

The Fruit

The Fruit of the Spirit Series, July 3 & 4 | Galatians 5:13-26
Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal

HOW DO I GET *THE* FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT?

How much would you pay for a grape?

Ruby Roman grapes were developed in Japan and introduced to the world in 2008.

Ruby Roman grapes are plump (the size of ping-pong balls), extra-sweet, extra-juicy, luxuriously tasty grapes.

Carefully picked, delicately packed clusters of 24 perfect grapes are usually bought to be given as gifts. The person receiving the fruit knows that they are respected and honored.

Packages of Ruby Roman grapes usually sell for \$4,000 and up. In 2019, one cluster was auctioned off and sold for \$450 per grape. So how much would YOU pay for a *grape*?¹

By comparison, the fruit of the Spirit is truly precious.

Of course, the fruit of the Spirit isn't edible.

Instead, the fruit of the Spirit is the godly character that God the Holy Spirit produces in the lives of those of us who are followers of Jesus.

Paul describes that godly character in **Galatians 5:22-23**:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

While Paul lists many different aspects of godly character, the fruit of the Spirit isn't like a fruit salad. There aren't *multiple* fruits of the Spirit, as if some of us got love while others of us got or could choose gentleness and self-control. Instead, the fruit of the Spirit is the one character—the character of Jesus Christ—that develops and grows inside Jesus' followers. That one character has multiple aspects or sides, but it is one fruit.

This is a good time to be thinking about the fruit of the Spirit.

During this year and a half, our character has been tested. We all have been squeezed.

I am a believer that we are all like sponges. When we're squeezed, what's inside comes out.

Over the past year as we have been squeezed, many of us have found surprising things leaking out. I don't know about you, but there have been plenty of times when I've been squeezed only to leak frustration, envy, fear, and anger. That says something about my character.

Now, as we regather during this reprieve from the pandemic, we are still being squeezed, and it's still interesting to see what's coming out. People are leaking angry words, hurt feelings, aggressive actions, depression, and anxiety.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/japan-grapes-expensive-fruit-intl-hnk/index.html>

This is a really good time to be thinking about, studying, and talking about character.

Earlier this year when we were planning the summer, our Executive Pastor, Kevin Haskins, suggested that we focus on the fruit of the Spirit. At the time, it just seemed like a good idea. As we have gotten closer to the start of this series, his idea seemed even more appropriate. Now that we're here, his idea feels Spirit-led and even prophetic.

We've all been squeezed, only to see our character come leaking out, and we don't always like what we see. Now is the perfect time to think about the fruit of the Spirit and godly character. But that leads to a question:

How do I get *the* fruit of the Spirit?

Clearly, we want the fruit of the Spirit.

It's definitely more valuable even than a cluster of Ruby Roman grapes.

However, we can't buy it. So, how do we get the fruit of the Spirit?

In unpacking Galatians 5:13-26, allow me to suggest "Four Ways to Grow a Bumper Crop of the Fruit of the Spirit."

1: PICK THE RIGHT FIGHT

Paul wrote the letter we call "Galatians" in the New Testament to Christians living in the Roman province of Galatia in the middle of the first century.

Paul preached and worked in Galatia repeatedly on his missionary journeys.

He was clear he was writing to Christians whose churches he had helped to start.

Of course, Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, people came behind Paul, preaching a new message. They preached that we needed to do something more if we wanted to be real Christians. They even implied that we needed to do something more if we wanted to be saved.

Paul was not happy. He wrote to remind them of the truth.

We face dilemmas like Paul's all the time! We feel pulled to pick the wrong fights! But we can't pick the wrong fights and still have the fruit of the Spirit growing inside of us.

Legalism is not the right fight.

Teachers had gone into Galatia after Paul, teaching the Christians that they needed to keep large parts of the Old Testament Law, including many of the ceremonial obligations. Essentially, they were teaching that to become Christians, people first needed to become Jews.

Paul was pushing back against that thought in the strongest terms possible. We are justified by grace alone through faith alone. Paul made the argument succinctly in **Ephesians 2:8-9**:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

If we're trying to earn or prove our salvation, then we aren't going to experience the fruit of the Spirit. We need to pick the right fight for the Holy Spirit to produce a bumper crop of the fruit of the Spirit.

Liberty is not the right fight either.

The message of the legalists resonated in the churches of Galatia because some of the members of the churches seemed to be saying that they were free to do anything they wanted.

Paul did tell the Christians in Galatia that, as followers of Jesus, they were free from the Law. Jesus had paid the price for their sin and set them free from the Law as their pathway to salvation and free from the demands of the Law.

In **Galatians 5:1** Paul wrote:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

It's easy to misunderstand what Paul wrote as an invitation to sin boldly or at least as liberty to do exactly what we want since there are no consequences. That thought occurred to many of the people in the province of Galatia, and it made them easy prey for the legalists.

However, Paul made it clear that just doing what we want is not what God intends. He wrote in **Galatians 5:13**:

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh ...

If we're sinning boldly, then we aren't going to experience the fruit of the Spirit. We need to pick the right fight for the Holy Spirit to produce a bumper crop of the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul went on to say that learning to love is the right fight to pick.

Let's revisit Galatians 5:13 again and then continue into verse 14. **Galatians 5:13-14** reads:

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Rather than being consumed with legalism or getting lost in liberty, Paul calls us to learn the way of godly, charitable, Christian love.

Paul reminds us of what the Old Testament and Jesus said repeatedly that we can summarize a large portion of the Law in the one command that we love our neighbors.

Learning to love in a godly way is picking the right fight. If you want the Holy Spirit to produce a bumper crop of the fruit of the Spirit in you, then you've got to start by picking the right fight.

2: SAY "NO" TO THE FLESH

What is the flesh?

On a literal level, the word "flesh" stands for our muscle tissue and more broadly our bodies.

Figuratively, "flesh" can be earth compared with heaven or with things that are spiritual.

"Flesh" also stands for the seat of sin and the place from which we sin.

The pull of our flesh reminds us that we have to say "no" to some things.

Flesh has desires and urges, and they are all sinful. We have to say "no" to some of them.

Flesh does works which are sinful. We have to say "no" to some of them.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:16**:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Saying “no” to sinful desires, urges, and works isn’t about legalism, though. We’re not saying “no” to the flesh to earn our salvation or to prove our salvation.

We’re doing it so that the Holy Spirit might produce a bumper crop of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. There’s something critical we must realize about the flesh and the Spirit:

Flesh and Spirit are antidotes to one another.

In some ways, Paul portrays flesh and the Holy Spirit as opposites. However, he takes it deeper.

Paul went on to write in **Galatians 5:17**:

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Paul told us that the flesh and the Spirit of God are against one another. The desires of the flesh are dragging us one way, and the desires of the Spirit are dragging us another.

Picture the desires of the flesh as destroying the work of the Spirit of God in us and the desires of the Spirit of God as destroying the work of the flesh in us.

It’s like the impact Dr. Alexander Fleming saw when he discovered penicillin.

When Dr. Fleming went on vacation from his laboratory in London in the summer of 1928, he left his desk scattered with culture dishes growing colonies of bacteria.

When he came back in September, he found that some of the culture dishes were contaminated with mold.

Fleming examined those culture dishes under a microscope. What he found was that certain types of mold stopped the natural growth of the bacteria. His discovery led to the creation of penicillin and launched a revolution in medicine.²

Giving in to the desires of the flesh has the same kind of impact on the work of the Spirit in our lives. Giving in to the desires of the flesh damages the work that the Spirit is doing in our lives.

Consequently, Paul calls us to put to death our sinful desires.

In **Galatians 5:24**, Paul wrote that, in a real sense, we have already crucified our sin nature. He wrote:

*And those who belong to Christ Jesus have **crucified the flesh** with its passions and desires.*

In other words, when we become followers of Jesus we say that we believe that Jesus died to pay the price for our sin. Furthermore, we are saying that we believe that we have participated in his crucifixion and death in a sense; we believe that our old life is dead and that a new life has begun.

Saying “no” to our sin nature and to our sinful desires gradually kills them. In **Romans 8:13** Paul wrote:

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Saying “no” the desires of the flesh gives the Spirit of God room to work in our lives.

Even better, saying “yes” to the desires of the Spirit allows the Spirit of God to weed out our sinful desires and our sin nature.

With the ground cleared, the Spirit of God can produce a bumper crop of the fruit of the Spirit.

² <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/the-real-story-behind-the-worlds-first-antibiotic>

3: WALK BY THE SPIRIT

Who is “the Spirit?”

The Spirit of God is the third person of the Trinity. God is Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit.

The people of God experienced the presence of God the Holy Spirit repeatedly in the Old Testament. However, they never knew what it meant to consistently experience the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told us that when he died, rose again, and ascended into Heaven, he would send us the Holy Spirit. In **John 14:16-17** Jesus said:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

When the Holy Spirit first came forever on the Church and on individual followers of Jesus in Acts 2, the building shook. Since that time, every follower of Jesus has the Holy Spirit with him/her.

That’s a good thing because we want God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, to cultivate a bumper crop of the fruit of the Spirit in us.

For that to happen, Paul says, we must walk *by means of the Spirit*.

You see the phrase “by the Spirit” repeatedly in Galatians 5:13-26. We walk by the Spirit, are led by the Spirit, and live by the Spirit. What does “by the Spirit” mean?

The phrase “by the Spirit” indicates “*by means of the Spirit*.”

The Holy Spirit is the one directing our path, fueling our plans, and empowering our living.

If we want the Spirit of God to produce a bumper crop of the fruit of the Spirit in us, then we need to be walking by means of the Spirit.

When we say, “walk by the Spirit,” what does the word “walk” mean?

The phrase translated “walk” in verse 16 implies that we are walking around, going about our daily business. We are to “walk around” by means of the Holy Spirit.

The other phrases Paul uses in these verses clarifies the picture.

In verse 18, Paul wrote that we are “led by the Spirit.”

In verse 25, Paul wrote that we are to “live by the Spirit.”

Again, in verse 25 Paul added that we “keep in step with the Spirit.” The picture Paul is drawing for us here is that the Holy Spirit is walking around through life. We are working to match the Holy Spirit’s direction and even the Holy Spirit’s footfalls. We are learning to act and behave like Jesus under the Holy Spirit’s direct, immediate mentoring.

What the Holy Spirit does for us is like what my friends Frank and Marcene did in our front yard years ago when my wife, Tammi, and I had a major landscaping project to do.

Tammi and I wanted to rip out some old plants and put some new ones in.

Frank and Marcene were good gardeners, and they offered to help.

Before we planted a single bush, Frank and Marcene insisted that we tilled up the soil. They brought a gas-powered tiller, and we tilled up the soil.

Then (because the soil was filled with clay), we added lots of stuff to the soil.

After hours of work, we finally started placing plants in the holes, which was what I thought we were going to do from the beginning.

However, all those plants lived and thrived. Frank and Marcene made the soil ready.

That's what's going on when we walk by the Spirit.

4: LET THE SPIRIT PRODUCE THE FRUIT

It turns out that sin is a lot of work.

Sin may feel natural to us at times. It may feel easy. It may even give us pleasure at times.

Paul knew, though, that sin was a prison. He knew that it led to brokenness and pain. Even better, Paul knew that sin became like slavery. Pretty soon, sin becomes a great deal of work.

That's why Paul called giving in to the desires of the flesh the "works of the flesh."

Cultivating the Spirit of God may feel like work, but we're simply creating the right conditions.

We are clearing the ground of the weeds of sin.

We're tilling up the soil of our hearts, making them ready for the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let's be honest, though. We're not doing the real work.

Cultivating the Spirit of God reminds me of my growth spurts when I was a teenager.

I remember feeling shorter, smaller, and lighter than all the adults around me.

Suddenly, I started growing. Fast.

Every time I saw members of my extended family, they would comment on how fast I was growing and on how much taller I had gotten since the last time they saw me!

In just a few years, I grew to be as tall as or taller than most of the adults in my life.

I didn't do that. Sure, I ate everything I could put my hands on. I slept long hours at night. I remember my knees aching at times because I was growing so fast. But I didn't really do anything. I didn't do the work. It just happened. Naturally.

In a similar way, the Spirit of God produces the fruit of the Spirit in us.

There are things we can do to make the conditions right and encourage the work of God's Spirit. (There are even things we can do to make the conditions wrong and discourage the work of God's Spirit.)

However, God the Holy Spirit is the one who causes the fruit of the Spirit to sprout up, grow, and become a bumper crop in us.

God the Holy Spirit is the one who develops godly character inside of us.

Let's commit together to doing the work required to make the conditions right.

More importantly, let's commit to longing for the fruit of the Spirit like it's truly precious.

And let's commit to opening our lives up to the presence of God—Father, Son, *and* Holy Spirit.

Then, look for the Spirit produce a bumper crop of the fruit of the Spirit in you.