

Be fruitful ...



... and multiply

Studies on Galatians 5²²⁻²³



Be Fruitful and Multiply

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Galatians 5²²⁻²³

Introduction

Some time ago I started looking at this passage in detail and have been surprised and thrilled by the way in which it has been speaking to me. As a result, I have put together these studies in the hope that it will also speak to you, to both challenge and encourage you in your walk with Jesus.

In this introduction I will outline some of the underlying thoughts that sparked off the following studies. I suggest you start by reading Galatians 5 (or better still the whole book, it's only 6 chapters) to put the passage in its proper context.

One fruit

In the past I have heard many sermons on "The Fruits of the Spirit", but the first thing I noticed was that the passage does not start, "The fruits of the Spirit are ...", but "The fruit of the Spirit is ...". In other words, there are not multiple fruits, but a single fruit. I checked different translations and all talk about one fruit. To make absolutely certain, I checked a concordance which said that the word translated as fruit refers to the harvest, but as a collective whole. In other words, it's a single item and not a picking list.

When the passage talks about love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, it is not talking about different fruits, but attributes or characteristics of the one fruit. What do I mean? Let's use an example. We could say, "the fruit of the vine is round, green (red or black), sweet, juicy, delicious, thirst quenching and attractive". Obviously, the vine only produces grapes. These words are used to describe the grapes. In the same way, I believe the list in Galatians is used to give us a description of the nature of the fruit of the Spirit.

What then is the implication of there being only one fruit? Does it make any difference to us? I believe so and will try to bring out some of these in the following studies. The main point, which we will consider more is that all the attributes in the list should be evident in every Christian, and not just a selection.

A subsequent question is, "Is this a complete list?" Opinion is divided over this, but I believe there are other attributes which could be considered "fruit". Why? Natural fruit contains the genetic make-up of the parent plant and if we are to bear the fruit of the Spirit, it should reflect the full nature of the Spirit, not just a select few. Those listed are significant, but are not, in my opinion, an exhaustive list. However, in these studies we will just look at those mentioned in Galatians.

The example of the vine

In these notes, where the passage refers to the fruit, I have used the vine as an example. There is no real reason for this other than that the Bible often compares Israel, Jesus and Christianity to the vine. If you prefer to use a different fruit (maybe you don't like grapes) then please do so.



Study 1 – Be fruitful ...

a model for maturity

Galatians 5¹⁶ tells us to “live by the Spirit”. What does this mean? If we are Christians, God fills us with his Holy Spirit who guides us in our walk with Him and helps us develop into the people He intends us to be.

Fruit comes from a mature plant

Fruit doesn't appear on seedlings. It develops on mature, healthy plants. It takes time to develop, but is the natural outcome of its existence. A vine that never produces grapes is unhealthy and has an unfulfilled purpose.

If we are called to live by the Spirit, then we are to become mature Christians and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. Like the vine, this will not happen overnight, but as we grow in spiritual maturity. On the other hand, we cannot go on through life saying, “it's not my time yet”. In God's plan for us, there is a timetable for our fruit-bearing.

Maturity means completeness

In the introduction, I stated that we need to display all the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. Why? To help us understand this, let's consider the example of the vine again.

Any fruit has a number of characteristics that identify it. In the introduction, I gave a list of attributes of a grape (round, green, sweet, juicy, delicious, thirst quenching and attractive). To be a good grape, it needs all of these. Where I used to work, there is a vine growing at the edge of the staff car park. At the appropriate time of year, the grapes begin to form and, while they will have the right shape and colour, they will be small and hard. Later they will swell and soften. Unfortunately, they will also get tainted by exhaust fumes and be unpalatable and will shrivel and die. They will never properly mature and realise their potential.



It can be the same with us. Sometimes we only partially develop. At other times we may hang around in an unhealthy environment and our faith dries up. We need all these aspects of the fruit to be mature Christians; otherwise we can end up as sour grapes.

Fostering good development

For a plant to mature, it needs several conditions to exist. I've listed a few of these for us to consider.

- The right environment. I understand that a wine expert can tell exactly where the grapes in a wine were grown. The grape takes in minerals from the soil, energy from the sun, moisture from the dew and the rain, fertilisers spread by the owner and is influenced by many other local factors. In a similar way, the Christian is influenced by his or her environment. We need to make sure we develop in the right spiritual environment.
- The right food. Plants need to be fed with the correct nutrients. Some of these they get themselves from the soil and some are supplied by the farmer. This is also true for us. We can get some food by studying on our own, but we also need the input from other sources (e.g. church, housegroups, events like Spring Harvest, Christian books, etc.)
- Some would say that the gardener needs to talk to the plants. I don't know if this is true, but Christians do need to spend time listening to God.

- Often, pruning is needed to remove the dead wood and allow the good wood to grow. Let's ask ourselves if there is anything in our lives that needs pruning.

The fruit is specific to the plant which produces it

It may seem obvious, but if you want a grape, you look on a vine, not an apple tree. In John 15, Jesus says that He is the vine and we are the branches. Christians are spiritual beings rooted in Jesus. The fruit we bear should reflect his nature. If not, then we need to check what's going wrong and sort it out. For a plant, damage may occur because some parasite has latched on and is sapping the strength. Let's ask ourselves what parasites may be getting between God and us and sapping our strength.



Study 2 - ... and multiply a model for evangelism

In this study we will look at the purpose of the fruit and what that means to us as Christians.

Bearing seed

The plant produces fruit so that the next generation can be propagated through the seed that it contains. We are all familiar with the process:

1. A bird or an animal is attracted to the fruit and eats it, seed and all.
2. In due time the seed is deposited on the ground.
3. The seed germinates and over time develops into a new plant where the cycle can start again.

This process is essential for the continued existence of the plant. Without it, it would naturally become extinct. Of course, man's interference may have provided slightly different mechanisms but, for the sake of our illustration, let's stick with the natural cycle.

Comedians sometimes ask how seedless grapes are produced. Of course they are a product of modern farming techniques, but in nature's terminology, a seedless grape is a failure. The seed is essential for survival.

What then of the fruit of the Spirit?

I believe that the characteristics of the fruit that we see in Galatians 5 show how the word of God is spread and the kingdom grows.

Attracting others

Look at the list of attributes of the fruit. All of these are attractive. When we see them in others, we are drawn to them because we want some of the same. If we are maturing as Christians and displaying the fruit, people will see Jesus in us and be drawn to Him through us. This is not to say that things like preaching are unimportant. On the contrary, they are a prerequisite to any evangelistic activity that we undertake. People should not merely be intellectually persuaded but also overwhelmed by the personality and love of our Lord. They should see Him and not us.

Depositing the seed

As seed bearers, we need to deposit the seed of God's word where it is needed – in the hearts of those who don't know Jesus.

How?

There are many ways of doing this. Some of us may be called to preach, serve overseas as missionaries or write Christian books. For most of us, this will be simply by being close to Jesus and showing him to those whom we meet as we go through life. I say simply, but this should in no way belittle either the importance or relevance of the task. Very few people come to Jesus as the result of a single evangelistic sermon. Almost always, contact with Christian friends and colleagues has been the key factor of the process.

In other words, don't hog the fruit, share it.

Germination

Having deposited the seed of the Gospel, it needs to germinate. This again will often need the presence of the Christian friend and mentor. We need to gently nurture the relationship so that people can remain focused.

A young plant can easily be damaged and needs to be protected. It will be stored in a greenhouse or on a window sill until it's strong enough to be planted out. When the frost comes, we may cover it with plastic sheeting or cloches to protect it.

Similarly, when a person becomes a Christian, we need to protect and guide them so that they can grow strong, so that they in their turn can become fruitful.



Study 3 – Nature and Nurture

As we look at the list of the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit, we will see some that may come naturally to us, and some that we recognise will require some effort on our behalf to nurture their development. For each of us, those two lists will be different. Also if we're honest, the division will not be clear-cut. Even those things that are easier for us will need some conscious effort at times. You might find it helpful to write out your own list of nature and nurture items.

Let's take a look at each of the characteristics and see what implications are there. Here are a few of my thoughts.

Love

Love of Jesus is hopefully something that comes naturally to us as Christians when we think of how He has sown His love to us. But still it takes time to really develop to the point where being in His presence is all-important to us. It means making an effort to spend time with Him and discovering more about Him.

Love of others may be more difficult, but it will grow out of our love for Jesus. We cannot truly love others until we see them through His eyes, and that comes from getting so close to Him that we share His viewpoint.

Joy

I often used to hear Christians say that while they were unhappy, they still had joy in their hearts. I think this is not quite accurate. What they meant was they knew they had a cause for joy, they were not feeling it at that moment. Joy is an emotion that expresses itself in happiness. It comes from enjoying the presence of Jesus in our lives.

Peace

Peace in this sense is not an absence of war or conflict, but an absence of worry. We can be in a really stressful situation but still know peace.

How?

Peace comes from having total confidence in God. We know that whatever we're going through he is with us. Like Peter stepping out of the boat to walk on the water with Jesus, it's when we lose sight of Him that panic or worry pushes peace out of our minds.

Patience

While love, joy and peace are very much inward things, the remaining attributes have more of an outward expression.

Patience only really becomes evident when it's tested. It can be needed when performing a long task when nothing seems to change or when dealing with someone with a difficult personality. In either circumstance, how do we cope?

Again, it comes back to our relationship with Jesus. The closer we are to Him, the more His patience rubs off on us. When we find our patience being tested, look to Him to share the load.

Kindness

Kindness is something of which we love to be on the receiving end. It may be in tangible ways (e.g. a gift when we need it, a lift when our car is out of action) or intangible (e.g. a word of encouragement).

To show kindness, we need to be listening to God for ways in which we can do so. We also need to be in touch with those around us so we can spot a need when it arises.

We can also help each other to show kindness. When we see a need that we can't meet, maybe we can involve a third party who can help.

Goodness

It's difficult to differentiate between kindness and goodness. I think of it as being someone who is there with a good influence. People can see that God is in their lives and that He is guiding them. They are a model of righteousness to those around them.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness has two aspects, faithfulness to God and faithfulness to other people.

We need to remain faithful to God, to continue to be His people, to be obedient to Him and to put Him first in our lives.

Also we need to be faithful to those around us. We need to consistently be true to God in all our relationships. This means not betraying our Christian foundations from the word go. We can only be faithful if our relationship with others builds on our relationship with Him.

Gentleness

Gentleness requires understanding. While it's easy to understand how to avoid physically hurting someone, emotional hurts are harder to avoid. The starting point is to understand them which may well take time. Part of that understanding will come from spending time with God and listening to the insights which He gives.

Self-control

Self-control is similar to patience, but perhaps is the more outward expression of that patience. It requires an act of will and God's restraint and strength. It means looking to God before acting. In many ways, self-control is giving control to Him. However that does not mean that we absolve ourselves of responsibility. When we get things wrong (as we all do from time to time), we cannot say, "it's God's fault as I gave him control" – usually it means that we did not give Him control in some aspect of our life.

In summary

How much of the fruit of the Spirit that is evident in our lives depend on our relationship to God. It is a sign of our maturity and will be a magnet to others. This applies to us as individuals and as a community of believers. We need to be

Mature and complete – not sour grapes

Seed bearing – not seedless grapes



Related Readings

I have listed some passages below which provide useful additional reading to supplement and complement these notes.

John 15¹⁻¹⁸

Matt 3⁸⁻¹⁰

Matt 7¹⁶⁻²¹

Rev 14¹⁴⁻²⁰

Luke 6⁴³⁻⁴⁵