



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

THE HOLY SPIRIT PART II: WELCOME TO FRUITOPIA

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We are taking some time this fall to look more closely at the Holy Spirit. Last week, we talked about the fact that God is called a Trinity – He’s three in one. There’s God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We talked about how important it is to realize that the Holy Spirit is God and the Holy Spirit is a person. He’s not just a power or a force – he cares about us on a personal level.

The Bible talks a lot about the Holy Spirit and what he does in our lives. One thing that it talks about is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23

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.

Quick – without looking at the verse again, who can tell me how many fruits there are in the list?

Actually, it’s kind of a trick question. There are nine different words, but it’s really all one fruit. They’re all from the same tree. They may look or taste a little different, but it says the FRUIT of the Spirit IS, not the FRUITS of the Spirit ARE.

That makes a difference in the way we think about these words. We just planted two baby apple trees in our back yard this year. When they get a little older, we’re not expecting to find bananas or oranges growing on them. They’re APPLE trees.

As a Christian, if I think of the words we read about as lots of different kinds of fruits, I might think, “Well, I’m just a JOY tree. You can’t possibly expect me to have PATIENCE. That’s not the kind of person I am.”

If we have the Spirit of God in us and these are all the fruit of the Spirit, they can ALL grow in our lives. We don’t pick and choose from the list.

We’ll be looking briefly at each word in the list to get a better handle on what it means, but first I want to talk about why they’re called fruit. Does that seem like a strange choice of words to you? Why not call them the ATTITUDES of the Holy Spirit, or the

BENEFITS of the Holy Spirit? And if you're going to name them after something you find in the grocery store, why fruit and not the vegetables of the Holy Spirit or the meat or the bread of the Holy Spirit?

When Paul wrote letters, he was usually pretty careful with his word choices, so we know he had to have some reasons for why he said what he said. And as we try to understand those reasons, we will better appreciate what he's talking about.

There are some things we know about fruit that help this make more sense:

First, fruit can't be faked or maked.

I know that's not a real word, but it will help you remember the point. Fruit is natural.

I need a volunteer to come up here and be a tree for a moment. This hat covered in leaves should make that easier for us to visualize. Now, I have some Christmas ornaments here shaped like apples. If I put them in this person's hands, would that mean that they had produced some fruit?

No? Why not? The tree hasn't produced fruit because it isn't a real tree. I can pretend this person's a tree, but that's not real. These apples aren't real.

The thing is, you can't produce Spirit fruit if the Holy Spirit isn't inside you. We said last week that everyone who believes in Jesus and asks him to forgive their sin is a Christian, which means that Jesus has put his Holy Spirit in your heart. If you've done that, you are like a Spirit tree. The fruit will show up in your life because the Holy Spirit is at work inside you.

But if you haven't done that, if you haven't put your faith in what Jesus did on the cross, then you can't really expect to see that long list – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so on, developing inside you to their fullest.

Jesus described it as being like a branch attached to a vine. If you're just a stick that's not connected, there's no life in you to produce the fruit.

John 15:4

No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Now, since God is good and his Holy Spirit is also at work in the whole world, even people who don't know Jesus can still show some of those qualities. You can't ever totally get away from the Holy Spirit. But if you're trying to grow in those areas without being attached to him, you're going to have a hard time, because fruit can't really be faked.

I also said it can't be made. This time, I'm going to ask our volunteer to close his eyes and visualize an apple. Do you see it? What color is it? Is it a big apple or a small apple? Okay. Concentrate on it as hard as you can. We'll all concentrate on apples.

Guess what? All that concentration and no real apple appeared! You can't manufacture apples by working at them. Scientists know all the chemicals that are in an apple, but they can't throw those chemicals in a test tube and produce one.

The list we're talking about this morning is a long one. I don't know about you, but I look at it and I see lots of areas where I need to get better. And my first instinct is to pick one out to work on. Maybe I want to work on kindness for a while. So I put my energy into trying really hard to be more kind. And it might work for a while. But I can never work hard enough to make it really stick. And that's just with one – I've got eight more to go.

You can't work at creating fruit. It's a natural byproduct of the life that's inside you. If you want to grow more apples on a tree, you don't do it by talking to the apples that are there already, shining them up and encouraging them. They're already what they are. Instead, you feed and water the tree. You prune it. You keep it pest free. And then the apples grow on their own.

God does some of that work on us as well. When we did our study in the book of John, we looked at this verse:

John 15:1-3

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

If we want more fruit of the Spirit, it won't be by focusing on a word like kindness or patience and trying to work hard at it. It will be by cultivating our life with the Holy Spirit. In other words, we focus on getting to know the Holy Spirit. We spend time praying, reading our Bible and talking to other Christians. That's like fertilizing and watering the tree. And we cut out the influences that are like pests, that would take away our ability to produce fruit. Fruit can't be faked or made.

A second thing we know about fruit is that it's delicious and nutritious.

If you had a choice between eating a piece of asparagus or an apple, which would you prefer? Most kids (AND adults, I think) would choose the apple, because it tastes sweet. It's nice to know that it also has good nutritional value, so you're not just eating a sugary snack that's bad for you.

God talked about this purpose for fruit right when he made the first people in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 1:29

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.

Apples aren't just pretty decorations on a tree. But sometimes that's how we think about the Holy Spirit's fruit. We see it as ways to make ourselves look better to other people and to God. We see the fruits of the Spirit as a way to turn ourselves into a nicer tree to be around. I should work on loving God because I'm supposed to. I should work on being kinder to people because it's the right thing to do. I should work on having more self-control over what I say so I don't hurt other people.

Those are all good benefits of the fruit of the Spirit? But you know what? God isn't just interested in you having more fruit for how it affects other people. He cares about how it impacts you. God gave us this list of fruit to feed our souls as well. We grow when we eat, and as we see more love, joy peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness goodness and self-control in our lives, it helps us grow to be more Christ-like. Not only that – it's a tasty way to grow. Having more of those qualities in our hearts will make life more pleasant. You can grow through hardships and learning tough lessons. But the fruit of the Spirit is a treat to look forward to rather than something difficult to endure. The fruit of the Spirit is delicious and nutritious.

A final thing we know about fruit is that it could be the next tree.

If you were writing a definition of fruit, one part of your definition would have to be that fruit is a house for the seeds of the plant. The apple tree's job is not just to produce lots of apples, but also to produce more apple trees. Each apple holds within it the potential to fall to a nice spot on the ground and grow into another tree.

Most of those apples will either get eaten or just rot away on the ground. I'm not sure what the ratio is, but my hunch is that the percentage of seeds that actually grow into something is very small compared to the total number of seeds.

Again, we're like apple trees in this way. The Holy Spirit's goal is not just to produce some nice fruit like love and joy and peace. There is potential future life in each fruit of the Spirit. The way we live out our faith, the way we demonstrate the life of the Holy Spirit inside us has the possibility within it of generating new life in someone else. And that's exciting.

Colossians 1:6

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

Just like real apple trees, most of the fruit we produce will probably be enjoyed by someone or just left to sit there. It's not like every time we're patient with someone they're going to see it as a God thing. But every once in a while, they will. Because the fruit of the Spirit is intended as a tool to show the world who we are.

John 15:8

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

We have to bear much fruit in order for a little of it to have an impact. But all fruit holds the future in it – the possibility of changing the world for someone.

Proverbs 11:30

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

So what is this list of fruit all about anyway? Preachers have done entire series of messages on each word in this list, so we can't expect to cover everything too thoroughly in the time we have left.

One thing that can help us get some handles on this long list is to break the fruit down into three little clusters. If we switch from an apple tree to a grapevine, we can think of these words as coming in three bunches like grapes.

I've named these clusters our glasses, our gloves and our glow. Let's look at each one.

Our Glasses

Those of you who wear glasses know that the reason you wear them is to correct the way you see the world. Some people have trouble seeing at a distance, some people have a hard time with things that are closer. And even when you have great vision, you probably wear sunglasses sometimes to make it easier to see.

Now glasses don't really change the world – they change the way you see the world. It isn't as if everything is blurry and the glasses make them not blurry. What is corrected is your vision.

The first three words – love, joy and peace – are like Holy Spirit glasses for the way we look at life. We see people through the eyes of love, we interpret life with joy and we face difficult things with peace. When we have the Holy Spirit, it doesn't change our circumstances or situation. But it changes the way we see them. It corrects our vision and lets us look at everything differently.

People we know might do some pretty unlovable things, and it is only because of the Holy Spirit that we are able to see them with love. Many of you know the story of Corrie Ten Boom, who was a prisoner in a concentration camp during World War II and who saw many of her friends and family killed there, including her sister Betsie. After the war, she was asked to speak at churches all over Europe about her experience. Here's what she wrote about one of those speaking engagements:

It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, a former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first

of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. “How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein.” He said. “To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!” His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I prayed, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

We can't look at certain people with love on our own. We can't be joyful in hard times on our own. We can't face our fears with peace on our own. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us our glasses that enable us to look at things differently.

Our Gloves

In addition to giving us glasses, the Holy Spirit gives us gloves. Under this category, I'm putting the words patience, kindness and goodness.

We all know about wearing gloves to keep our hands warm. But can you think of other people who wear gloves? Doctors wear gloves when they're touching a patient so they don't spread germs. Boxers wear gloves so they don't hurt each other too much when they're fighting. People who work with expensive equipment, valuable jewelry or paintings also wear gloves to protect whatever they're working with.

In other words, gloves can be worn to treat things carefully. Back in the 1800s, people would wear very soft gloves made from lambskin or goatskin called kid gloves. They were the softest gloves you could find. And they would refer to being careful with someone or something as “treating it with kid gloves.”

So having patience, kindness and goodness are all related to the way we treat other people. People are both prickly and fragile, and we need to handle them carefully.

The old King James version of the Bible translates the word “patience” as “longsuffering”. That's a pretty descriptive word. It means putting up with somebody for a long time, enduring their imperfections and not snapping at them.

Kindness is similar, in that people don't often deserve kindness.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Goodness can relate to our motives. Paul and Peter both write about having a "good" conscience. A good conscience is one that will be sensitive to how we are treating other people. Why do we want to treat people a certain way? Are we wanting to react and retaliate for something they did? Are we wanting to be nice to them because it's the right thing or because we hope to gain something out of it?

The word goodness comes from a Greek word that also has to do with something being beneficial. Is the way we're treating other people helpful to them? Will it make a positive difference in their lives?

Being as careful as if we're wearing gloves with people means wanting to be sincere in how we treat them, and wanting what we do to be to their benefit.

We have new glasses from the Holy Spirit that change how we see things. We have gloves from the Holy Spirit that help us touch people's lives with care and respect. The last cluster has to deal with what I call our glow.

Our glow

Faithfulness, gentleness and self-control fall into this category. Have you ever had a toy that could glow in the dark? Addison has a glow in the dark dinosaur that works pretty well. You turn off the lights and it shines for quite a while. It doesn't have any batteries or anything, but you see this shine coming from somewhere inside it.

Of course, it only works if you've had the lights on for a while first. It doesn't just glow by itself – it borrows light from a lamp or lightbulb and then shines it back.

Glowing is a light shining from the inside, and I think of faithfulness, gentleness and self-control as Holy Spirit light that shines out of our character. These words deal with who we are on the inside.

Faithfulness – am I true to my word? Am I a person of integrity that is consistent? Do my actions and my words and my thoughts all match?

Gentleness – What is my attitude like? Am I angry and harsh inside? Am I all churned up, or is there a quietness in my heart?

Self-control – Do I have the discipline to guard what I want to say and do? Can I tell myself "no" when I need to?

These words will affect our glow – how we shine in the world. What kind of light do people see in us, coming from who we are on the inside?

It's a borrowed light. We're just reflecting what we've absorbed of the Holy Spirit. Like we said at the beginning, it isn't a glow that we can manufacture on our own.

When you take all three of these clusters together, you have a pretty comprehensive picture of who Jesus was. The more fruit that's showing in our lives, the more we look like Christ.

His love conquered death. His joy gives us strength. His peace passes understanding. His patience gives us time. His kindness leads us to repentance. His goodness follows us everywhere. His faithfulness outlasts our faithlessness. His gentleness shows his Father heart, and his self-control let him put aside his glory and come down to save us.

And even though we can't create fruit on our own, he gives it to us through his Holy Spirit, to feed our souls and light up the world.

Closing questions:

Are you a Spirit tree?

What can you do to cultivate your spiritual life?

What area is your biggest struggle – glasses, gloves or glow?