so you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature, the acts of the flesh, are obvious.

Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things, there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature. They've crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

[9 : 46] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking, and envying each other. Now, did you see a couple of imperatives, of commands, of duties, of things that we are to do?

What was one of them? We are to live by the Spirit. What else? That's the first big one. Keep in step with the Spirit. And then, then he adds in verse 26, let's not become conceited, provoking, and envying each other. Now, here's the wonderful truth. This is the gospel truth. The wonderful reason that we are to keep in step with the Spirit, that we are to live by the Spirit, we are to walk with the Spirit. Because if we do, if we do that, then the Spirit will produce in us, love, and joy, and peace, and patience, and kindness, and goodness, and faithfulness, and gentleness, and self-control. [10 : 56] The wonderful reason we should walk in the Spirit is because the Spirit will produce this new life within us as we do it, this new fruit within us. And that, so Paul, Galatians 5, 22 and 23, is its motivation for you to live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit.

Now, we're going to talk about what that means next week. But I want you to see that the connection here is the fruit of the Spirit is not, first of all, a command. Instead, it is motivation for you to keep in step with the Spirit and to live by the Spirit.

And so the truth is meant to encourage us. The truth is meant to motivate us. You see, what was going on in Galatia where people were trying to live by the flesh and they were trying out of their own resources to live the Christian life and to please God by what they did and by living, you know, including circumcision and the rest.

They were going to, they were going to do this and please God. And what Paul is saying is that whole mindset is backwards and it actually doesn't produce the life that God wants.

Instead, it's when you live by the Spirit and walk by the Spirit. And we're going to, again, we're going to see what that looks like next week. But this is, first of all, an encouragement and a reason.

[12 : 22] Instead of depending on yourself, you depend upon the Spirit. And instead of following your own desires, you follow the Spirit's desires. And instead of leaning on your own strength and what you've done and what you can glory in, you instead lean on and you glory in Jesus Christ and what He has done.

So that's the first thing. We have to understand what Paul is doing here. This is motivation. This is not a command, at least as it initially comes to us. Now, you know what? There is this implied idea that we should be pursuing these things and that's where we're going to, we're going to talk about that at the very end.

But I just want to put that out in the front. We want the right perspective as we look at the fruit of the Spirit. And what I'm saying is, is if we don't start with that, then we're going to get off track very quickly.

Now, here's the second reason we can't just divide these up and say, I'm going to get to work on this one and I have the other ones taken care of. Or, I really need to work on this one, but in this area I'm okay.

Now, let's just look at them again. You see what they are, the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, and the rest. I have a question. Can you really do any of them well without the other one?

[13 : 37] Can you really do any of them well without the other ones? We can divide them up in our mind, but in your heart, do they work that way?

In your life, do they actually work that way? No. Paul says, it's the fruit of the Spirit. Singular. Not the fruits of the Spirit.

Because in one sense, this is all one thing. It's just looked at from different perspectives. It's all the life of Christ being grown and developed in us.

The heart of Christ. And it's looked at from different directions. It's all Christ-likeness. It's all godliness from different perspectives. You can't really be good at one and bad at another one. I think we can have general strengths or weaknesses, but they really hang together. They really grow on the same tree.

[14 : 36] They all really grow together. So just think about it. Have you ever known anyone who is marked by real joy? Real joy. He's a real joyful person, but he wasn't patient?

Do you know anyone like that? Okay, so you're standing in line at the grocery store, and you're standing behind someone, or there's this big long line, and that person's waiting in the big long line at the grocery store, and you know, you've been there.

They're agitated, right? They're so tired, and the person in front is not getting their money ready. They're writing a check, and who writes a check anymore, and what's going on?

So there that person is. They're impatient. They're irked. They're all, and then they finally get up, and they're snippy with the cashier, and they give her a hard time, like it's her fault, and now, would you ever say, well, that person's impatient, but boy, are they joyful?

No. Their impatience shows their lack of joy, right? Their impatience shows their lack of joy.

[15 : 43] If they had real joy in their heart, they wouldn't be impatient. Now, what about love and goodness? What about love and goodness?

Is there anyone anywhere who is loving? So loving, but they're really not that good. They, you know, so you have this father, and he loves his children.

Jesus talked about this. And they ask for a fish. He loves them, and so he gives them a snake.

Does that happen?

No, love and goodness go together, don't they? Goodness is an expression of love. So love produces goodness, and your goodness of heart, so your goodness of heart and your love, it makes you patient and kind and gentle and self-controlled, doesn't it?

And your patience shows itself in self-control. and your patience comes across as gentleness. So if you have, you're with someone, and they're not doing what they're supposed to do, so men, you're at work, and you have somebody that's not doing what they're supposed to do, and they're always messing up.

[16 : 59] Can you be patient and harsh at the same time? No. Your patience will make you gentle with that person. Are there mean people who are gentle?

And are there people who are at peace who don't have self-control? They're calm, they're resting, but they're out of control. Do you see what I'm getting at?

We really can't divide them up and say, I need to work on this one, but this one's okay. Well, like I said, there's general strengths and weaknesses, I'll give you that, but we can divide them up in our minds, but in reality, the life of Christ is this whole cloth.

It's this whole thing. It's a tree that grows in us. And when we are fruitful in one area, it produces fruit in other areas. So it all hangs together.

And that's why Paul is able to say in 1 Corinthians 13, you know, you need to seek the better way. And he talks about love.

[18 : 12] And he says, do you remember how that starts? Love is patient. Love is kind. Does not envy. It is not proud.

does not boast. It's not easily angered. So, love is first on our fruit of the spirit list. And love shows itself in all the rest.

If you love, you'll be patient. If you love, you'll be gentle. love is the rest of the spirit. And all the rest are what it means to love real people. Self-control, patience, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, all the rest.

That's what it means to love real people. So, all together, it's what the spirit produces in those who follow after him, who live by the spirit. So, you see the life, this is what Paul is saying.

And this is what he says in Romans chapter 8 as well. it's those who follow, who live by the spirit that actually obey the law.

[19 : 17] It's those who follow after the Holy Spirit and live according to him and are believing and trusting in what he is saying and what he is teaching about Jesus Christ that actually live in the law.

The spirit produces in us what we could never in our flesh produce. Remember the law can be summed up in these two great commandments, love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself.

And, that is what the spirit produces in those who are in Jesus Christ who follow, who are following after him. And so, he doesn't, the spirit doesn't take just part of Jesus and replicate it in us.

The spirit takes, it doesn't just take his gentleness but doesn't take his love. It takes his, it takes Christ's love, he takes Christ's love, he takes Christ's gentleness, he takes Christ's peace and all the rest.

He doesn't produce the joy of Christ without his patience and so on. And so, the spirit is producing within us the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God the Father, Philippians says.

[20 : 29] The spirit is, he isn't taking part of Christ, part of Christ's character, he is taking all of Christ's character and working it into us. Now, so where one is, there is the other and where one fruit is, there will be the others behind it and all around it, in front of it.

Now, the third reason we can't divide it up and say, oh, I'm going to get to work on this one and I don't have to worry about the other ones is because in the same way that our righteousness and our Christ-likeness hangs together, our sinfulness does too.

Our sinfulness does too. Your sinfulness, we would like to say that I just have one or two really apparent blemishes. But it doesn't take a lot of digging or a lot of experience to see that our sin hangs together in much the same way as our godliness does.

So one time I was talking to a man with a terrible temper and he was a professing Christian and I have no doubt that he, I think he was.

But what I, when I talked to him, we talked about his temper, it became clear that there were other things going on as well. envy and jealousy and selfish ambition.

[21:59] See, it wasn't just one or two acts of the flesh. It was this whole complex array of things going on in his heart. And he was jealous and he wanted respect and he didn't get it at work and so when he came home he was going to get it.

And of course, you know, when he came home his family wouldn't do everything he wanted and so he reacted in anger.

Now, his anger, it wasn't just all out there by itself. Behind it, it was planted in the soil of selfish ambition, it was planted in the soil of envy, it had its roots in his view of God and unbelief, a sense of alienation from God.

He wasn't resting in his adoption, he was instead living like an orphan. He wasn't satisfied in Christ's righteousness. He didn't see himself as God saw him through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Instead, he lived day by day trying to justify himself by what his work did and how much money he produced trying to prove himself with his work. His work was going to be the way that he was going to be somebody.

[23:12] But don't, the point here is that that was all hanging together. Our sin hangs together.

And out of that came a presenting symptom of anger. Here's another example from David Powelson, who's a Christian counselor.

And in an article on, he wrote, he was saying that you have to recognize and repent of the sin patterns underlying your obvious sin.

And he said this. This is a very long quote, but this is, I learned this when I was, when I counseled Tom, a single Christian man in his late 30s who had been struggling with pornography since he was a teenager.

He had tried all the right things, accountability, memorizing the Bible, exercise, cold showers, being involved in ministry, and he still struggled.

[24:15] And when I asked him to keep a record of when he was tempted, he said to me, I already know when. It's on Friday night. It's my temper tantrum with God.

And I thought that his big struggle was with pornography. And all of a sudden, he was talking about being angry with God. And then he said, I'm tired and lonely on Friday nights.

And I think about my single friends and they're out on dates. And I think of my married friends with their wives and I feel sorry for myself. And I get angry at God because I think he owes me a wife and I don't have one.

And by nine o'clock, the temptation to sexual sin is overwhelming and I give in. Tom's fight with sin focused on one thing, his struggle with pornography.

That's why he was in the counselor's office. He's saying, I need help with this one thing. But underlying that struggle was Tom's anger, self-pity, envy, his belief that God owed him a wife.

[25:14] Tom was also a legalist. He believed that when he tried to be a good Christian, God owed him goodies, such as a wife. And then, when he did something wrong, he despaired.

And out of his despair, he sinned. So, see, sin hangs together. One holds the other up.

And as we live without Christ, without the Spirit, we develop this whole complex way, and I don't mean complex as in complicated, I mean, this whole thing that's interrelated, interwoven together, of thinking about God, thinking about ourselves, feelings, desires, the whole philosophy, the whole way of doing life where we don't have Jesus at the middle, we're not, he's not the reference point, the Holy Spirit is not, we're not listening to him, we're not following him, the whole way of doing life, Paul calls the flesh.

The flesh. The flesh is the whole pre-Christ, apart from Christ, apart from the Holy Spirit way of doing life.

Now, sometimes the flesh is very religious. I think that's something we don't, we don't take into account often enough. The flesh is, can be very religious.

[26 : 37] Just because Paul wrote all of these really bad things that the works of the flesh are, that isn't, he's saying, there's more like it, this is just a representative example, and, and some of the things that he doesn't include are how religious the flesh can be.

The flesh can even accommodate the law, it can accommodate the sacrifices, the flesh can accommodate and take in and bring and use the Bible, it's just fine, as long as Christ is not at the center.

And that's what many of the Jews did. Just because the Jews didn't do these sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, and witchcraft, I mean, that wasn't a normal part of the Jewish experience.

It doesn't mean they weren't living in the flesh. Instead, their living in the flesh looked very much like, oh, we go to synagogue, and we read our Bibles, and we do this, and we do that.

They never saw Christ as the end of the law. Instead, they just took the law, and they said, okay, I'll obey it. I can do it. And I'll try. And so, when they sort of did it, they were proud, and when they didn't do it, they despaired.

[27 : 54] But they never saw Christ as the end of the law. They never saw the law as pointing to Christ. And so, even as they took the law of God, the perfect law of righteousness, they bent it and used it for their own purposes.

They never saw the law and the sacrifices as pointing forward to Christ. They didn't need a Messiah. Someone said, the law became the perfect vehicle for the flesh. The flesh did its best protection, its best living, its strongest, most, best living when it had the law.

And they took the law, and they lived like they were still Adam in the garden. They didn't figure on the fall at all. They figured they could do it.

It was still up to them. They didn't need a Savior. Because they had the law. Now, the acts of the flesh were very different in the Gentile world that Paul was writing to. The acts of the flesh were very different.

But it was all flesh. It was all pre-Christ. It was all living in Adam. It was all related to Adam apart from Christ, way of living, way of thinking.

[29 : 03] And that flesh, that philosophy, that power, that mentality, that attitude, that direction of heart, it is a powerful force.

It desires, and it controls. That's what it talks about. It's dominating. It has these strong desires. And it's not satisfied. The flesh can never rest.

There's always more that it needs. It's never satisfied. The flesh is this empty tomb demanding more and more. And that's the power that we lived in. Whether it was irreligious or whether it was very religious, it was still that power.

It was all not Christ. And that's what controlled us. But what Paul is saying, now everything has changed. And so you can't live that way anymore. Romans 8 and 9 says, you, however, are controlled not by the flesh.

You see, the flesh controls the people that are living in it. You're, however, not controlled by the flesh, but by the spirit. You are, so if you are in Christ now, you have a new master.

[30 : 07] You have a new power at work, a new power controlling you. And he's the Holy Spirit. And so, now in the words of Romans 8, 4, now the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

So the spirit produces in us what the flesh never could, even at its best, even with the law, it could never do. Now, let me just say that, let me just stop here and say, this is really good news.

It's really good news. Remember, this is an indicative. What Paul is telling you here is something that's good news about what's going on in your life or what could be going on in your life.

God the spirit, he is able to make us fruitful in ways that are completely different than the way that you used to live. And if you are a Christian, you belong to Christ and the spirit, he is already at work within you.

So something drastic has already happened. So look at verse 24. Those who belong to Christ Jesus.

[31:26] And if you belong to Christ Jesus, you have the spirit of Christ in you. That's what Paul talks about in Romans 8. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its desires.

So the flesh with its power and its control over us, its desires are crucified. crucified. So it's on the cross.

It's losing its strength. It is dying. It is dead to us. So anytime we listen and follow the flesh, we are listening and following someone who is on the cross as good as dead.

But its power, its domination, its control, its mastery is over. It's dead to us now. And so now, we have a new power. We have the Holy Spirit living in us.

And so the flesh is not animating our every move. Instead, the spirit, we live by the spirit. His desires, his goals, his aims are flowing through our lives.

[32:32] And he says, if you live by the spirit, so the spirit is giving us life. He's animating us, helping us, leading us.

Now, in verse 24, we're not told to crucify the flesh. Some people have said that. We need to crucify the flesh. If you're going to be holy, you have to crucify the flesh.

That's to miss the point. The flesh is crucified. crucified. We aren't told to make ourselves alive by the spirit.

We already are. You already are alive by the spirit. Now, here's where, this is where the rubber meets the road. This is where we want to get some good traction. This is where this intersects with our lives this morning.

If this is true, then our mentality and our attitude as we think about the fruit of the spirit should not be, oh, no, I'm tired.

[33:33] I can't do this. I don't have what it takes. I can't do this. I wish I could. Oh, I wish I could, but I can't. This is impossible. Brothers and sisters, this Holy Spirit is in you and he is powerfully at work.

He is going to produce these things in us as we follow him, as we keep in step with the spirit. God is for you.

God is for you as you look at this list. He's so for you that he sent the third person of the Trinity to live in you to help you to produce these things. God is not against you.

God is not against you. You've been reconciled by the blood of his son. God is for you. And so he's not this impersonal judge who doesn't know you, who doesn't understand you, who doesn't relate to you, who doesn't love you, who just stands back and puts this list in front of you like nine hurdles on a racetrack and says, now you've got to run this and you better not trip up and, oh, you messed up. Oh, you messed up. Oh, you messed up. He's not doing that because he is in you. He is for you. Christ is for you. He, Christ lives in you by his spirit.

[34:49] And so Paul is able to say, God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine according to his power that is, present tense, is at work within us.

Right now, at work within us. And so all this to say, as we look at this list, we have to realize that this is not you against God in your pursuit of holiness.

This is you and God pursuing holiness. So, he's not against you because you are sinful. He is for you because you are sinful.

And he is determined to save you. Let me say that again. He's not against you because you are sinful. He is for you because you are sinful and he has determined to save you.

Jesus has determined to wash you clean. And so when he sees your sin, he doesn't stand against you. Instead, he stands ready to help you, to cleanse you.

[36:02] The spirit himself has desires for you. The flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other. So, the Holy Spirit, he is not passive within you.

He has desires. He's fighting. He's fighting for you. And it says we're to be led by the spirit. That means that the spirit is leading us.

The Holy Spirit is not in the passenger seat waiting to see what we're going to do. The spirit is in the driver's seat. He has the map. He knows where we're going. And he's saying, follow me, come along. What the spirit begins, he's going to complete.

Now, once we understand that, once you understand this, this does not leave you passive in your pursuit of godliness. If you translate it into, okay, now I just yield to God and do nothing and wait,

that's missing something.

If you really understand God is for me, then you say, oh, then I want to do it. The spirit's leading me? Okay, I want to follow him. So 1 Timothy 6.11, but you, man of God, pursue, chase after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

[37 : 14] Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. So Paul says, you don't just sit back. This is good news, but it's not good news that leaves you passive.

It says pursue. He says pursue, fight, take hold of eternal life. So right now, as a Christian, you can take hold of the life that is eternal. And how do you do it? You pursue these things.

You pursue them. We grasp, we live in eternal life even as we pursue holiness. And so brothers and sisters, where does this end?

This ends with this, that as you look and as you read, as you meditate, as you think on, as we embark on this trip to the fruit of the spirit, we do so with great expectation, with hope, not despair. Because this is meant to encourage us. It's meant to move us and convict us and to bring us along. It's meant to say, okay, God, I'm in this race with you.

[38 : 17] I'm running after you. I'm following you. And so next week, we're going to talk about what it means to live by the spirit and keep in step with the spirit. But I want you to start with encouragement and help and hope.

Well, we are dismissed.