

# “The Spirit’s Fruit (Part 1): Love”

## Galatians 5:13-26, 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

### Introduction to the Fruit of the Spirit

Here at the beginning of this new nine-week series, we need to spend a few minutes introducing the Fruit of the Spirit as a whole. There are three key things we need to understand right from the start.

1. The plurality of the fruit
2. The presence of the fruit
3. The potentiality of the fruit
4. The power of the fruit

1. The plurality of the fruit

The Spirit’s fruit is plural. There are nine fruit here. Of course, Paul’s list here is not exhaustive. We could add many other fruits: humility is essential, but it’s not on the list. How about courage? We could multiply the list many times. The Spirit’s fruit is plural. It has variety. It covers all aspects of a good, true, and beautiful human life.

But even though the list is plural, there’s a unity to it. In fact, it’s not the “fruits” of the Spirit, plural, (in the original Greek, plural), but the *fruit*, singular!

The motto of my home country is *e pluribus unum*. Out of many, one. The motto of the Fruit of the Spirit, though, is the opposite: *ex uno plures*: out of one come many.

And guess what that means. If you have the fruit of the Spirit, it *must* manifest itself in *all* these many ways.

Jonathan Edwards says that we can all rely on our natural temperaments to “fake” certain fruits. I’m naturally even-tempered, and it looks like I’ve got *peace*. I’m not very assertive, so people might see “gentleness.” But unless I have the plurality of the fruit— unless I have gentleness *and* joy; peace *and* faithfulness, then I’m just being *natural* me. I’m not being supernatural, *spiritual*, New Creation *me*.

The fruit is plural, and when it’s seen in all its plurality, then you know the one single *thing*— the Spirit's fruit, Christian character—is present.

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### 2. The presence of the fruit

Now, what *about* the presence of the fruit. Tim Keller points out that if you are a real Christian, you have the Spirit residing in your heart. And that means that the *seed* of every bit of Christian character is planted in your heart. Is an acorn an oak tree? Yes, and no. You can’t climb it. But it’s got all the makings of an oak tree in that seed form. And so in that sense, the fruit is already in you.

But that brings us to the third thing,

### 3. The potentiality of the fruit

Inside every acorn is a potential oak. In every grape seed is the potential for a whole vineyard of fruit. When the Spirit of God claims you, you belong to Jesus, and Jesus is a gardner who is looking for a fruitful harvest. The seed of fruitfulness is implanted in you. And the conditions are now perfect for you to grow and bear fruit that lasts. To go from acorn to oak; from grape seed to vineyard. Jesus is looking to grow a forest and he’s planning for some fine wines among us. And it’s all there, in potential form, within us.

And that leads us to the final thing. There’s the plurality of the fruit, the presence and potentiality of the fruit. But how does it get from seed to fruit? What is

### 4. The power of the fruit?

Who does the work? Jesus, or us? Answer: yes!

Jerry Bridges says it well: “Godlike character is both the fruit of the Spirit as [the Spirit] works within us, and the result of our personal efforts. We are both totally dependent upon his working within us and totally responsible for our own character development.”

If you’re a true Christian, you’re a Christian by pure grace. Because Jesus, all by himself, in the power of the Spirit, has mightily saved you when no one else could. But if you’re a true Christian by pure grace, you are now *alive* and energized and growing. The gardner works on the vineyard, but the vines photosynthesize and bear fruit. As Dallas Willard says, don’t forget: “grace is opposed to earning, but grace is not opposed to *effort*.”

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If we are planted and given life by God’s Spirit, we *will* put forth effort, and we *will* be powerfully helped by God’s Spirit, and we *will* manifest the fruit of the Spirit. If we aren’t, and if we don’t, then— whether we’re religious or secular — we might have fake fruit. But it won’t be the real thing.

So, each week in this series, we’ll study the particular fruit of the Spirit. And with each one— love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control— we’ll ask four things:

1. What does the fake fruit of the secular flesh look like?
2. What does the fake fruit of the religious flesh look like?
3. What does the fruit of the Spirit look like?
4. What did Jesus do to bear this fruit and ensure that we’ll bear it too?

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### Love

1. The fake fruit of secular love
2. The fake fruit of religious love
3. The Spirit’s fruit of love
4. Jesus the fruit-bearer

#### 1. The Fake Fruit of Secular Love

Unlike the 10 Commandments, everybody likes these 9 fruit of the Spirit. If you went up to someone on the street and said “would you like to be friends with someone who fulfills the 10 Commandments,” they’d probably run away. But if you told someone “I’d like to introduce you to someone who is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control” they’d probably say “yes, please!”

That means that these nine things are things everyone knows they really ought to have. And none of these nine more than love. Secular people want love.

But without the Spirit, you get the fake fruit of secular love. How?

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Secular people are generally slow to say “I love you.” In fact, you might sleep with someone for nine months before you dare to say those words. But when love is declared, it can get awfully impatient (4). The reason secular people don’t say “I love you” very much is because when they *do* say it, it gets intense. The demand is that the love I show must be reciprocated, *now*. Secular people mistake love for intensity, and this results in impatience.

If I’m a typical secular person, I view love as something that I’m trying to *get*. Something to improve my experience of life. Love for me will be (5) self-seeking. When my family or friends or lover is no longer enhancing my life, I’m done with them. In the mean time, I’m consciously or unconsciously (5) keeping a record of people’s wrongs. When the wrongs reach a certain threshold, I cut you out of my life.

Folks can also be very envious of the love other people have if they don’t have it, and very boastful if they do have it. Whether it’s romantic love, or the love of family and friends, our secular culture tends to treat love as a zero-sum game, a competition for scarce resources. I might resent you cause you come from a two-parent home or you have a nice romance going. You might look down on me because I’m single, or divorced, or because I didn’t have a dad growing up.

The fake fruit of secular love says “I love you.” But what the culture *means* by “I love you” is “I love you ... for now.” Endurance, perseverance (7) is not built into the declaration “I love you.” In fact, the *opposite* is built into that expression: the false fruit is *temporary and conditional*. No patience. No hope that the beloved is relatively immature, but growing toward maturity. No determination to protect the beloved by making lasting promises that you’ll stick by them no matter what.

Our culture’s love protects self. It ultimately only loves self. It might look passionate and ferocious; or it might look steady and stable. But, apart from the Spirit, the fake fruit of secular love is ultimately only self-love. It’s on a journey for its own sake, and other people are either enhancing that experience or messing it up.

### 2. The Fake Fruit of Religious Love

But, not so fast. There’s plenty of fake fruit in churches and mosques and synagogues. In fact, that’s the very first thing Paul says in this famous love chapter. Verse 1: around churches there

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might be plenty of God-talkers who make lots of religious noise. But you won’t catch the rhythms of the Spirit of God because they don’t have love. As Duke Ellington might say, it don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing. And without the Holy Ghost, we can hear the noise coming off your gongs and cymbals, but we’ll never hear the harmony of heaven or be able to sing in the syncopation of the Spirit!

You can be (2) the kind of person who reads the newspaper with the Bible in the other hand, and reads the Bible with the newspaper in the other hand. You can be confident you have grasped the meaning of biblical prophecy. You can tell everyone about it. Tell everyone to WAKE UP! You might even be able to believe something will happen with such faith that it actually *does* happen. And is Paul impressed? Not if you are doing all that religious stuff without the love produced by the Spirit. Your spiritual life without love amounts to nothing; *you* amount to nothing.

Maybe you’re a big donor to the church (3). Or to the poor. Maybe you even boldly testify to the truth of Jesus and it gets you *killed*. You’re a religious hero! Guess what: unless all your heroism is deployed for the love of your neighbor with the energy of the Spirit of God, neither Paul nor Jesus is impressed. It’s nothing. It’s just a fake show of love, without its reality.

Friends, without the Spirit of God, religious people can be twice as bad or more than secular folks. Because we are prone to all the fake love fruit secular folks have, *plus* the ugly lovelessness of Spirit-less religion.

### 3. The Spirit’s Fruit of Love

So if the culture and the church will often bear counterfeit love, what’s the real thing look like?

Paul says just before the Fruit of the Spirit passage that the one badge of true Christian identity is “faith expressing itself in love” (Gal 5:6). Chris Wright says that “love is what enables us to fulfill God’s law without legalism.” Love comes first in the list of the Spirit’s fruit because “it binds them all together in perfect harmony (Col 3:14).

We read it at weddings. But as Rich Villodas says, “1 Corinthians 13 was not written with a wedding ceremony in mind. It’s not meant to give us warm, fuzzy feelings. This chapter is

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Paul's word of rebuke to a church marked by great miracles and charisma, but by little maturity and character.”

Friends: growth in maturity and character—growth in *love*—is the mark of a not-dead life, and a not-dead church. We’re here representing a God who says his very name is love, and whose covenant faithfulness is described as *hesed*, loyal lovingkindness.

And so our lives, and our church’s life, must be full of swing or it don’t mean a thing. In fact, a loveless church is *worse* than nothing. It’s a positive nuisance. A clanging cymbal. But when the Spirit gets ahold of a person, or a church, out comes living testimony of the very character of the perfect human, Jesus of Nazareth. Everyone will be able to see that we are growing in grace; that we’re more loving—patient, kind, protecting, trusting, persevering, hoping—than we were last year, and on and on until we see Jesus face to face, and we become *really* like him.

That’s a tall order. Has anyone ever done it?

### 4. Jesus the loving Fruit-Bearer

I said before that our culture’s version of love is really self-love. I love you as long as you are enhancing my life. If I love you at all, I love you *temporarily, conditionally*. And I said before that religion’s version of love talks a big game but lacks the real thing.

Religious people denounce secular culture as being full of fake love. Secular people denounce religious culture as being full of fake love. And they’re both right.

So there’s only two possibilities left. Either there’s no hope for real love—no such *thing* as real love. Or both religion and secular culture have missed real love when it showed up.

Real love showed up in the person of Jesus. Jesus is what happens when God wants to sing 1 Corinthians 13 to the world. Jesus has no love for noisy gongs and swingless songs. But Jesus is patient with clueless people who are genuinely looking for love—whether they’re religious or secular. He doesn’t keep a record of your sins or treat you as your sins deserve. He doesn’t leave when loving you gets hard. He just loves harder. He isn’t loving himself by loving you. He’s loving you to death. His love endured: he persevered in love through ridicule and slander, and all the way through the suffering of the cross. Greater love has no one than this: to lay one’s life down for one’s friends. And Jesus did it.

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Jesus looked at our immaturity, he looks at our immaturity *now*, and he says: “I can make something really fruitful out of this. Give me a little time, the power of the Spirit, and a person and a church who really wants to love like me.”

If you’ve realized that you’re basically a secular love faker; if you’ve realized that you’re basically a religious love faker; if you want to bear the real fruit of love, then you need to meet my friend Jesus. He’s got all nine of these fruits and more. And is ready to bring them lovingly to bear on your heart, so that you can become a lover.