Sermon Series: Fruit of the Spirit

Sermon Title: Defining Fruit

Scripture: Galatians 5.22-23

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Define *fruit*.

According to Lawrence M. Kelly, Ph.D., Director of Graduate Studies at the They York Botanical Gardens, “A fruit is a mature, ripened ovary, along with the contents of the ovary.”

Here’s another definition: “broadly, the botanical term fruit refers to the mature ovary of a plant, including its seeds, covering and any closely connected tissue, without any consideration of whether these are edible. As related to food, the botanical term fruit refers to the edible part of a plant that consists of the seeds and surrounding tissues.”

Yes, tomatoes are technically fruits, as are beans and coconuts.

But what about a definition for the fruit of the Spirit?

Based of my study from scripture, here’s a working definition I came up with which I firmly believe to be accurate and true: The Fruit of the Spirit is **the (1) ideal Christlike character (2) to which believers are being conformed (3) by the Holy Spirit (4) with our willful cooperation.**

Let’s take a look at each of the four parts of this definition beginning with the Fruit of the Spirit being ideal Christlike character.

**Fruit of the Spirit as ideal Christlike character**

From Galatians, we have already learned that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (**Galatians 4.6**). If the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, then the fruit is produced the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) must therefore come ultimately from Jesus. And if it comes from Jesus, then we can know Jesus Himself possessed this fruit which He is passing to us through His Spirit.

Furthermore, Jesus said in **John 16.14** that the Spirit of truth would glorify Jesus by taking what belongs to Jesus and declaring it to us, that is, believers of Jesus. He then said in **verse 15**, “All that the Father has is mine, therefore I said that He (the Holy Spirit) will take what is mine and declare it to you.” The Spirit takes what belongs to Jesus, which would include His perfect character, and declare it or give it to us.

But Jesus made a very interesting point in **verse 15** by saying everything the Father has belongs to Him. What this means then is that the Christlike character Jesus passes to us through the Holy Spirit ultimately came from God the Father! God the Father gave it to God the Son who passes it through God the Spirit to the sons and daughters of God. What we see here describes what the Bible calls the image of God.

**Image of God**

Back when God created Adam and Eve, the first humans, and placed them in the Garden of Even, we are told in **Genesis 1.26-27** that God made them and all humanity in His image. It doesn’t mean we literally look like God, but rather we reflect His character in ways animals don’t: we have intellectual ability, we make moral choices, we have a spiritual nature, we have the right to rule and have dominion, etc. But when Adam and Eve sinned, that image of God in humanity was corrupted: we use our intellect for selfish gain, we make morally wrong choices, our spirit is corrupted and dark, our rule/dominion is tyrannical, etc. However, Jesus is that image of God in humanity restored and perfected again.

All this goes to show us that the fruit of the Spirit is ideal Christlike character, the perfect image of God to which believers are being conformed.

**Believers are being conformed to the image of Jesus, the perfect image of God**

Yes, the second part of our definition is that believers are being conformed or changed to become like Jesus.

The Apostle Paul said in **Romans 12.2**, “Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind…” The Greek for *be transfor*med is in the passive voice which means it’s an action being done to someone by someone else.

Believers are being changed. Our corrupt image of God is being restored into the perfect image of Jesus who is the perfect image of God. Again, we turn to the Apostle Paul who said in **Romans 8.29**, “**29**For those whom he (God the Father) foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he (Jesus) might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

It is God’s good desire and perfect plan for believers in Jesus to be conformed into the image of Jesus, the perfect image of God. As the fruit of the Spirit comes from Jesus and ultimately God the Father, we can therefore conclude that the fruit of the Spirit describes that perfect image of Jesus.

I love this quote I found by Derek Tidball. He said about conforming to the image of Jesus, “To be holy is to have the image of God, given to us at creation, restored in us. It is, therefore, to be truly human and truly Christlike.”[[1]](#footnote-1) As we are changed to be more like Jesus, we are becoming truly human.

But until that is complete, we are still sinful humans who are incapable by our ability to change. That’s why we need help; we need the Holy Spirit.

**Conformity to Christlike character must by the power of the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is the power of our transformation. The whole reason Jesus sent His Spirit to us is because we desperately needed Him to be changed.

The prophet Ezekiel, 400-500 years before Jesus and the Holy Spirit, prophesied about an incredible work of God done to His people, a work that included God putting His Sprit within us and thereby causing us to walk in His ways and obey His rules.[[2]](#footnote-2) We are told about the coming of God’s Sprit, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit in **Acts 2.1-13** where He descended on the Apostles like fire and filled not only them but all those who are drawn by the Spirit to faith in Jesus.

It's by the power of this Holy Spirit that believers are changed to become like Jesus. The theological word for this is *sanctification*, the process by which the Holy Spirit changes us to become like Jesus.[[3]](#footnote-3)

John Walvoord in his book *Five views of Sanctification* said this: “Believers, because of their relationship to Christ as well as to the Holy Spirit, are able to bear fruit, but as the dependence on the branch upon the vine illustrates, they are at the same time dependent upon the Holy Spirit for the manifestation of any evidence of sanctification in their lives.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

We need the Holy Spirit.

However, while the Holy Spirit is the power behind our transformation, He does not work against our will. Conformity to Christlike character must be done willfully.

**Conformity to Christlike character must be done willfully**

Never does God force someone to do something against their will. He does not act like the demons who can possess people and override a person’s will, but instead God works with our will. If our wills are in a bad place, He works to change our will to be in line with His, but He never forces us against our will.

Because of this, we need to be willfully engaged with the Holy Spirit in our transformation because it will not happen apart from our desiring and pursuing it. Looking back as **Romans 12.2** again, Paul instructed believers to be transformed, meaning it’s something we are involved in. There are similar commands in **Galatians 5.16,25** to *walk by the Spirit* and *keep in step with the Spirit.*

Without a doubt then, believers bear personal responsibility for conforming to the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

By our will, we can either hinder the Holy Spirit from working or enable the Holy Spirit to work.

**Hindering the Spirit**

**Ephesians 4.30** says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

I believe grieving the Spirit is to choose sin and self over Christ Jesus. When believers choose sin, we create a breech in fellowship between us and God. We separate ourselves from the peace of God, we put earplugs in our ears to make it harder to hear from God, and it becomes easier to sin. God never actually leaves us, but the work of transformation stops until we repent and come back.

If you haven’t experienced any spiritual change in the last months or years, perhaps the Holy Sprit is grieved by your sin. The only thing to do is to confess your sin to God and repent, turn away from the sin and turn to Jesus.

As we can grieve the Spirit, we can also enable Him.

**Enabling the Spirit**

**Galatians 5.16 and 18** mentions walking by the Spirit/being led by the Spirit. Being led by the Spirit implies a willingness to obey the Spirit by (as we discovered last week) desiring Jesus and loving one another. A ready submission to obey the Spirit/Christ Jesus enables the Spirit to do His work effectively and powerfully.

So, if you want to enable the Holy Spirit to transform your life, desire Jesus and love others.

For this reason, our study of the fruit of the Spirit will focus primarily on how God the Father and/or Jesus the Son embodies each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit comes from them and is it so them we must turn our eyes if we have any hope of being transformed.

**Conclusion**

As I close, I want to leave you with this final thought that I hope and pray will change the way you view yourself and the world we live in.

As mentioned earlier, by conforming to the image of Jesus by developing the fruit of the Spirit, Christians are becoming “more human”. We are actually being transformed into a greater humanity, a humanity suited for the new creation.

Consider the biblical progression of humanity with me:

* Adam and Eve were blameless and pure yet without the Holy Spirit.
* Humanity became sinful and corrupt and without the Holy Spirit.
* Jesus is blameless and pure but also possessing the Holy Spirit.
* Believers now are sinful and corrupt yet possessing the Holy Spirit who is transforming us to become like Jesus.
* Believers after the second coming will be blameless and pure but still possessing the Holy Spirt.

By the time all is said and done, when Jesus returns and the dead in Christ rise and all believers are transformed and freed forever from the stain of sin, at the end of the story, we will be far better and greater than when we first began.

In His glorious grace, God is using sin to make the end better than the beginning. He will finish the good work He began in each believer, and we will be changed; the image of God will be restored in us and with the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we will rule and reign with Christ over the New Heaven and the New Earth!

May God transform us as we look to Him as the source of the fruit of the Spirit.

1. Derek Tidball, “Holiness: Restoring God’s Image – Colossians 3:5-17,” in *Sanctification: Exploration in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ezekiel 36.27 **27**And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See 1 Peter 1.1-2 and 2 Thessalonians 2.13 for the scriptural connection between sanctification and the Holy Spirit. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John F. Walvoord, “The Augustinian Dispensational Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Staney N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 221) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)