

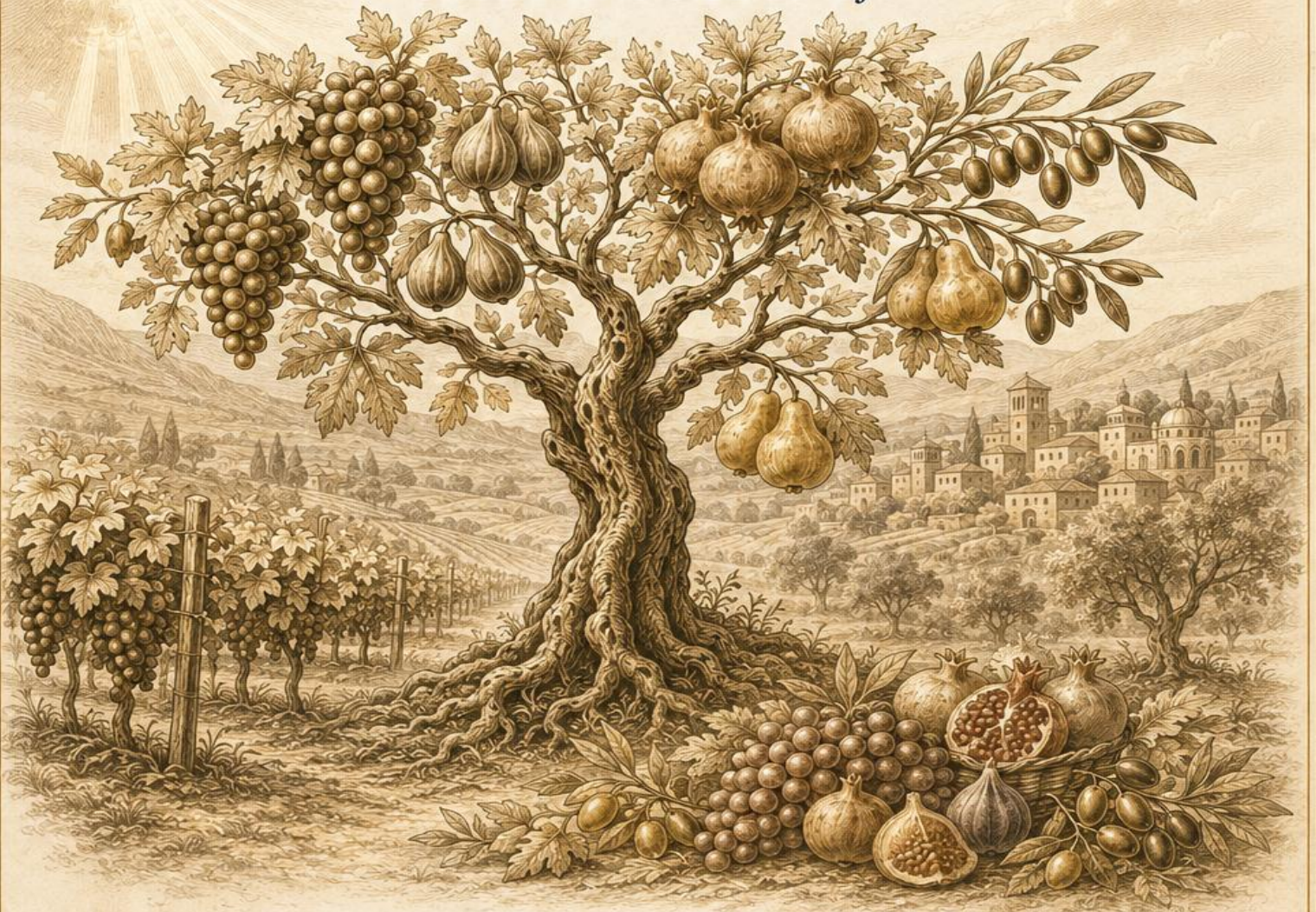


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

IS IT FRUIT OR FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT?

GALATIANS 5:22-23 KJV



Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley • *Pastor & Teacher*

OPEN YOUR BIBLE. BRING YOUR QUESTIONS.
LET'S REASON TOGETHER THE WORD OF GOD.

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

**IS IT FRUIT OR FRUITS
OF THE SPIRIT?**

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*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you have been with us from the beginning, whether this is your first time visiting or whether you are still trying to decide what you believe, I am genuinely glad that you are here.

At Reason Together Church, we do not believe questions are enemies of faith.

We believe honest questions can lead us into a deeper and more careful examination of the Word of God.

Our invitation is simple.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If you are visiting, please understand that you are our honored guest.

You are not expected to give anything.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to support your home church.

For those who call Reason Together Church their church home, there is a giving box available in the back, but we will not pass a plate and we will not interrupt the study to ask you for money.

We want you to be able to listen, think and reason without wondering what will be expected from you next.

There is also a guest card available.

We ask only for your first name and an email address so we can let you know what we will be studying next.

After the service, please stay for coffee and conversation.

The coffee is free.

The refills are free.

And around here, we like to say that the refills on conversation are free as well.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for allowing us to gather around Your Word.

Thank You for every person who is here and for every question that brought us to this moment.

As we open the Bible, protect us from carelessness, pride and the temptation to make the text say more than You have said.

Help us to understand the work of Your Holy Spirit.

Give us the courage not only to examine a word in Scripture, but also to examine the fruit visible in our own lives.

May Jesus Christ be honored in everything that is taught and everything that is received.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Our principal passage today is Galatians chapter five, beginning with verse sixteen.

The Bible says:

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."

The question we are considering today began while I was a guest in another church service.

Someone made a reference to the fruit of the Spirit being singular.

I did not hear enough of what followed to know precisely what point was being made.

But the observation stayed with me.

I have read Galatians chapter five many times.

I have quoted the fruit of the Spirit.

I have heard lessons about love, joy, peace and the other qualities in this passage.

But I realized that I had never stopped long enough to ask why Paul wrote "fruit" instead of "fruits."

Sometimes a Biblical question begins with an entire chapter.

Sometimes it begins with a difficult verse.

And sometimes it begins with a single letter that is not there.

In this case, the missing letter is the letter "s."

The Bible does not say, "The fruits of the Spirit are."

It says, "The fruit of the Spirit is."

That raises several questions.

Is this only a decision made by English translators?

Does the original Greek actually use a singular word?

If it is singular, does that mean there is only one fruit?

Are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance nine separate fruits?

Are they nine portions of a single fruit?

Or is love the one fruit with the remaining qualities flowing from it?

Before we answer those questions, we need to make certain that we do not remove two famous verses from the argument Paul was making.

Galatians chapter five is about Christian liberty.

Paul had been confronting people who wanted to place believers under the law as though obedience to the law could earn their standing with God.

At the beginning of the chapter, Paul said:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

We are not justified by our performance.

We are not saved by keeping a sufficient number of religious rules.

We are not forgiven because our good works finally outweigh our sins.

Salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

But Paul understood that liberty could be misunderstood in the opposite direction.

Some people might hear that we are not under the law as the means of salvation and conclude that conduct no longer matters.

They might think freedom in Christ means freedom to surrender to every appetite, every impulse and every desire of the flesh.

So Paul said in verse thirteen:

"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

Paul rejected legalism.

He also rejected license.

We cannot earn salvation by obeying rules.

But we were not saved so that sin could rule our lives without resistance.

Paul's answer was not, "Try harder to make yourself look religious."

His answer was, "Walk in the Spirit."

Verse sixteen says:

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

The fruit of the Spirit is not a decorative list of pleasant attitudes that Paul inserted into his letter because he needed something positive to say.

It is his description of what life begins to look like when a believer is walking under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes a conflict.

The flesh lusts against the Spirit.

The Spirit stands against the flesh.

The desires of our fallen nature pull in one direction.

The Holy Spirit leads in another.

And each influence produces recognizable results.

That is why Paul first lists the works of the flesh.

Then he presents the fruit of the Spirit.

Now let us answer the translation question.

The Greek phrase begins, "Ho de karpos tou pneumatos estin."

You do not need to remember the pronunciation in order to understand the point.

The word karpos means fruit.

It can refer to literal fruit, a crop, a harvest, a product or a result.

In this verse, karpos is grammatically singular.

The verb estin means "is," and it is also singular.

Paul did not write, "The fruits of the Spirit are."

He wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit is."

The King James Bible accurately preserves the singular.

Most major English translations do the same because the Greek is not uncertain on this point.

So this is not merely a KJV wording.

It is not a modern translation choice.

It is not an accidental English expression.

The singular is really there.

But we must be careful about what the singular proves.

The word "fruit" can be used collectively.

A farmer might say, "This land produces fruit."

He does not mean the entire farm produces one enormous orange.

He means fruit is the product of the land.

We may speak about the fruit of someone's labor.

We may speak about the fruit of a decision.

We are describing the result produced by something.

The Bible itself uses fruit this way in a number of places.

Therefore, the singular is real and it suggests unity, but we should not force it into an overly literal piece of produce.

The relationship between the Spirit and fruitfulness did not begin with Paul.

Isaiah chapter thirty-two looked forward to a time when the Spirit would be poured upon God's people from on high.

Isaiah said the wilderness would become a fruitful field.

He then connected that work of the Spirit with righteousness, peace, quietness and assurance.

Paul does not directly quote Isaiah in Galatians chapter five, so we should not claim more than the text gives us.

But the Biblical pattern is consistent.

When God supplies spiritual life, that life produces an observable harvest.

You may have seen an illustration of an orange with nine sections.

You may have heard the fruit compared to a cluster of grapes.

Those pictures can be useful teaching aids.

But an illustration is not the same thing as grammatical proof.

Paul was not giving the Galatians a botany lesson.

He was describing a spiritual harvest.

The more striking observation may be found by comparing verse nineteen with verse twenty-two.

Paul says, "The works of the flesh."

Then he says, "The fruit of the Spirit."

Notice that he changes two things.

Works becomes fruit.

Plural becomes singular.

The works of the flesh are numerous, disorderly and destructive.

Adultery tears at faithfulness.

Idolatry turns worship away from God.

Hatred, strife, wrath and envy tear people apart.

Drunkenness and reveling surrender control to appetite.

And Paul finishes by saying, "and such like."

His list was not exhaustive.

He did not name every sin fallen human nature can produce.

He gave enough examples for us to recognize the source.

Then Paul changed the picture.

He did not call love, joy and peace the works of the Spirit.

He called them fruit.

Fruit points us toward life.

Fruit grows from an inward source.

Fruit develops over time.

Fruit becomes visible.

Fruit provides evidence about the nature and condition of the tree.

Fruit also reproduces what is contained in its source.

There is a difference between fruit that grew on a tree and artificial fruit that someone tied to a branch.

Artificial fruit may have the proper shape.

It may be painted the proper color.

From across the room, it may appear convincing.

But it did not grow from the life of the tree.

It cannot nourish anyone.

Its presence does not prove the tree is alive.

In the same way, people can sometimes attach religious behavior to the outside of their lives.

They can learn when to smile.

They can learn the language Christians use.

They can appear patient while they are being observed.

They can imitate gentleness when it benefits them.

But the fruit of the Spirit is more than behavior attached to the outside.

It is character growing from spiritual life within.

Paul does not call this the fruit of determination.

He does not call it the fruit of education.

He does not call it the fruit of church attendance.

He does not call it the fruit of natural personality.

He calls it the fruit of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the source.

Now we are ready to consider what the singular might mean.

One possibility is that fruit is simply a collective noun.

Under that understanding, Paul is speaking about the entire product of the Spirit's work in a person.

That is grammatically possible and certainly contains truth.

A second possibility is that the singular emphasizes a unified Christian character.

These qualities belong together.

They are not nine unrelated spiritual options.

This appears to be the safest conclusion.

The Holy Spirit is not building nine disconnected compartments in us.

He is transforming the whole person.

We should not say, "God gave me joy and faith, but patience is simply not my fruit."

We should not say, "I received goodness, but apparently the Spirit did not assign me self-control."

We may be stronger in some areas than in others.

We may grow more quickly in one quality than another.

But none of the qualities can be dismissed as someone else's spiritual specialty.

There is a third interpretation that is often preached.

Some teachers say that love is the one fruit and that the other eight qualities are expressions of love.

Under that approach, joy is love rejoicing.

Peace is love resting.

Longsuffering is love enduring.

Kindness is love serving.

Goodness is love acting.

Faithfulness is love remaining.

Meekness is love yielding.

Self-control is love restraining itself.

That is a beautiful description.

It also has significant Biblical support because love holds a central place in this entire passage.

Galatians chapter five, verse thirteen says, "By love serve one another."

The next verse says:

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Romans chapter thirteen says that love is the fulfilling of the law.

First Corinthians chapter thirteen tells us that extraordinary spiritual gifts without love become empty noise.

Love appears first in Paul's list.

It is entirely reasonable to say that genuine joy, peace, patience, kindness and the remaining qualities will be shaped by love.

But we should not claim that Greek grammar proves love is the only fruit.

Paul did not write, "The fruit is love, and love then produces joy, peace and the rest."

He placed all nine words together after the expression, "the fruit of the Spirit is."

So we should distinguish a beautiful devotional explanation from a conclusion demanded by the text.

Love is central.

The other virtues express love.

But the safest conclusion is that the Spirit produces one unified harvest of increasingly Christlike character, described by these qualities together.

Let us look briefly at the words Paul chose.

The first is love.

The Greek word is agape.

Biblical love is not merely attraction, affection or warm emotion.

It seeks the good of another person.

It can remain active when affection is difficult.

It loves when love is not being returned.

It serves when there is no applause.

It does not mean approving everything another person does.

Love can tell the truth.

Love can establish a boundary.

Love can confront what is destructive.

But it does so while seeking redemption rather than revenge.

The second quality is joy.

The Greek word is chara.

Joy is deeper than a pleasant mood.

Happiness often rises and falls with circumstances.

Joy is rooted in what remains true about God even when circumstances are painful.

Christian joy does not require us to pretend that grief does not hurt.

It does not require a permanent smile while our heart is breaking.

It is the quiet confidence that sorrow does not have the final word because God remains faithful.

The third quality is peace.

The Greek word is eirene.

It carries the idea of wholeness, reconciliation and settled well-being.

Peace does not mean that nothing troublesome is happening.

It means trouble does not have to rule the center of the soul.

The Spirit can produce peace before the problem is resolved.

The fourth quality is longsuffering.

The Greek word is makrothymia.

Some modern translations use patience, but longsuffering preserves an important picture.

It is the ability to suffer long.

It particularly describes restraint toward difficult people.

It is being slow to anger when someone has given us plenty of opportunities to become angry.

It does not mean remaining indefinitely in a dangerous situation.

It means we do not surrender control of our character to another person's aggravating behavior.

The fifth quality is translated gentleness in the King James Bible.

The Greek word is chrestotes.

Most modern translations call it kindness.

It describes graciousness and benevolent treatment of others.

It is not only feeling kindly.

It is becoming the kind of person whose presence is useful, gracious and safe.

The sixth quality is goodness.

The Greek word is agathosyne.

Goodness is moral goodness expressed through conduct.

Kindness and goodness are close, but they are not identical.

Kindness emphasizes gracious treatment.

Goodness emphasizes what is morally right and beneficial.

Sometimes goodness requires saying something that does not initially feel kind.

A physician may cause momentary pain in order to treat what is dangerous.

A parent may deny a request because granting it would cause harm.

Spirit-produced goodness seeks what is truly good, not merely what is immediately comfortable.

The seventh quality is faith.

The Greek word is pistis.

The word can mean faith, trust, fidelity or faithfulness.

The King James Bible translates it faith.

Many modern translations use faithfulness because Paul is listing qualities of character.

The emphasis may be upon becoming reliable, trustworthy and loyal.

A Spirit-led person should increasingly become someone whose word can be trusted.

The eighth quality is meekness.

The Greek word is *prautes*.

Modern translations frequently use gentleness here.

Meekness is not weakness.

Weakness may be unable to retaliate.

Meekness may possess the power to retaliate and choose restraint.

It is strength that does not need to dominate.

It is confidence without arrogance.

It is conviction without cruelty.

The ninth quality is temperance.

The Greek word is *enkrateia*.

Today, the word temperance is sometimes associated almost entirely with abstaining from alcoholic beverages.

The older English word was broader.

It means self-control.

It is mastery over impulses, appetites and desires.

Notice that Paul ends with self-control after naming drunkenness and reveling among the works of the flesh.

The flesh says, "If you desire it, obey the desire."

The Spirit enables us to say, "That desire does not own me."

These nine qualities form a remarkably complete portrait.

But are there exactly nine and only nine things the Holy Spirit can produce?

Paul ends the list by saying, "against such there is no law."

He does not merely say, "Against these nine there is no law."

He says, "against such."

That language points toward qualities of this kind.

Just as "and such like" shows that the works of the flesh are not an exhaustive list, "against such" allows us to recognize other Spirit-produced virtues found elsewhere in Scripture.

Compassion matters.

Humility matters.

Mercy matters.

Forgiveness matters.

Truthfulness, righteousness and steadfastness matter.

Paul is not attempting to limit the Holy Spirit to nine activities.

He is giving us a unified and recognizable portrait of Spirit-led character.

There is another distinction that may be even more important than singular and plural.

The fruit of the Spirit is not the same thing as the gifts of the Spirit.

First Corinthians chapter twelve teaches that the Holy Spirit distributes different gifts to different believers according to His will.

One person may be especially equipped to teach.

Another may be equipped to lead.

Another may serve, give, encourage or show mercy.

No believer is expected to possess every spiritual gift.

The fruit of the Spirit is not presented that way.

Paul does not suggest that one believer receives love while another receives self-control.

He does not permit someone to say, "Patience was not included in my spiritual assignment."

Spiritual gifts concern how the Spirit equips us to serve.

Spiritual fruit concerns the kind of people the Spirit is making us.

And this distinction should change the way we evaluate spiritual maturity.

A person may be a gifted preacher without being gentle.

A person may be a brilliant teacher without being patient.

A person may be a talented musician without possessing self-control.

A person may be a capable leader without meekness.

A person may give impressive amounts of money without love.

Giftedness can attract attention.

Fruit reveals character.

That is why First Corinthians chapter thirteen is placed in the middle of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts.

Paul said that even if he spoke with the tongues of men and angels, understood mysteries, possessed extraordinary faith and gave away his possessions, without charity he was nothing.

We should never be so impressed by what someone can do that we stop examining the kind of person he is becoming.

That includes the person standing behind a pulpit.

That includes the person leading a ministry.

And it includes the person we see in the mirror.

There is also a difference between spiritual fruit and natural personality.

A quiet person may appear peaceful.

A friendly person may appear loving.

An optimistic person may appear joyful.

A person who dislikes confrontation may appear meek.

A naturally disciplined person may appear self-controlled.

Those qualities may be valuable, but natural temperament is not automatically evidence of spiritual transformation.

The more revealing test comes when circumstances oppose the quality.

Can I love someone who has injured me?

Can I retain joy while I am grieving?

Can I experience peace while the outcome remains uncertain?

Can I be longsuffering with someone who knows exactly how to aggravate me?

Can I show kindness to someone who cannot repay me?

Can I remain faithful when keeping my word becomes expensive?

Can I be meek when I possess enough power to win the confrontation?

Can I exercise self-control when the temptation is available, private and immediate?

The Holy Spirit does not merely polish the parts of our personality that were already easy.

He works upon the places that do not naturally resemble Christ.

That may be why the singular is so challenging.

We would prefer to choose our strongest qualities and display them as proof of maturity.

The unified fruit forces us to notice the neglected areas.

We may be loving toward strangers and impatient with our family.

We may appear peaceful at church and become controlled by anger at home.

We may speak gently in public and harshly to the person who knows us best.

The people closest to us may provide the most honest testimony concerning the fruit growing in us.

So how does this fruit grow?

Jesus answered that question in John chapter fifteen.

He said:

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

A branch cannot produce fruit independently from the vine.

It may be able to maintain its appearance for a short period after it has been cut away.

But separation from the source of life eventually becomes visible.

Jesus continued:

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

Fruit grows through abiding in Christ.

That includes prayer.

It includes Scripture.

It includes obedience and repentance.

It includes Christian fellowship.

It includes yielding when the Spirit confronts something in us that does not resemble Jesus.

These practices do not manufacture the fruit.

They do not replace the Holy Spirit.

They keep us listening, surrendering and walking with the One who produces it.

Jesus also spoke about pruning.

The Father purges the fruitful branch so that it may bring forth more fruit.

Pruning is not always pleasant.

God may expose an excuse we have protected for years.

He may confront our pride.

He may remove an unhealthy influence.

He may close an opportunity that was consuming us without making us fruitful.

He may use a difficult person to reveal that our patience was never as developed as we believed.

The pain of pruning does not necessarily mean God has abandoned the branch.

It may be evidence that the Father intends it to become more fruitful.

Fruit also requires time.

We do not plant a seed on Monday and become offended when there is no mature harvest on Tuesday.

Spiritual growth is real, but it is not instantaneous perfection.

That truth should give hope to the believer who sees genuine growth but also recognizes how much remains unfinished.

At the same time, time should produce change.

If years pass and there is never love, never repentance, never increasing self-control and never any visible transformation, we should not dismiss the absence of fruit as unimportant.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter seven:

"Ye shall know them by their fruits."

In that passage, Jesus was warning about false prophets.

He did not say we would recognize them by their popularity.

He did not say we would recognize them by their ability to hold an audience.

He did not say we would recognize them by the size of the ministry.

He said fruit reveals the tree.

Paul also warned that those whose lives are characterized by the works of the flesh shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

We must handle that warning seriously and carefully.

Fruit does not purchase salvation.

We are not saved because we finally accumulated enough patience, goodness and self-control.

We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

But salvation brings spiritual life, and living things begin to show evidence of life.

A new tree may have immature fruit.

A branch may require pruning.

A believer may stumble, fail and need to repent.

The question is not whether you were impatient yesterday.

The question is whether the Holy Spirit is changing you.

Are you becoming more like Christ?

Is there growth over time?

Do you repent when the works of the flesh become visible?

Are there areas in which you are resisting the Spirit?

Can the people closest to you see a difference?

There are two errors we must avoid.

One person may say, "I lost my temper yesterday, so I must not be saved."

That conclusion forgets that fruit develops and believers are still being transformed.

Another may say, "I made a profession of faith years ago, so it does not matter that my life has never shown any spiritual change."

That conclusion ignores the warnings of both Jesus and Paul.

We are not looking for sinless perfection.

We are looking for evidence of spiritual life, an increasing harvest produced through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Now let us return to the missing letter "s."

Perhaps Paul did not write "fruits" because he did not want us dividing Christian character into separate baskets.

Love in one basket.

Joy in another.

Patience in a basket we prefer not to visit.

Meekness in a basket we have decided does not fit our personality.

Self-control in a basket we plan to address someday.

The Holy Spirit is not decorating us with nine unrelated religious ornaments.

He is producing a transformed life.

The singular does not prove that love is the only fruit.

It does not prove that there are exactly nine possible Spirit-produced virtues.

It does not mean every believer displays every quality perfectly from the moment of salvation.

But it does tell us something important.

The Spirit is the source.

The qualities belong together.

Christian character should become increasingly visible.

No believer is excused from growth in any of these areas.

The greatest question is not whether the word "fruit" is singular.

The greatest question is whether the Spirit's fruit is visible in us.

Before we pray, I want to ask you to carry this conversation beyond this room.

Read Galatians chapter five, verses sixteen through twenty-six again during the coming week.

Do not merely identify the quality that comes most naturally to you.

Ask God to show you the place where the desires of the flesh most often resist the work of the Spirit.

You might pray:

"Holy Spirit, show me what You desire to produce in me and where I have resisted Your work."

Then be willing to listen when the answer is not the one you expected.

There may also be someone listening who recognizes that spiritual fruit requires spiritual life.
Jesus said the branch cannot bear fruit by itself.
It must be joined to the vine.
Religious behavior cannot join us to Christ.
Church attendance cannot erase our sin.
Trying to become a nicer person cannot reconcile us to God.
The Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
Sin separates us from the holy God who created us and loves us.
But God did not leave us without hope.
Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world.
He lived without sin.
He died upon the cross and bore the judgment our sins deserved.
He was buried.
On the third day, He rose again.
Salvation is not a reward for people who finally become good enough.
It is the gift of God received through faith in Jesus Christ.
If you recognize your sin and understand that you cannot save yourself, you can call upon Christ today.
The prayer I am about to offer is not a magical collection of words.
Repeating after a pastor does not save anyone.
Jesus saves the person who genuinely repents and places his or her trust in Him.
If that is the desire of your heart, you may pray quietly with me.
Lord Jesus,
I know that I am a sinner.
I know that I cannot save myself.
I believe that You died for my sins.
I believe that You were buried and rose again.
I turn from trusting myself and place my faith in You.
Please forgive me, save me and make me Your own.
Thank You for the gift of eternal life.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.
If you prayed that prayer and meant it, please speak with me before you leave.

I would be honored to pray with you, answer your questions and help you understand what comes next.

For everyone here, this conversation should not end with the final word of the sermon.

Take the question with you.

Ask what the Holy Spirit is producing in your home, your relationships, your private decisions and your response when life becomes difficult.

Do not use the fruit of the Spirit primarily as a tool for inspecting everyone else.

Begin with your own branch.

After we close, please join us for coffee.

If you disagree with something I said, let us open the Bible and talk about it.

If this study exposed a struggle, I am available to pray with you privately.

If the question returns on Tuesday afternoon instead of Sunday morning, you do not have to wait until the next service.

Please contact me.

This church exists for more than a weekly presentation.

We want to walk together, reason together and help one another grow in Christ.

Let us close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word.

Thank You that You have not left us to manufacture a Christian life through our own strength.

Thank You for the Holy Spirit who indwells, leads, convicts and transforms Your people.

Produce in us love that serves, joy that survives sorrow and peace that remains when circumstances are uncertain.

Give us longsuffering with difficult people, kindness that expects no repayment and goodness that chooses what is right.

Make us faithful, meek and self-controlled.

Show us where we have excused the works of the flesh as personality, temperament or simply the way we are.

Give us humility to repent and courage to follow Your leading.

Prune what must be removed.

Strengthen what is weak.

May the fruit growing in our lives point others toward Jesus Christ and bring glory to You.

Watch over every person as we leave this place.

Carry this conversation into our homes and into the coming week.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Thank you for reasoning together with us today.

Please remain for coffee, questions and conversation.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH
REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

COMMENTARY

**IS IT FRUIT OR FRUITS
OF THE SPIRIT?**

A Biblical, Linguistic and Pastoral Commentary

Galatians 5:16-26; John 15:1-8 (KJV)

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Commentary Introduction

A single letter can sometimes open an entire Biblical conversation. Galatians 5:22 does not say, “the fruits of the Spirit are.” It says, “the fruit of the Spirit is.” Many believers have read that verse for years without stopping over the singular word. Once the wording is noticed, the natural question follows: Is Paul describing nine fruits, one fruit with nine qualities or love as the one fruit from which the other qualities flow?

The first answer is grammatical. The singular is not an accident created by the King James Version. Paul used the Greek noun *karpos*, fruit, in the singular and joined it to the singular verb *estin*, is. The second answer requires interpretation. A singular noun can describe a collective yield. A farmer may speak of fruit or produce while referring to a harvest containing many pieces. Paul's wording is therefore significant, but it does not by itself settle every question about how the nine qualities relate to one another.

This commentary follows the entire movement of Galatians 5:16-26. The list belongs inside Paul's teaching about Christian liberty, the conflict between flesh and Spirit, the works produced by fallen desire, the character produced by the Spirit and the command to keep in step with the life God has given. The goal is not merely to count virtues. It is to understand the kind of person the Holy Spirit is forming.

CONTROLLING PRINCIPLE

The fruit is singular in Paul's Greek, and the nine qualities describe one coherent harvest produced by the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-26: Read the Whole Paragraph

Galatians 5:16

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Paul begins with a command to walk. The metaphor describes a continuing manner of life. A walk is not one dramatic moment. It is direction, rhythm, repeated movement and daily dependence. The believer does not defeat the flesh by admiring the fruit list. The believer walks under the Spirit's influence and refuses to surrender the body, mind and relationships to fallen desire.

Verses 17-18 explain why growth includes conflict. The flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. That conflict does not automatically prove that spiritual life is absent. It often proves that two opposing desires are present. Before conversion, the flesh may rule without meaningful resistance. In the believer, the Spirit creates opposition to what once passed without challenge.

Verses 19-21 name the works of the flesh. Verses 22-23 name the fruit of the Spirit. Verses 24-26 then return to identity and practice. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh. Those who live in the Spirit are commanded to walk in the Spirit. The list is therefore framed by

grace and obedience. The Spirit gives life. The believer is called to live consistently with that gift.

The Greek Really Is Singular

The key clause reads: Ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματος ἐστίν. Transliterated, it is *Ho de karpos tou pneumatou estin*. *Karpos* is nominative masculine singular. *Estin* is the third-person singular form of the verb to be. A woodenly literal rendering would begin, “But the fruit of the Spirit is.”

Form	Grammar	Meaning in the clause
karpos	Nominative masculine singular	The subject is fruit, not fruits.
tou pneumatou	Genitive neuter singular	The Spirit is identified as the source of the fruit.
estin	Present indicative, third-person singular	The verb agrees with the singular subject.
agape through enkrateia	Nine nominative singular nouns	The virtues form a coordinated list after the linking verb.

This means the KJV translators did not decide to make nine things sound like one. They followed the number found in the Greek text. Almost every major English translation does the same. Translation differences appear mainly in words such as longsuffering or patience, gentleness or kindness, faith or faithfulness, meekness or gentleness and temperance or self-control.

WHAT GRAMMAR PROVES

Paul wrote fruit in the singular. Grammar does not, by itself, prove that love alone is the fruit and the remaining eight words are definitions of love.

Fruit Can Be Singular and Still Be Manifold

English already provides the simplest explanation. We speak of fruit on a table, fruit in an orchard or the fruit of a season. The word can identify the kind of yield without counting every individual piece. Greek *karpos* can function similarly. It can name literal produce and it can name a result, outcome or moral consequence.

This collective force keeps the singular meaningful without making it mathematically restrictive. One tree can bear much fruit. One harvest can contain many items. One Spirit can produce a life marked by many related qualities. The singular directs our attention to unity of source and character rather than to the number of separate objects.

Fruit also differs from decoration. Apples tied to a dead branch may resemble a living tree from a distance, but they did not grow from the branch. Religious manners can be attached to a life for reputation, employment, family approval or church acceptance. Spiritual fruit grows from spiritual life. Its source is eventually revealed when pressure tests what appeared attractive in calm conditions.

Works in the Plural, Fruit in the Singular

Paul places the plural works of the flesh beside the singular fruit of the Spirit. The contrast is rhetorically powerful. The works of the flesh form a recognizable pattern of disorder: immorality, idolatry, hatred, rivalry, wrath, division, envy, intoxication and related behavior. The Spirit produces a recognizable pattern of Christlike character.

The contrast should not be turned into an absolute rule about the two nouns. Scripture can speak positively of good works and negatively of corrupt fruit. Works is not always evil and fruit is not always good. Paul's moral contrast comes from the phrases of the flesh and of the Spirit, then from the contents of the two lists.

Still, the movement from works to fruit communicates something important. Fleshly desires appear in acts that compete, fracture and destroy. The Spirit's qualities cooperate. Love needs patience. Goodness needs meekness. Joy needs faithfulness. Self-control protects every other virtue from being surrendered to impulse.

SAFE SERMON SENTENCE

The flesh produces a pattern of disorder. The Holy Spirit produces a unified pattern of Christlike character.

Why Love Stands First

Galatians 5:13-14

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Love is not first by accident. The entire ethical argument of Galatians 5 turns Christian liberty toward loving service. Freedom from the law as a means of justification is not freedom to use another person. It is freedom to serve another person without attempting to earn God's favor through that service.

Paul has already written that faith works by love. He will later command believers to bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. Love therefore stands at the head of the fruit list because it expresses the Godward and neighborward direction of Spirit-led life.

This context explains why some interpreters view love as the one fruit and the remaining eight qualities as descriptions of love. Love rejoices in God. Love seeks peace. Love suffers long. Love acts kindly. Love pursues goodness. Love remains faithful. Love uses strength meekly. Love restrains selfish appetite. The reading is spiritually coherent and closely related to 1 Corinthians 13.

Is Love the One Fruit?

The proposal may be heard by placing a conceptual colon after love: “the fruit of the Spirit is love: joy, peace...” Printed punctuation in Greek New Testaments is editorial. Ancient manuscripts did not present the sentence with modern commas and colons in the way readers now expect. A colon is therefore possible as an interpretive presentation.

Possible does not mean required. The nine nouns have the same grammatical form. No conjunction, relative clause or other syntactical marker explicitly places the final eight beneath love. The ordinary reading is a coordinated list. It is therefore too strong to say that Greek grammar proves love is the only fruit.

The most responsible conclusion is layered. Love is the first quality. Love is central to the argument of Galatians 5. The remaining qualities describe conduct consistent with love. The list may be preached as a portrait of love in action, but that preaching insight should not be presented as the only translation or grammatical possibility.

Conclusion	Confidence	Reason
Fruit is grammatically singular.	Certain	The noun and verb are singular.
The qualities form one Spirit-produced character.	Strong	The metaphor, source and context support unity.
Love governs the ethical movement of the passage.	Strong	Galatians 5 places liberty in the service of love.
The final eight qualities define love.	Possible	The reading fits the context but is not required by syntax.

Love: The Direction of the Harvest

Biblical love is not approval of everything another person desires. It seeks the person's true good under the authority of God. Love can comfort, confront, forgive, wait, protect, give and refuse to participate in evil. Its emotional tone changes with the need, but its commitment to God and neighbor remains.

The flesh uses people as instruments of desire, pride or security. The Spirit teaches the believer to serve. This is why love is the first evidence Paul names. The test is not merely whether a person feels warmly toward people who are easy to love. The test includes whether the person seeks good when service costs time, recognition is absent and gratitude never comes.

Joy: Gladness Rooted Deeper Than Circumstances

Joy is not the denial of sorrow. Paul knew grief, persecution, disappointment and physical weakness. Biblical joy rests in God, His salvation, His promises and His work. It can coexist with tears because it is deeper than immediate comfort.

Natural cheerfulness may be a gift of temperament. Spiritual joy is tested when the temperament has little reason to remain cheerful. It does not require a believer to pretend that tragedy is pleasant. It enables the believer to confess that suffering does not have the final word.

Peace: Wholeness Under the Rule of God

Peace includes inward steadiness, reconciliation and communal wholeness. It is not merely the absence of noise or disagreement. A family can avoid every difficult conversation and still have no real peace. A church can silence questions and call the silence unity.

Spirit-produced peace is willing to tell the truth for the sake of reconciliation. It refuses needless quarrels, yet it does not purchase calm by surrendering goodness. The peacemaker is neither the person who starts every conflict nor the person who runs from every conflict. The peacemaker brings conflict under the rule of Christ.

Longsuffering: Patience With People

The KJV word longsuffering captures duration. The underlying term often describes patience toward persons, especially restraint when provoked. It is the ability to suffer long without quickly retaliating, abandoning responsibility or surrendering to bitterness.

Longsuffering does not prohibit boundaries or accountability. God is longsuffering, yet He judges evil. A patient believer may confront harm, involve proper authority or step away from danger. The fruit lies in being governed by God rather than by revenge, panic or wounded pride.

Gentleness and Goodness: Kind Action and Moral Purpose

The KJV renders chrestotes as gentleness, while many modern translations use kindness. The word points toward benevolent action, gracious usefulness and a manner that makes goodness tangible. It is more than a pleasant tone. It acts for another person's benefit.

Goodness, agathosyne, has moral strength. It seeks what is truly right and beneficial. Kindness without goodness can become indulgence. Goodness without kindness can become harsh self-righteousness. Together they describe action that is both morally directed and graciously expressed.

THE VIRTUES WORK TOGETHER

The Spirit does not make us kind instead of good or good instead of kind. He forms goodness that knows how to act with grace.

Faith or Faithfulness?

The KJV reads faith. The Greek word pistis can mean faith, trust, faithfulness, reliability or fidelity according to context. Because the surrounding words describe moral and relational qualities, many modern translations choose faithfulness.

The KJV is not wrong. The range of the word allows the preacher to preserve faith while explaining its visible result. Trust in the faithful God should produce a person who becomes trustworthy. Claimed faith that repeatedly excuses disloyalty, dishonesty and broken promises has not been permitted to shape conduct.

Faith and faithfulness belong together. The believer relies on God, remains loyal to Christ and becomes dependable toward others. The fruit is not merely the ability to state what one believes. It includes becoming the kind of person whose word can be trusted.

Meekness: Strength Under Government

Meekness is often mistaken for weakness. Biblical meekness is strength submitted to God and governed for the good of others. Moses is called meek, yet he confronted Pharaoh. Jesus is meek and lowly in heart, yet He cleansed the temple and rebuked hypocrisy.

The opposite of meekness is not confidence. It is uncontrolled strength, self-importance and the need to dominate. A meek person can speak firmly without using truth as a weapon of personal revenge. Meekness gives correction without forgetting that the corrector also stands under grace.

Temperance: Spirit-Governed Self-Control

Temperance in the KJV is broader than moderation in alcohol. Enkrateia refers to self-control, mastery of appetite and restraint of impulse. Food, anger, sexuality, speech, spending, entertainment, attention and ambition all belong within its reach.

The expression self-control can sound as though the self is the source. In Galatians, the Spirit is the producer. The believer truly chooses, refuses, disciplines and acts, but does so in dependence on the Spirit. Grace does not remove effort. It changes the source, purpose and hope of effort.

Against Such There Is No Law

Galatians 5:23

Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Paul does not merely say, “against these nine.” He says, “against such.” The phrase points to qualities of this kind and suggests that the list is representative rather than mechanically exhaustive. Humility, mercy, truthfulness, courage and generosity may also belong to the same Spirit-shaped moral family.

No righteous law condemns love, joy, peace or any quality consistent with them. The statement also answers legalism. The Spirit produces the kind of life toward which God's moral law points. The believer is not justified by producing fruit, but the justified believer is not left unchanged.

Fruit Is Not the Same as Spiritual Gifts

Fruit	Spiritual gifts
Describes moral character	Describes capacities for service
Expected as a unified pattern in every believer	Distributed differently according to the Spirit's will
Answers, "What kind of person am I becoming?"	Answers, "How has God equipped me to serve?"
Governs the manner in which ministry is performed	Cannot substitute for love, holiness or maturity

A person can be gifted and immature. Eloquence, leadership, music, knowledge and visible influence can place someone before a congregation without proving that the person's private character is mature. First Corinthians 13 makes the warning unmistakable. Extraordinary gifts without love amount to nothing.

The church should be grateful for gifts and careful about confusing them with fruit. Gifted ministry may attract attention. Fruit determines whether the gift is carried with humility, truth, restraint and love.

Fruit Is Not the Same as Temperament

Natural temperament can resemble spiritual fruit. A quiet person may appear peaceful. An outgoing person may appear joyful. A cautious person may appear self-controlled. A conflict-averse person may appear meek. The resemblance becomes less reliable when pressure arrives.

Spiritual fruit is revealed when the Spirit governs both strengths and weaknesses. A naturally gentle person may need courage. A naturally forceful person may need meekness. A naturally optimistic person may need faithfulness in sorrow. The Spirit does not erase personality. He brings personality under the character of Christ.

Fruit Is Evidence, Not the Price of Salvation

A living tree bears fruit because it is alive. It does not bear fruit in order to purchase life. The same order protects the gospel. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Good works and transformed character follow as God's workmanship, not as a payment added to Christ's finished work.

This does not make fruit optional. Persistent rebellion without repentance is spiritually serious. Jesus said trees are known by their fruit. Paul warned that those whose lives are characterized by the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. Grace must never be used as permission to remain comfortably ruled by sin.

Pastoral care must also avoid demanding instant ripeness. Genuine believers grow unevenly. Some sins are surrendered quickly. Other patterns require long seasons of confession, accountability and renewed obedience. Assurance rests finally in Christ and His promise, while a changed direction provides confirming evidence of life.

PASTORAL BALANCE

Do not comfort persistent rebellion by calling fruit optional. Do not crush a repentant believer by demanding instant ripeness.

Abiding in Christ: Where Fruit Comes From

John 15:4-5

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches...

Jesus places fruitfulness inside union and dependence. A branch does not create life by straining. It receives life from the vine. The Christian life is therefore more than imitation of Jesus from a distance. Christ is the living source from whom the believer receives strength, truth and grace.

Abiding is not inactivity. Christ's words abide in His people. They ask in prayer. They obey His commandments. They remain in His love. Dependence produces action because the life of the vine moves through the branch. Self-manufactured virtue becomes pride or exhaustion. Abiding obedience gives glory to the Father.

Pruning and the Patience of Growth

John 15 also says the Father prunes fruitful branches so that they may bear more fruit. Pruning is not proof that the branch has been abandoned. It can be evidence that the Gardener intends greater fruitfulness.

Scripture, correction, disappointment, suffering, responsibility and community may expose what needs to be cut away. The process is painful because the flesh does not release control willingly. Yet God's discipline is fatherly, purposeful and directed toward holiness.

Fruit normally develops over time. That does not excuse delay in obedience. It does prevent us from treating a living process like a manufactured product. The right question is not whether the believer has reached flawless maturity. It is whether the life is abiding, repenting and moving in the Spirit's direction.

How the Nine Qualities Correct One Another

If isolated	Possible distortion	Needed companion
Love	Sentiment without truth	Goodness and faithfulness
Joy	Cheerfulness that denies grief	Peace and longsuffering
Peace	Avoidance of necessary conflict	Goodness and meekness
Longsuffering	Passive tolerance of continuing harm	Goodness and self-control
Kindness	Niceness without courage	Goodness and faithfulness

If isolated	Possible distortion	Needed companion
Goodness	Harsh moral superiority	Kindness and meekness
Faithfulness	Stubborn loyalty to an unworthy cause	Love and goodness
Meekness	Timidity	Faithfulness and self-control
Self-control	Rigid pride	Love and joy

This is one reason the unified-character interpretation is pastorally valuable. The virtues do not compete for space. They protect one another from counterfeit forms. The Spirit does not merely increase one preferred trait. He conforms the whole person to Christ.

How to Examine Fruit Without Becoming a Fruit Inspector

Jesus permits moral discernment. Paul commands churches to address destructive conduct. Leaders must meet character qualifications. The warning against judgment does not require blindness. At the same time, believers can use fruit language to place themselves above others, interpret every weakness as hypocrisy and make declarations about hearts only God fully knows.

- Begin with your own walk before conducting an inventory of someone else's life.
- Look for governing direction and repeated pattern rather than one isolated failure.
- Distinguish immaturity from defiance and repentance from excuse-making.
- Consider conduct under pressure, not merely public manners in safe settings.
- Use Scripture's definitions rather than personality preference or cultural politeness.
- When correction is necessary, restore in the spirit of meekness and consider yourself.

Fruit inspection is safest when it begins as self-examination and continues as loving discernment. Its purpose is restoration, protection and truth, not superiority.

Pastoral Counsel for the Church

- Say fruit in the singular because that is Paul's wording.
- Explain the singular as one Spirit-produced harvest rather than nine optional spiritual specialties.
- Present love as first and governing without claiming that grammar proves it is the only fruit.
- Retain the KJV terms, then explain longsuffering, faith, meekness and temperance for modern hearers.
- Do not confuse quietness with peace, timidity with meekness or pleasantness with kindness.
- Do not confuse gifts, charisma, education or visibility with mature fruit.
- Do not preach fruit as a method of earning salvation.
- Do not use grace to make fruit unnecessary.
- Give growing believers room to mature while calling every believer to present obedience.
- Keep Christ and abiding at the center so that the sermon does not become nine lessons in self-improvement.

The Gospel Is the Root of the Fruit

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The works of the flesh are not merely somebody else's list. Every person has sinned. Every person needs more than character improvement. We need forgiveness, reconciliation with God and new life. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again. Salvation is received by grace through faith in Him.

The Spirit's fruit does not replace the gospel. It grows from the gospel. Those who trust Christ are given life by the Spirit and called to walk in that life. Love, joy, peace and the remaining qualities become evidence that Christ is not merely admired but present and at work.

A person who recognizes the works of the flesh and has never trusted Christ should not begin by attempting to manufacture nine virtues. Begin with Christ. Confess your sin. Believe the gospel. Receive the gift of eternal life. Then learn to walk by the Spirit who gives that life.

Final Commentary Conclusion

The phrase fruit of the Spirit is singular because Paul wrote it that way. The King James Version is not smoothing nine fruits into one. The Greek noun and verb are singular, and the nine qualities follow as a coordinated description of what the Spirit produces.

The singular does not force one narrow interpretation. Fruit can be collective. Love may organize the list, but grammar does not prove that the final eight nouns are definitions of love. The strongest conclusion is that one Holy Spirit produces one coherent Christian character expressed through many related qualities.

The passage is not asking which fruit a believer received. It is asking whether the life of Christ is becoming visible. The answer is found through abiding in Christ, walking by the Spirit, crucifying the flesh, receiving the Father's pruning and practicing Spirit-shaped obedience in the relationships where character is tested.

FINAL COMMENTARY PRINCIPLE

One Spirit produces one coherent harvest: the character of Christ becoming visible through love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control.