

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

LOVE

JOY PEACE

PATIENCE KINDNESS

GOODNESS

FAITHFULNESS

Two studies on Fruitfulness to finish 2021

Two studies on Fruitfulness

In late 2021 and early 2022, our Sunday teaching will be exploring the nine “fruit of the Spirit” mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. Because of the summer break, we won’t be doing a small group study on each of the fruits. Rather, we will spend the last couple of weeks of 2021 in groups looking at some passages on fruitfulness in general. Rather than focussing in detail on the fruits themselves, these studies explore the means by which we become more fruitful as God’s people. This will serve as useful background for small groups in 2022, which will begin with a focus on growth in the Christian life.

Study 1: John 15:1-17

Setting the scene

In the “farewell discourse” in John 13-17, Jesus addresses his closest disciples on the night before his crucifixion. After Judas leaves to betray Jesus (13:30), Jesus tells the remaining disciples, repeatedly, that he is going away (13:1, 13:33, 14:4, 14:9, 14:28). This raises the question of “what next” for those who have followed him around Palestine for several years. In this context, Jesus says a lot about the ministry of the Holy Spirit:

- *another “advocate”/“comforter”/“encourager” (14:16)*
- *via whom the Father and Son will dwell with their people (14:23)*
- *who will teach and remind them of all things (14:26)*

In the midst of this section, Jesus teaches his disciples about fruitfulness, beginning with the claim “I am the true vine”. But before delving into this, we need to look at the Old Testament background to this “vine” idea.

Read Isaiah 5:1-7

1. In this passage what does the vine/vineyard represent?
2. What did the vineyard owner expect from his vines? What did God expect of his people?
3. What did God’s people actually produce, and what’s the outcome for them?

Read John 15:1-8

4. Considering the background from Isaiah, what is Jesus claiming when he says “I am the true vine”?

5. What does this section say about the *necessity* of fruitfulness? Why is it so important?

6. What does this section say about the *source* of fruitfulness? What is needed in order to bear fruit?

7. What does this section say about the *purpose* of fruitfulness? What's the end goal?

“By these words, [Jesus] shows that believers need incessant culture that they may be prevented from degenerating; and that they produce nothing good, unless God continually apply his hand; for it will not be enough to have been once made partakers of adoption, if God do not continue the work of his grace in us.” - Calvin

Read John 15:9-17

8. What does this passage reveal about the relationship between the Father, Jesus, and Jesus' followers? How does that make you feel?

9. Why did Jesus choose his disciples? Why did he choose you?

10. Bearing fruit is mentioned in verse 8 and then in verse 16. How do you think verses 9-15 relate to fruitfulness?

11. What are some mistaken ideas of fruitfulness that this passage can help us avoid?

Finish by praying and thanking God for bringing you into fellowship with himself, Jesus and the Spirit. Ask him to strengthen you to remain in Jesus always so you can bear much fruit for his glory.

Study 2: Galatians 5:13-25

This is the passage where the classic list of fruit comes from. It's not an exhaustive list of Christian virtues, and the rest of the Bible has more to say on each fruit listed here. But this passage is worth exploring to see why such a list was written down in the first place.

Spend five minutes getting the big picture of Galatians

This letter was written by the apostle Paul to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia (now Turkey). Paul writes to them because of serious false teaching that was taking hold: the claim that Jewish circumcision, according to the old testament law, was a requirement for salvation.

Read out these key verses to get the flavour:

- 2:15-16
- 3:1-5
- 4:4-7
- 5:1-2

1. Note these key contrasts in the book:

Works of the L_____	Sl_____	Fl_____
vs	vs	vs
F_____ in Christ	Fr_____	Sp_____

When Paul contrasts flesh and Spirit, it's important to note this isn't about physical things being bad and non-physical things being good. It's about what belongs to the present sin-infected age (flesh), versus what belongs to God's coming kingdom (Spirit).

Read Galatians 5:13-18

2. Paul has been emphatic that it's a mistake for Christians to seek to be governed by the Old Testament law, which he labels a "yoke of slavery" in 5:1. But here there is another mistake he warns against. What is it? Why would this concern arise at this point?

3. According to this section, what does the Spirit do for us?

4. Paul says the flesh and the Holy Spirit are "in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want" (v17). Are you conscious of this conflict playing out in your life? What does it look like for you?

Read Galatians 5:19-26

5. Some of the "acts of the flesh" seem quite foreign to us. But others are familiar. Which of them do you see in your life, or which of them are you in most danger of?

6. For you personally, name one fruit of the Spirit that seems to come most easily, and the one that comes least easily.

7. According to this section, what does the Spirit do for us?

8. What reasons are given for pursuing the fruit of the Spirit and fleeing from the acts of the flesh?

9. For you personally, which of the reasons given motivate you the most?

Finish by praying and bringing before God the ongoing conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, asking his help to put to death the works of the flesh, and to bear the fruit of our new Spirit-given identity.
