

# THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

*(Galatians 5.16-26)*

There's a story about an R. E. teacher in a church school who says to his class, "Now then, how many people here believe in God the Father?" and practically every hand goes up. Then he asks, "How many people here believe in God the Son?" and again, practically every hand goes up. Then he says, "And, who here believes in God the Holy Spirit?" and not one hand goes up. Eventually one girl raises her hand, and says, "Please sir, the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit isn't here today."

But, as the Christian stand-up comedian Milton Jones says, "The Holy Spirit is a real person you can invite in. But watch out - in time he will go over to the fridge, pull it from the wall and say 'What's all this mess under here?' But at least he helps clear up."

That's actually a good summary of what the Holy Spirit does – firstly, he lives inside us; secondly, he shows us where we sin; and thirdly, he makes us more like Jesus. And this third aspect of his work is called the fruit of the Spirit.

In Galatians 5 it says that when the Holy Spirit lives within us, he begins to change us from the inside.

Sometimes people say, "Oh, that sounds very worrying. Does that mean I'm going to go all weird?"

But no one should worry; all the changes the Holy Spirit brings about in our lives are designed to make us more like Jesus. The Bible says that as we spend time in the presence of Jesus Christ, we become transformed into his likeness.

That is what you might expect when you think about it. When we spend time with people we often become more like them. You see that of course with parents and children.

You see it with husbands and wives. In a good marriage husband and wife often become more alike character wise. Physically they don't always come to look exactly like each other.

But certainly dogs and their owners do! Take a look at these images:



The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 5 precisely what changes we can expect to occur in our lives. He writes: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." This is the moral fibre that will begin to emerge.

So you can expect as a Christian to become more loving, more joyful, more peaceful, more patient, more faithful, kinder, gentler, more full of goodness, and more in control of yourself.

It is actually a picture of Jesus. No one exhibits all those characteristics more than he does.

John Newton, the man who wrote *Amazing Grace*, was an atheist slave trader before he was converted. He described himself as an infidel and libertine. He once contemplated murdering a ship's captain and committing suicide by throwing himself overboard. Sometime after his conversion, long after he abandoned the slave trade, he said "I am still not what I ought to be. I am not

what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be. But thank God I am not what I used to be.”

You see, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit is a lifetime’s programme; it doesn’t happen overnight, just as fruit doesn’t appear overnight.

I heard about a man who planted a pear tree in his garden. Every day he looked out the window to see if there were any pears on it. One evening, his wife played a practical joke on him. She went out at night and tied a big green apple on the tree with a cotton thread. When he looked out of the window the next day there was this enormous apple right in the middle of his pear tree! But of course he wasn’t fooled. Everyone knows that it takes time for a tree to produce fruit - and that a pear tree produces pears, not apples, or £50 notes.

Love is the first fruit of the Spirit. If you want to sum up what Christianity is about, apart from the word “Jesus”, the word “love” is the best word to sum it up. The Christian faith is all about God’s love for us being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Most people understand love as a great feeling; but Christian love is not first of all an emotion you feel; it is a choice you make – that’s why Jesus could say “Love your enemies.” Jesus taught us to love those who wish us harm. Because only by loving them is there any chance that their hearts can change. It’s a very powerful force. Love transforms the whole of our lives. And without love everything else, the Bible says, counts for nothing. It’s the first evidence that the Holy Spirit is living in us.

Secondly joy. Joy is different to happiness. Happiness depends on what happens to you. Joy is much deeper. We can be joyful even if we are having a difficult time. Even when things are going badly wrong in our lives, we can still have the joy of the Lord in our hearts.

Richard Wurmbbrand was a Romanian church leader who was in prison for many years and frequently tortured. He wrote an account of his time in a prison cell. He wrote this: “Alone in my cell, cold, hungry and in rags, I danced for joy every night... Sometimes I was so filled with joy that I felt I would burst if I did not give it expression.” That is the fruit of the Spirit. That is not normal; it comes only from the Holy Spirit living within us.

Thirdly, peace. Again, it's not what we might think. Jesus said "My peace I give you, not as the world gives." It doesn't mean being calm because everything is fine; it means peace in the midst of anxiety and trouble. The Bible describes as "peace that passes understanding". It's not plausible that somebody can be absolutely at peace when everything is going wrong, but that's the peace that the Holy Spirit brings.

And so on with all these things. I'm not going to go through them all. These are the qualities that begin to grow; patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control - that's what Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit become like.

There is one more I want to mention in closing though, and it is faithfulness.

On March 3rd 1972, NASA launched a space probe called Pioneer 10. Its mission was to reach Jupiter, to photograph that planet and its moons, and beam data back to us about its magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere.

It was a bold plan, because it was thought the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter would probably destroy Pioneer 10 before it could get there. But it made it. In November 1973 it was hurled like a slingshot by Jupiter's colossal gravitational force toward the edge of our solar system.

At one billion miles distance from the Sun, it reached Saturn, photographed it up close and sent back data.

At some two billion miles, it whizzed past Uranus and sent back data about that planet.

A billion miles later it passed Neptune and beamed back pictures of that as well. At almost four billion miles from the Sun, it then hurtled past Pluto.

By 1997, twenty-five years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the Sun and was still sending back radio signals to scientists on Earth. Those signals come from an 8-watt transmitter, (that's about as much power as a bedroom night light). Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years. But it just kept going and going.

Faithfulness – the strength and character to just keep on going – is the fruit of the Spirit too.

Make sure you're a child of God the Father, stay close to Jesus, be filled with the Holy Spirit - and you will become increasingly Christ-like to infinity and beyond.