

10 minute talk as part of All Age Talk on Fruit of the Spirit.

Big idea: the fruit of the Spirit is supernatural Christ-like character

Application – celebrate the fruit of the Spirit in Jesus' life, the life of the church and our own lives.

Prayer.

As I mentioned earlier we're starting with our first list in our mini-series: 'Lists in the New Testament', which we'll be doing as part of our all age services this term.

We've already starting thinking about the fruit of the Spirit with Sarah earlier, but let me read it again as we dwell on it in the next few minutes:

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In preparing for speaking today, I've asked the question – what's counter cultural in these verses? What's here in the Bible which is different from what the world around us is pushing on us in terms of who we are as people?

After all, there's a danger, perhaps, that his verse might sound like something people who aren't Christians might say 'How lovely' about, but not see how it's good news.

But this isn't supposed to be a lovely list to make us feel fuzzy inside.

It's actually profoundly counter-cultural and distinctively Christian. It really is good news.

How so?

Well, first of all, lots of people we know believe that people are intrinsically good, don't they. They believe people are basically 'good', even if they slip up occasionally in small or not so small ways.

We were talking about some students at my school the other day at lunch and wondering why teenagers behave badly at times, and my colleague said:

'what happens to them? They're not born that way!'

Well, this is the counter-cultural claim of God in the Bible: we are born that way

That's the point of the list just before these verses, where Paul lists the 'acts of the flesh' – human nature left to its own devices.

We're not naturally good on the inside, is the point: we're naturally bad people.

Selfish. Jealous, Envious, and he lists other acts that show up what we're all like on the inside. People willing to grasp for our own pleasure and our own power at the expense of other people or our obedience to our Creator.

And it's in this context that our verse for today arrives as such good news:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...

These attributes that characterise the fruit of the Spirit aren't things that we would ever have without the Spirit at work in our lives. They're supernatural. Evidence that God the Holy Spirit is present in us and at work in us.

The world around us says: we're naturally good. Be the best version of yourself.

The Bible says: we're naturally evil. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control

And when we consider the list itself, we find the Spirit's fruit is very much the character of Christ Jesus – it's what he's like.

If you get a new boss or a new flatmate and you tell me about them, you might tell me their appearance and all kinds of other details, but at some point I'm going to ask:

Yes, but what are they *like*?

What's their character?

And the fruit of the Spirit seem to beautifully display to us: what is Jesus like?

It's a long list of nine, so I suggest we look at the first two separately and then the last seven grouped together:

First, Love – this fruit seems to be first to sum up the whole list. The word used is about a decision to do what's best for someone else rather than yourself. It's not demanding a return but a giving, self-sacrificial, love. You can't help but think of Christ on the cross! Earlier in Galatians, Paul writes, 'The life I know live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' Love. A self-giving, self-sacrificial love, addressing people's spiritual need at immense personal cost. – It's a love that the world around us doesn't even think necessary, and so certainly doesn't inspire us to live *this* type of love!

Second, Joy - this fruit seems about what we're like on the inside. Beyond simply happiness. It's a fruit that is about something permanent. Finding joy in God no matter what's happening in our lives. Again, Jesus springs to mind. A man full of joy, knowing so deeply the love that God the Father had for him. In Galatians 4.6 we read earlier, the Spirit of Jesus calls out 'Abba, Father'. Jesus has such joy in his Father, his Abba, his Dad, we might say. A deep and lasting joy this world doesn't even try to offer us, doesn't even believe is possible.

Third, we've got the other seven fruit mentioned. The other fruit I think are about what we're like with other people.

Peace -not just looking for a lack of conflict to our relationships, but seeking relationships that are harmonious, full of wholeness and stability and togetherness

Forbearance or patience – this is about putting up with people, even when that's hard. Not 'getting your own back' even when you could.

Kindness – acting for the good of others, without wanting or thinking about being repaid

Goodness – wanting to do what's right and doing it, consistently, wholeheartedly

Faithfulness – it's about reliability, having staying power in our relationships, not giving up on people, or going awol, growing silent. Being there for them through thick and thin.

Self-control – keeping ourselves in check for the good of others. Not going along with selfish desires that treat other people as rivals - or objects for our own personal gain. Reigning ourselves in. being the master and not the slave of our impulses and desires.

This. This is what Jesus is like, isn't it? It's his character. It's so far above and beyond what the world believes the good life is about!

And the joy is this as we read earlier:

God sent the Spirit of His Son into *our* hearts

This really is wonderful.

I deserve to be treated as God's enemy - I'm naturally selfish, it's true.

Jesus deserves to be treated as God's Son – he's full of love and joy and peace like no one else before or since.

And yet on the cross:

Jesus died as God's enemy, that we might live as God's sons.

Wow- Jesus is unique.

And maybe as I read out that list, you were thinking, like I was when I was preparing this:

Love, joy, peace and the rest - 'This isn't me!'

And naturally, without God, it isn't!

But supernaturally, we do see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives as a church and as individually.

It's still a battle inside us between the sinful nature and the Spirit.

But these verses are saying to us: when you see this fruit – celebrate it work of the Spirit it is!

We can see the fruit of the Spirit in church life –

I've loved becoming part of Emmanuel these last two years.

We're not perfect are we.

But I rejoice to see the fruit of the Spirit in our church

Love – people pouring out their lives in service

Often in unlooked for ways,

Or ways that only that person will
know about.

Joy – seeing people in our church family
experience and live out and speak about a true joy even in the
hardest of times.

In our relationships with each other, I see the fruit
of the Spirit – people really looking for other people's good not
their own. It's so different to what so many of us experience in
our work life, isn't it!

We're know we're not perfect. And that's the point. None of this
is anything we could even do, naturally.

But we can celebrate it as the fruit of having the Spirit of Christ
dwell inside us.

And lastly, in our own lives.

For Christians here, we can be wowed again that any time we act
like Jesus does, it's fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

What an encouragement.

I know we're not there yet, but like the saying goes:
I'm not what I should be.

I'm not what I could be.

I'm certainly not what I will be.

But praise God – because of the fruit of the Spirit in my life:

I'm not what I was.

And for those of us here today who aren't Christians, I hope you
see this list isn't there to give us a warm fuzzy feeling inside on a
Sunday for a few moments before the reality of Monday hits
tomorrow !

No, the fruit of the Spirit is what we could never begin to produce
in our own strength

It's a beautiful list that shows us what Christ Jesus is like

And it's a list that I hope and pray and believe you'll be able to
see in our church if you stick around us long enough, alongside
all our faults and failings and fickleness which is still a part of
our lives, for sure.

And to even say those words reminds me that this really is the
love of God in our lives, not what any of us deserve.

Final prayer.