

LESSON 11

The Fruit of the Spirit as Maturity

Galatians 5:22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.”

(Galatians 5:22-23)

Class Overview: In this lesson, we explore spiritual maturity as defined by Scripture: not by giftedness, longevity, or outward success, but by Christlike character produced by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit as the visible sign of a life shaped by the gospel. Maturity, then, is not primarily measured by what a believer knows or does, but by who a believer is becoming. This lesson emphasizes the inner transformation God creates in His people as they walk by the Spirit and remain in Christ.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Define spiritual maturity as Christlike character produced by the Holy Spirit rather than activity or longevity.
 2. Explain how the fruit of the Spirit reveals genuine spiritual progress.
 3. Distinguish between outward religious behavior and inward transformation.
 4. Recognize the role of the Holy Spirit in shaping maturity over time.
 5. Evaluate personal spiritual development in terms of developing Christlike character.
-

Introduction:

WHEN CHRISTIANS TALK ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATURITY, the conversation often turns to knowledge, longevity, or involvement. We may assume that a mature Christian is someone who has been in the church for a long time, knows Scripture well, or carries significant responsibility. While those things can accompany maturity, we need to go deeper.

The New Testament defines maturity primarily in terms of **character**. True maturity is revealed in who a person is becoming. This is why Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit is so important. The fruit of the Spirit is not a checklist of behaviors to master, nor a personality profile reserved for a few exceptional Christians. It is the visible evidence of a life shaped by the Spirit of God. These qualities: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, describe the character of Christ being formed in His people over time.

The fruit of the Spirit helps us answer an essential question: *What does a mature Christian actually look like?* Scripture's answer is not abstract or mystical. Maturity looks like Christ reflected in everyday attitudes, responses, and relationships. It shows up in how we treat one another, how we respond under pressure, and how we carry ourselves in the ordinary moments of life.

This lesson naturally builds on what we've already learned. Perseverance helps us stay faithful. Making progress toward maturity moves us forward. Now, we focus on the fruit that maturity produces. Before we are prepared to serve others well, we must be inwardly shaped by the Spirit. Character comes before contribution.

The question isn't whether fruit is perfectly present, but whether it is increasingly evident. Where the Spirit works, fruit develops. Spiritual maturity isn't about impressing others; it's about reflecting Christ. As we focus on the fruit of the Spirit, we're invited to evaluate not just what we believe or endure, but the kind of people we are becoming in Christ.

The Fruit of the Spirit is the Evidence of Maturity (Galatians 5:22-23)

Paul introduces the fruit of the Spirit as a contrast to life directed by the flesh. The emphasis is not on external behavior alone, but on the inner transformation produced by the Spirit's work in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit is presented as the natural outcome of walking by the Spirit, not as an achievement to earn, but as evidence of maturation. It is significant that Paul speaks of **fruit** in the singular. While the list contains multiple qualities, they belong together as a unified picture of Christlike character. Spiritual maturity is not selective. It does not allow us to emphasize certain traits while excusing the absence of others. Where the Spirit is shaping a life, all aspects of Christ's character are increasingly formed.

This helps us better understand how spiritual maturity is measured. The New Testament does not define maturity primarily by activity, giftedness, or visibility. It is possible to possess spiritual gifts and yet lack spiritual fruit. Gifts enable service; fruit reflects character. Maturity is revealed by the consistent display of Christlike character. The fruit of the Spirit also reminds us that maturity is not self-produced. Paul does not say "the works of the believer," but "the fruit of the Spirit." Changes in character flow from relationship and dependence, not from self-discipline alone. While effort and obedience matter, transformation ultimately comes from yielding to the Spirit's leading. As we mature, the fruit of the Spirit becomes increasingly evident in everyday life—how we speak, respond to conflict, treat others, and exercise self-control. These qualities may grow slowly and unevenly, but they should grow genuinely.

We need not fear careful self-examination. The question is not whether we possess knowledge or endure hardship, but whether the character of Christ is becoming more visible over time. The fruit of the Spirit provides a reliable measure of spiritual maturity because it reflects the life of Christ Himself being formed in His people.

Fruit is Formed Through Abiding, Not Effort Alone (John 15:4-5)

How is the fruit of the Spirit produced? While this involves decisive choices and obedience, maturity does not come from sheer effort or self-discipline alone. Jesus said that fruit comes from abiding in Him (John 15:4-5). A branch does not strain to produce fruit; it bears fruit by remaining connected to the vine. Abiding speaks of relationship, ongoing dependence, trust, and attentiveness to Christ. When we remain in Christ, the Spirit works to shape our character from the inside out. Effort without abiding leads to frustration or hypocrisy. Abiding without response leads to stagnation. Maturity comes when we stay connected to Christ and walk by the Spirit.

Another passage to consider is Galatians 5:16, where the Spirit calls us to walk by the Spirit instead of being driven by the desires of the flesh. Walking by the Spirit is active, involving daily decisions to follow God's guidance, submit desires and habits to His will, and let Scripture shape our responses. Yet, even these choices are based on relationship rather than just performance.

So, we must resist **self-reliance**, which tries to produce maturity through discipline alone. And on the other side, we must push back against **spiritual passivity**, which expects it without effort. Fruit grows as we actively abide, staying connected to Christ while faithfully responding to the Spirit's lead. Understanding this process keeps maturity rooted in grace. The fruit of the Spirit isn't created by human willpower but by God's work within a surrendered life. Maturity, then, is neither rushed nor forced. It is developed through a faithful relationship. Where we abide, fruit appears.

Fruit is Expressed and Tested in Relationships (Colossians 3:12-15)

Spiritual maturity is not most clearly revealed in isolation, but in relationships. The fruit of the Spirit always shows up in how we treat one another. Qualities such as patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control are most visible when life involves people, pressure, and disagreement. Therefore, we have to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving as the Lord has forgiven (Colossians 3:13-14). These instructions assume real relational tension. The fruit of the Spirit is not proven when circumstances are easy, but when relationships are demanding.

We also see this in Ephesians 4:1-3, where the Spirit urges us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, marked by humility, gentleness, patience, and love, and to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Unity is not maintained by ignoring differences, but by mature character shaped by the Spirit. Spiritual maturity is relational maturity. It is easy to speak about love in theory; it is harder to practice it consistently with people who test patience or challenge preferences. The fruit of the Spirit reveals whether our progress is genuine when beliefs are tested by everyday interactions.

Relationships also function as the proving ground for maturity. They expose areas that still need work and provide opportunities for the Spirit to deepen character. Where we walk together in humility and grace, fruit is cultivated, and Christ is reflected.

All of this prepares us for service. Before we can lead or serve effectively, we must be shaped internally. Character comes before contribution. Mature Christians strengthen the church not only through their

actions but also through how they relate to others. The fruit of the Spirit, then, is not just personal virtue—it is the Spirit’s work transforming a community to reflect Christ to the world.

For Application

Spiritual maturity is not measured by how busy we are, how much we know, or how long we have been in Christ. Scripture consistently points us to character. The fruit of the Spirit reveals whether Christ is truly being formed in us. Where the Spirit is at work, Christlike qualities become increasingly visible. So, we must look beyond outward activity and examine inward transformation. The fruit of the Spirit grows as we abide in Christ and walk by the Spirit. The changes we make are not always instant or perfect, but it should be real. Maturity is seen over time as love deepens, patience increases, self-control strengthens, and gentleness shapes relationships.

The call here is not self-condemnation, but surrender. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be forced, but it can be cultivated through dependence on Christ. As we yield daily to the Spirit’s leading, God works to shape hearts that reflect His own. As we grow, we become a blessing to others. Mature faith strengthens relationships, preserves unity, and prepares the way for meaningful service in the body of Christ. It is not simply whether we are faithful or active, but whether the character of Christ is becoming more evident in our lives. Where the Spirit leads, fruit follows. And where fruit grows, Christ is seen.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

Memory Verse:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.” — Galatians 5:22-23 (CSB)

Weekly Challenge:

This week, focus on one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit that is most needed in your life. Pray daily for the Holy Spirit to shape that area of your character and look for opportunities to practice it in real-life relationships. Rather than striving through self-effort, commit to abiding in Christ through prayer and Scripture, trusting the Spirit to produce genuine growth. At the end of the week, reflect on how dependence on the Spirit shaped your responses and attitudes.

For Discussion

1. How does Scripture define spiritual maturity differently than we often do?

✎ _____

✎ _____

✎ _____

✎ _____

✎ _____

2. Why is the fruit of the Spirit a more reliable measure of maturity than activity, knowledge, or giftedness?

 _____


 _____

 _____


 _____


 _____


3. What does it mean to abide in Christ, and how does abiding shape our spiritual fruit?

 _____

 _____

 _____

 _____

 _____

4. Why are relationships the primary place where spiritual maturity is revealed and tested?

 _____

 _____

 _____


 _____

 _____

5. Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit do you most need to see grow in your life right now, and what might that require of you?

 _____

 _____

 _____

 _____

 _____