

LESSON 12

The Fruit of the Spirit

Webster's dictionary defines fruit as "the effect or consequence of an action or operation." This fits well with the Scriptures' teaching on the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit develops as a direct result of the Spirit's action in our lives as Christians. In fact, the process begins the moment a person accepts Christ as Lord and Savior.

The apostle Paul writes, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:19–23). Paul makes a unique distinction between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. The works of the flesh flow out of our sinful human nature, but the fruit of the Spirit is the result of the Spirit's activity in us. Growing the proper fruit is impossible without the Holy Spirit, but we also have a part to play in the process. We must willingly cooperate and respond to what the Spirit is doing in us.

LESSON OUTLINE

The Role of Salvation in Bearing Fruit
 A Balanced Life
 The Nine Fruit of the Spirit

LESSON OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- 1: *Point out prerequisites for bearing fruit.*
- 2: *Explain the need for both the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.*
- 3: *Describe the nine fruit of the Spirit.*

The Role of Salvation in Bearing Fruit

Objective 1:

Point out prerequisites for bearing fruit.

Born again

In order for there to be fruit, there has to be life. We must experience salvation through faith in Christ before we can bear fruit. This salvation is often referred to as regeneration, or the “born-again experience.” A true believer and follower of Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who produces good fruit. Matthew records these words of Jesus, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:17–19). Regeneration is a prerequisite for bearing good fruit.

Abiding in Christ

A second prerequisite for fruit-bearing is an ongoing union with Christ by the Spirit. John records Jesus’

words, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:5–6). Notice that Jesus is the vine, and we are His branches. We have to abide in the vine to grow and bring forth fruit. People who do not follow through on their commitment to Christ and stay in close fellowship with Him cannot produce spiritual fruit pleasing to God. If you uproot a flowering plant from the ground, you would not expect it to blossom. Likewise, when we are not rooted and grounded in a relationship with Christ, we will not bring forth fruit.

Living in the Spirit

A third prerequisite for fruit-bearing is that there must be a desire to live in the Spirit. Paul says in Galatians 5:16, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Living in the Spirit is sometimes referred to as walking in the Spirit, and it indicates one’s yielding to the Spirit’s direction and guidance. To be led by the Spirit implies surrender to the authority and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consider this brief illustration: When traveling in a foreign country, it is much easier to have a knowledgeable guide. The guide knows the geography and culture of the land and can make visiting a new place more interesting and enjoyable. So it is for the believer. When we are led by the Spirit of God, our journey on earth becomes far more God-pleasing and productive.

Sowing and reaping

A final prerequisite for fruit-bearing is recognition of the law of sowing and reaping. Paul writes, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7–8). We need to ask ourselves what kinds of

things we want to reap in our lives. If we want the right kind of harvest, we need to sow properly. We sow good seed by doing what the Lord asks of us.

In his epistles or letters, the apostle Paul identifies a number of negative human attributes. He calls them the works of the flesh or the acts of the sinful nature. Some of these works are immorality, impurity, sensuality, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, drunkenness, and carousing. These are all the result of improper sowing. Knowing that God wants to produce good fruit in us, we have a responsibility to sow properly so that with the Spirit's help we reap a good harvest.

A Balanced Life

Objective 2:

Explain the need for both the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

The gifts of the Spirit are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10: the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, the gift of faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. As God's children, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we can personally experience the gifts of the Spirit. However, due to the often exciting nature of these spiritual manifestations, some people focus more on the gifts than on the fruit of the Spirit.

While recognizing the importance of the gifts, let us not lose sight of the significance of the fruit of the Spirit. There are nine fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5, and nine gifts of the Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. Both are divine and supernatural. A good way to understand the difference between the two is to remember that fruit is for developing Christlike character in our lives. Gifts are predominantly outwardly focused, to minister to the body of Christ and others. Fruit takes time to grow; gifts are given immediately.

People who exercise spiritual gifts have the greatest need to show the fruit of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts do not measure the spiritual depth and character of a believer. In fact, the believer who operates in the gifts of the Spirit without much evidence of spiritual fruit can dishonor both his or her own testimony and that of Christ. Such inconsistency must be avoided at all cost!

Clearly, God places great value on the fruit of the Spirit. It is the quiet influence of a Christlike life rather than the seemingly explosive power of the gifts that truly validates a person's relationship with the Lord. The optimum condition is when fruit and gifts work harmoniously in the believer's life.

Christians are a work in progress. Growth in all areas of our lives is continuous and progressive. Furthermore, when we speak of the fruit of the Spirit growing in our life, we must remember two simple truths: the believer must cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and fruit produces visible change.

Cooperating with the Holy Spirit

The Lord will not force development of spiritual fruit in our lives. He alone can produce fruit, but we must yield to Him. Therefore, we must avoid doing what displeases and grieves Him. If we want to see growth of spiritual fruit, we have to make a concerted effort to keep out the weeds or acts of the sinful nature and stay connected to the vine, the source of life.

Fruit produces visible change

While the development of the fruit is ongoing and perhaps not as rapid as you wish, changes will be noticeable. People will see the fruit of the Spirit in your life and be amazed. This brings glory to God! While you are not yet the finished product of God's workmanship, you are also not what you used to be. God is pleased when He sees genuine progress, so do not be discouraged when the fruit seems to be growing too slowly. Remember that God does not see what we used to be; He sees what we will become.

The Nine Fruit of the Spirit

Objective 3:

Describe the nine fruit of the Spirit.

Paul writes in Galatians 5:22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Let us look at each of these nine fruit of the Spirit.

Love

Love produced by the Holy Spirit is different from human, natural love. This fruit of the Spirit goes beyond natural love in that it produces love for our enemies. When we love our enemies, we do not merely put up with them; we are motivated to do good to them. Jesus taught, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43–44). This is the kind of love Jesus showed when He hung on the Cross and cried, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). And this is the love that Jesus wants to produce in each of us.

Love borne out of the Spirit is sacrificial and does not fail. It is in the area of sacrifice that natural love most resembles the spiritual fruit of love. When natural love is strong, a person may be willing to sacrifice for the one he or she loves, even to the point of death. This is what God did for us. Paul writes, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Thus, love that comes of the Spirit is sacrificial and never fades.

Joy

The Spirit desires to produce joy in our lives. In fact, joy should be a dominant trait in every believer. Many Bible verses speak of joy. Jesus said, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11). The psalmist writes also, “I

will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will ever sing for joy” (Psalm 132:16). Isaiah continues, “And the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads” (Isaiah 35:10). Then, “In thy presence is fulness of joy” (Psalm 16:11 KJV).

There is a big difference between natural joy or happiness and spiritual joy. Natural joy is usually based on circumstances. When things go well or people experience good things, they feel joy. However, the fruit of joy produced by God's Spirit does not require comfortable circumstances. For instance, when Paul and Silas were in the Philippian jail, they chose to sing praises to God at midnight although they were in great physical pain (see Acts 16:25). Their attitude in the face of persecution showed the Spirit's joy.

Peace

God's peace is brought into our hearts as a fruit of the indwelling Spirit of God. Its source is the atoning work of Christ on the Cross. Paul writes, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). We first experience God's peace when we are born again.

The fruit of peace fills our hearts so that even in times of great turmoil we still experience it. How is the fruit of peace different from the natural serenity that even unsaved people feel from time to time? Like the fruit of joy, the fruit of peace does not depend upon circumstances. God's peace passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Patience

Sometimes patience is described as “long-suffering.” God is patient and long-suffering with humankind in general and even with His true followers. He is slow to anger, compassionate, and gracious. Read how God describes himself in Exodus 34:6–7: “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,

abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.” Surely, patience is one of God’s most noteworthy attributes. The apostle Peter writes, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

As Christians, we need the fruit of patience. The journey of life is long, but we cannot lose heart. Though we desire to be with Christ and escape the trials of this world, we must be patient. Consider Paul’s desire for the Colossians. He prayed that they would be strengthened with all power according to God’s glorious might so that they may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:11–12).

Patience is essential in our dealings with people, both Christian and non-Christian. People will disappoint and fail us. They will wrong us and be slow to change. But just as God is long-suffering with us, we must be patient with others. No believer can afford to ignore this fruit of the Spirit if he or she wants to become a servant of God.

Kindness

When you think of kindness, what comes to mind? Paul tells us that God’s kindness leads people toward repentance (Romans 2:4). We are commanded by Scripture to be kind in our spiritual life and our relationships with others. Peter writes, “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith . . . brotherly kindness” (2 Peter 1:5–7). Paul advises in Colossians, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with . . . kindness” (Colossians 3:12). In Ephesians 4:32, Paul writes again, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Notice in this verse that one of the ways we show kindness is by forgiving others when they have wronged us.

We see a great example of kindness in the Old Testament account of Joseph and his brothers. After having been sold into slavery by his older brothers and having experienced many other traumatic events, Joseph could have been very cruel to them. But he chose to show them kindness. Genesis records, "But Joseph said to them [his brothers], 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them" (50:19–21). Each of us, as Christians, has been shown kindness by God in that He saved us; the least we can do now is show kindness toward others.

Goodness

A life of goodness is strong evidence that a spiritual and moral transformation is taking place in a person. Jesus said, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him" (Matthew 12:35). Later, Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, "that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work" (Colossians 1:10).

Do not ever think that God is not concerned about good works. The Bible teaches us that we are not saved because of good works; however, good works must be evident once we are born again. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10 that we were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works." We are His workmanship. God saves us that we might serve Him and others. Read what Tim LaHaye (1993) writes, in the *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*, about the fruit of goodness.

Many a Christian has cheated himself out of the blessing of the Holy Spirit's inspired impulse to do something good or kind for someone else by not obeying that urge. Instead of bringing joy to someone else's life by an act of kindness, the self-centered person stifles the impulse and sinks deeper

and deeper in the slough of despondency and gloom. It is one thing to get good impulses; it is quite another to transmit them into acts of goodness.

Faithfulness

Genuine faith produces faithfulness. Faithfulness can be seen in the way a believer conscientiously studies God's Word, prays, worships, serves, gives, lives, and carries out responsibilities. It affects every area of life. Paul writes, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Faithfulness, like all the other fruit of the Spirit, grows. It develops as we complete smaller responsibilities. Then, God entrusts us with greater tasks. This new life we have in Christ is lived from a position of trust. It is contradictory to trust God for eternity but not in our daily relationships and activities. Jesus promises that if we are "faithful, even to the point of death" He would give us "the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Gentleness

In Galatians 5:22, gentleness refers to having humility and meekness. While, today, gentleness is not always seen as a virtue, it should not be viewed as weakness. Let us look at an example in the Old Testament. God the Father is all-powerful, yet He deals gently with His people. The prophet Isaiah wrote of God, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young" (Isaiah 40:11). Note that the verses just before and after this text speak of God's infinite power and wisdom. Hence, though gentleness and power may seem to be in great contrast, in reality gentleness is power under control of the Spirit.

Gentleness also keeps us from inflicting injury on others. Sometimes older Christians set unreasonable standards for new Christians, forgetting to demonstrate gentleness while the new believers grow in their relationships with Jesus Christ. Just as parents do not

usually scold their children who fall while taking their first steps, but instead they deal gently with them and encourage them. So, too, seasoned Christians must be gentle with newcomers to the faith.

Self-control

Self-control has been described as the thermostat that controls the operation of all the other fruit of the Spirit. Its appearance later in the list of spiritual fruit is no indication of lack of importance. The ability to control oneself is a great Christian virtue and a sure mark of growth. We all know people whose lives are dominated by dangerous habits and sins precisely because they lack self control. They may be grossly overweight because of overeating; may smoke or drink incessantly; may use obscene language; or may find themselves dependent on prescription or illegal drugs.

The Spirit's fruit of self-control is not attained by human effort; it is the product of the Spirit's help and grace in our lives. Because of this grace, even non-Christians can demonstrate some self-control. For instance, an athlete trains and disciplines her body for a particular game or event. She refrains from eating foods that will hamper her abilities. She may also force herself to perform in spite of pain or extreme fatigue. However, while commendable, human efforts at self-control have limitations.

The spiritual fruit of self-control provides a dimension of control that is beyond the natural ability. Let us go back to the issue of overeating. For many years, Christians have been encouraged to abstain from tobacco and alcohol because of the harm these pose to our physical bodies. Yet in the United States, many who abstain from strong drink or tobacco eat excessive amounts of food, to the point of gluttony. There are serious side effects of consistently overeating. These include diabetes, high blood pressure, fatigue, and lack of physical mobility. Some people cannot stop overeating on their own. They need the help of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of self-control. Take time now to think of areas

in your own life where greater self-control is needed. As you grow in grace, expect self-control to increase.

Conclusion

The fruit of the Spirit is not the result of efforts at human self-improvement. Rather, it is the result of a new spiritual life from above. There are many religious people in our world who strive to improve their lives. They go to a church, temple, or mosque. They give offerings, pray, and do good deeds. This, however, does not make their lives acceptable to God. To be acceptable to God, we have to experience new birth through faith in Christ. This is God's design, and it will not change. Only after we have entered into a relationship with God on His terms can He begin to work in our lives to produce the qualities that please Him. May you give careful attention to your relationship with Christ and focus on those things that will bring about spiritual growth.

Reference List

LaHaye, Tim. 1993. *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR MEMORIZATION

Galatians 5:22–23

Galatians 6:7–8

John 15:4

Galatians 2:20

1 Corinthians 13:8

Psalms 16:11

Romans 5:1

Matthew 12:35

1 Corinthians 4:2

Revelation 2:10

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

- The fruit of the Spirit develops in a person's life*
 - all on its own.*
 - by trial and error.*
 - as a result of the Spirit's action.*
- To bear spiritual fruit, you must*
 - be a part of the right church affiliation.*
 - be a member of the royal family.*
 - have a born-again experience.*
- The greatest showing of spirituality comes when*
 - fruit and gifts work together.*
 - one attends church all the time.*
 - one prays often.*
- For the fruit of the Spirit to develop and for our character to mature, we must*
 - join a church body.*
 - stay in fellowship and communion with Christ.*
 - speak in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.*
- Growth in the life of the believer is*
 - a thing of luck.*
 - something we have no control over.*
 - continuous and progressive.*
- The love that Paul speaks of in Galatians 5:22 is*
 - romantic and easy.*
 - possible only through the Holy Spirit.*
 - emotional and temporary.*
- God's long-suffering leads to our*
 - indifference.*
 - nervous breakdown.*
 - repentance.*
- The fruit of the Spirit is not the result of improving the natural character; it is the result of*
 - being a good person.*
 - new spiritual life from above.*
 - reading the Bible and praying every day.*

9. *One benefit of having the fruit of the Spirit is*
 - a) *liberty to say and do whatever we want without consequences.*
 - b) *having God force His will on us.*
 - c) *that the fruit produces visible change.*

10. *The law of sowing and reaping teaches that*
 - a) *what one sows one reaps.*
 - b) *we must be good farmers.*
 - c) *our thoughts do not affect our actions.*

ANSWERS TO SELF-TEST

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parentheses.

1. *c (12.1)*
2. *c (12.1)*
3. *a (12.2)*
4. *b (12.2)*
5. *c (12.2)*
6. *b (12.3)*
7. *c (12.3)*
8. *b (12.3)*
9. *c (12.2)*
10. *a (12.1)*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

Terry Reiser has been in pastoral ministry for over 30 years. He presently pastors Faith Community Church in Berlin, Wisconsin. He holds a doctorate in Clinical Christian Counseling in Temperament Therapy from the National Christian Counselors Association.

