

The Fruit of the Spirit

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"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: . . ." Galatians 5:22-23.

The Christian faces the common troubles in living as all men do. He has no advantage as he deals with the natural world or with social affairs. He must pay his debts, meet his scheduled dead-lines, and get along with his neighbors just as any other man. It is the glory of the Gospel that by his faith the believer can get help that enables him to handle all these problems in victory and joy.

Living as a Christian is as much different from living as a person as living as a wife is different from living as a woman. To be sure every wife is a woman, but not every woman is a wife. No woman can ever live as a wife in herself, by her own wisdom and ability. By no means can a woman alone live as a wife. There must be a husband. She is a wife only if and as she has a husband. Just so no human being alone can be a Christian or live as a Christian. To be sure every Christian is a human being, but not every human being is a Christian. "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Romans 8:9). "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:12).

Becoming a Christian is much like getting married. The basic issues of living do not change. The married person must work for food, secure clothing and shelter, and must live as a neighbor in his society, just the same after his marriage as before: the pattern does not actually change. But now there is more power to do these things: additional power, that is, more than his own. The married person is not alone. Even so with the Christian. The believing person receives comfort and encouragement from the Lord which provide strength and assurance which in turn lead into victory and glory. "The joy of the Lord shall be your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

Another way of describing the matter of becoming a Christian is to say that it is a "New Birth." When we say the Christian is a born again person, we recognize that now he has added a new nature. Paul speaks of our human nature as "the old man." This we inherit with our bodies from our human parents as the flesh. He speaks of our new nature as "the new man." This we receive from God through Christ by His Word as the Spirit. So every Christian has in him these two natures: in the flesh, he is a human being and has all the responsibilities of a man among men, dealing with the things of the world; in the Spirit, he is a child of God and has all the benefits and the responsibilities of a child in communion with his Heavenly Father, receiving all the grace of God through Christ Jesus.

Just as the first "old man" is dependent upon the environment in this world for food, so the second "new man" is dependent upon the Word of God and the power of God out of the Spiritual world for nourishment and strength. The Christian while he lives here must face all the problems in this world which anyone else faces. Being a believer does not lessen any of the usual demands, nor does it make any daily task lighter. However being a believer means that the Lord will help the Christian in his heart to face these problems with confidence and do his part with strength.

This means more than simply guiding him as to what he should do. Actually when a soul receives Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and is regenerated as a Child of God, God sends the Holy Spirit into his heart. The Holy Spirit then will function to keep the believer in communion with the Father, and to activate the will of the living Lord Jesus Christ in his inner being: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit as "love, joy, peace . . . temperance." Any believer can have more or less of this fruit, according to the extent he is yielded to the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit works in more strength there is more fruit.

By looking closely at this fruit it will be noted there is no reference to the actual deeds of the believer. The Christian must still do a day's work for a day's pay; he must still live with his family and his neighbors; he must still endure suffering and distress according to his circumstances. Being blessed in the operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart does not change anything in this world: the Christian must meet the issues of living just as they are.

The natural man in living is depending upon himself and upon other men. With the natural disposition to do as he wants to do in serving himself and his own people, the natural man comes into conflict with other men bent on serving their own interests. Man is sinful, and sin in a man's heart prevents him from seeing his own interests advanced by yielding to others. He is inclined to do as he will regardless of who else is hurt.

The Spiritual man is inwardly controlled and directed by the mind of Christ, with the one ambition: to obey God. Thus the Christian, being yielded into the will of God, responds to the Holy Spirit who directs him in his living. In dealing with other men he will not look at men in themselves as they are. Were he to do this he would have to judge others to decide who is worthy and for how much. Thus he is led to overlook the shortcomings of men. He is so yielded to the Holy Spirit that he is first of all thinking of God. He sees himself "bought with a price." He is "not his own." He belongs to God who is now his Father and he wants to please God by doing His will. He trusts God and believes that He "doeth all things well."

How the Christian acts is largely determined by the situation in which he lives. In his home, in his neighborhood, in his daily work, in his community, in his nation, in his world, in every place, there are things he must do, actions he must decide and perform. The Christian will accept all his affairs as being under God's hand, and he will respond to every situation "as unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:24; Ephesians 6:6-8; Colossians 3:17). The practical study of the needs of the hour and the choice of the several alternatives to be noted before him are all matters in which his very best performance will be done "as unto the Lord." Because he has basically denied himself, is "crucified with Christ," "reckons himself to be dead," he can see more clearly what is involved and can act wisely. His concern is to do the will of God that he might be "well pleasing in His sight."

Such yielding to God in obeying the indwelling Holy Spirit produces a certain result in the experience of the believer. Because of the way this process works the result is called the "fruit of the Spirit." Much can be learned about the appearance of this result by considering what the word "fruit" implies.

Living as a Christian is very much like cultivating a garden. No piece of land left to itself will produce a garden. Even at the time of the creation it is written "and the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2:8). "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15). All the elements necessary were provided: soil, sunshine, rain, etc.; but the man had to plant the seeds, hoe the weeds, prune the plants, protect from destruction, etc. Just so in spiritual living, a man must do something to have something.

Any man's garden has the same conditions as all other plots of ground around it. What actually grows in the garden depends on the gardener: one plot of ground produces beans, beside it another plot produces apples. The conditions are the same: temperature, sunlight, rain, storms, etc.; but the harvest in each is different. Each gardener chooses what he wants to plant because of what he wants to harvest.

One person wants Christ Jesus to live in his heart and to rule in him so that he may do the will of God; and another person wants to live as he personally pleases: yet living in the same community means they will face the same situations and conditions. The sun will be just as hot, the cost of groceries will be just as high, the danger of death will be just as real for the Christian as for the unbeliever.

The gardener decides what his garden will produce. There is nothing in the garden itself that decides whether it will produce apples or cherries. If the gardener plants an apple tree there may be apples, but there will not be cherries! If that garden produces beans it will be because beans were planted there. Likewise there is nothing in human nature that determines that a man will have the Holy Spirit operative in him. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7-8).

Another great truth is that "fruit" will appear without human manipulation. This is not true, as we have seen, in the selecting of the seed: the gardener decides whether his garden will produce beans or potatoes. And to some extent this is also not true so far as "dressing it and keeping it" is concerned. The gardener who is diligent and competent can cause more beans to grow. Pruning the trees can result in more and better apples. But the process of growth and maturation which produce the beans and the apples operate quite independently from the gardener's actions. The gardener does not use any device to stretch the bean pods to a specified length, nor does he use a paint brush to tint the color of the apples. English peas will be harvested from plants that grew from English peas, and Jonathan apples will grow on Jonathan apple trees each and every season. It is the seed that determines the kind of beans, and it is the tree that determines the kind of cherries. The part played by the gardener was to choose which he would plant.

The fruit of the Spirit will appear where the Holy Spirit is operating, just as the works of the flesh will be manifested wherever the flesh is in control. Living according to the flesh is natural and for the unbelieving person this is normal. This is not to say that all are alike and each natural person does everything others may do. Not all fleshly conduct is the same, just as not all weeds are the same. But if beans are not planted in the garden, there will be no beans. Beans are not natural to that garden: they must be planted. Even so the Holy Spirit is not natural in the nature of man. God must send the Holy Spirit into the heart (Galatians 4:6); then "fruit" can be cultivated and harvested.

There is a sense in which "fruit" is actually "incidental" to the gardening process. It seems to be rather a "by-product" of a more basic operation! Consider the time of fruit-bearing in the course of the life of a tree. An apple tree may bear ripe apples for perhaps two weeks in the year. That tree must live fifty-two weeks in order to bear fruit for two weeks! It is actually the living that counts. The orchard owner keeps the tree living! He does not actually handle the developing, ripening fruit! The apples grow by themselves in the process of living. The orchard owner works to promote the living of the tree: plows the soil, fertilizes, irrigates, prunes, sprays, protects. The tree bears the fruit in the process of living, without any direct manipulation by the gardener. This truth can be seen in Spiritual experience when one notes that the "fruit of the Spirit" occurs only on occasion. Communion with the Lord should be as constant as living, but the several qualities of conduct grouped together as "fruit" are not manifest all the time. This will be seen more clearly when each quality is examined by itself, but by way of illustration consider "gentleness." This can be seen only in situations where the manner of treatment might be rough. A person might live for days without facing a situation where "gentleness" would be required. Then suddenly a situation might arise where "to be gentle" would require special grace. At this point the Christian, with the Holy Spirit operating in him, would be "gentle" because the Spirit was working in

him. But the Spirit must be in him all the time, day and night, day by day in order to be evident in the believer at the moment when being "gentle" was important.

It is significant that Paul used the word "fruit" instead of "fruits." These nine qualities of conduct do not occur separately. They are like a cluster of grapes on one stem. This is important to note when one thinks of nurturing this "fruit." These characteristics develop together at the same time.

Sometimes an error appears in Christian Education when the pupils are asked to study these qualities in order to reproduce them. This assumes that the production of each is a matter of deliberate design. Thus students may be asked to describe "love" as if it were something in itself that could be produced at will. At best such efforts would produce some conduct, offered as something one could do, that would look like "love." It is simple to see that this would be, of course, an "imitation" of "love." In contrast, consider the truth: "We love Him because He first loved us!"

It can be helpful to think of these characteristics as the colors of the spectrum of white light. All the colors of the rainbow are in every beam of sunlight. They all are there at any one time. They may not always come into vision, but they are all present. It is not necessary to think of them as being so many separate colors. Just as these colors of the rainbow are present in light, so these traits of personal conduct are in the working of the Holy Spirit.

The "light" can be thought of as the presence of Christ in the fellowship of communion made possible by the Holy Spirit in the heart. This loving communion between Christ Jesus as the Bridegroom and the believer as a member of the Church, the Bride, continues unbroken all the time. When the believer faces whatever situation he may be in, his circumstances become the glass prism through which the presence of Christ within him shines. The circumstances will cause refraction of the "light" so the various rainbow colors will appear. The nine traits listed by Paul are like these colors. They may not all appear at any one time. Specific circumstances will bring forth first one hue and then another tint. Once there may be "longsuffering," again there may be "goodness," then there may be "meekness," or several may appear as a blend in another situation. But always they are derived from the white light of His presence made real in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

What has been noted is involved in the origin and nature of this fruit. In keeping with his theme in Galatians Paul is stressing the importance of receiving the Holy Spirit and yielding to His guidance. The Galatians had been misled into focussing attention upon their own actions which Paul speaks of as "works." They fell into the snare of seeking to grow in the grace of God by regulating their conduct according to certain standards. Looking at one's own works, even in the ideal, is still looking at self. There is no help, no power, no salvation in this (Galatians 2:16).

On the other hand, recognition of the results of having the Holy Spirit at work, as reported in the Scriptures, may call forth similar conduct in any present situation. Desire to act in certain ways to please God will be aroused as the Holy Spirit shows the believer what Christ has done, is doing, and will do. Being aware of the love of Christ is like the shining of light into darkness.

As has been noted above, all the colors of the rainbow are in that light, just as the dynamic to produce all these traits are in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Always the grace of Christ will move the believer to seek to be well pleasing to God. Just what that would mean may not always be known to the believer despite his willingness to obey. In reading and studying the Bible, the Christian learns what would please God. Then as he faces the issues of living, the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures will show him what the will of God is. Thus he will be helped to choose such actions as are pleasing to God.

Thus when Paul wrote of the "fruit" of the Spirit he was referring to this heartfelt desire in the believer to be well pleasing to God. In this frame of mind certain behavior will always follow, which Paul

describes in Galatians 5:22-23. These characteristics are found wherever the Holy Spirit is showing the things of Christ to the believer. Each of these traits can best be understood when the presence of Christ Jesus is related to the circumstances which make up the situation as it is recognized.

"Love" is not how I feel about anybody or anything, but why I do as I do toward that person or that thing. There is no sentiment in love: even as there is no approval nor compromise in judgment: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This wonderful verse does not mean that God was pleased with, or that He approved, or even that He condoned, the world. It does not say that He liked the world. There is no reference to His feelings, but to His action: "He so loved . . . that He gave . . ." The Greek language has words that mean sentiment, affection, approval, preferment, delight, etc., but the word "love" is not one of these.

It has been said that "love" is almost an adverb because it refers only to an aspect of something that is done to or done for some person or thing to promote welfare or happiness. There is no such thing as "love" in itself. There is no such stuff that can be added to or mixed in with something else. Only when I am acting about anything or to anybody can you see "love." If I do what I do for the sake of someone else, so that welfare and happiness is promoted, then I do what I do "in love."

The opposite of "love" is "selfishness." When I do anything to advance my own interests there is no love. When I act so that someone else is helped, then in that much I love that person. Here one can understand how one can love his enemies. If a person acts toward his enemy in such a way that he is actually helping his enemy, this is love. It may be that he will put his enemy in jail. It may be that he will report small pox in his enemy's house, which would mean quarantine. Superficial thinking could say that he hurt his enemy, but actually what he did was good for him. If he intended what he did to be for the welfare of that person, then he acted in love. It would be right to say: he loved that person.

The meaning of Paul's statement can be seen still more clearly when it is remembered that the believer acts for the benefit and happiness of another person, because God created that person, gave His Son to die for that person and wants to bring that person to Himself. And so the Christian acts for the welfare and happiness of the other person because that is the will of God. Christ died for all men. When the Spirit of Christ prevails in my heart I will do anything I can to show the love of God to anybody, to all and especially to the one I am acting toward.

"Love" may be prompted by feelings. The Good Samaritan had compassion as he saw the man on the road. Moved by compassion, he proceeded to help the man: this was "love." But it would appear that "love" was not something the Good Samaritan carried with him as a commodity, or even a personal ability or strength. He could have had the disposition to do this – but it was the doing of it that was love.

"Joy" is an inner experience of elation which the believer has when he is personally conscious of his reconciliation to God (Romans 5:11). Happiness and gladness are terms that bring a sense of bright good fortune, and are often used to describe fellowship with the Lord. Joy seems to have deeper, wider meaning and is well suited to describe the mind of a believer when he realizes his fellowship with God cannot be broken. "The joy of the Lord shall be your strength." This joy can be experienced as real even in times of grief or loss. Just to know "He will never leave me nor forsake me" fills the heart and mind with "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

This assurance does not depend on anything the believer can do, but entirely on the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just because it depends on Him, the believer can have this confidence without

reservation. Nothing on earth can give this joy, and nothing can take it away. It is of God and for that reason the Christian can "rejoice evermore."

"Peace" is not the cessation of all activity nor is it dependent upon the elimination of all opposition or sinful actions. Jesus of Nazareth could say "My peace I give unto you" even though He knew He was facing rejection and Calvary's Cross. Evidently He did not need to be out of this world to have peace. And Christians share His peace. This does not mean there will be no conflict, but it does mean that victory is available through Christ.

"Peace" is an achievement. It can be sought and it can be made. It may be secured even in the midst of trouble or suffering. When the believer is persuaded that all is in the hands of the living God, and that God intends to care for him, the believer can be in "perfect peace," because he trusts God. When the Holy Spirit shows the believer that "God spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all" He brings "peace" into the heart of the Christian.

"Long-suffering" refers to the patience of the believer who is trusting God to achieve His benevolent purpose. It is not a matter of "will power," or of strength of determination, or of persistence of purpose or of willingness to endure pain. At one time or another the "long-suffering" Christian may seem to be exhibiting personal resolution. Actually the believer is reminded by the Lord Himself with whom he is kept in communion by the Holy Spirit, that Christ will achieve the will of God in victory over all circumstances that may seem to thwart and hinder. Because his confidence in Christ is unshaken he is able to endure with hopeful expectation, even though the immediate circumstances are hard to bear.

"Gentleness" is listed significantly just after "long-suffering." When a person endures hardship in his own strength, there is inevitable resentment against those who cause the prolongation of the suffering. Thus a person weary in distress can be irritable and harsh in the feeling of having been imposed upon. To be gentle after one has endured suffering over a long period is possible when one is aware that the whole situation is under God's Providence and also when one knows he can cast his burden on the Lord. With complete confidence in God's wisdom and trust in His benevolence, the Christian can accept the circumstances as "from the Lord," and knowing that God is faithful and will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able (I Corinthians 10:13) he can endure with quietness and confidence. Having no sense of personal responsibility in meeting the demands of the situation, and assurance that God is over all in control, the Christian can be "gentle" in humble gratitude toward God and in sincere love toward all men.

"Goodness" has reference to the effect the Christian's conduct has upon others. This term does not so much refer to the absence of evil as it indicates the beneficial results which follow the actions taken. The believer is "good" because he is "good for" others. When the heart is reminded of how Christ Jesus gave Himself for the sinner, it is moved to do what will be helpful. Such conduct will not be because the Christian is so gracious in himself, nor because he has any reason by looking at others to feel that they deserve such help. It will be because God has been so kind and so good for the believer that there is a natural response in wanting to be good for others.

"Faith" indicates an acceptance of the promises of God. The believer understands that everything is under the hand of God, and that in each situation there is a will of God that can be obeyed to personal advantage. In any situation the Christian will seek the mind of God as to what he should do to please

Him. When a person acts in a given way because he feels this is the will of God, he is acting in faith. It is not so much that he has confidence in his own judgment, or his own ability as if he were believing in himself – but he has total confidence in God and seeks only to choose what God leads him to choose. Having learned to trust God about his soul's welfare, he has no difficulty in obeying God in everything. Such obedience to the guidance of God is "faith."

"Meekness" is only possible when a person has been unjustly treated. When a person has been unfairly or harshly treated there is a natural reaction of resentment which tempts the victim to retaliate. This is not the way Jesus of Nazareth responded to injustice. It was His way to answer nothing to such wrongs. The will of Christ made real by the Holy Spirit affects the Christian in such a way that he follows the pattern of the Lord Jesus because he wants to please Him. His treatment of the wrongdoer is not inspired by thoughts of him, nor of possible consequences. He reacts toward the other man in the way he feels Christ would approve and God will bless.

"Temperance" should better be translated as "self-control." Here again it is obvious that "self-control" is not exercised because of its social bearing, nor more even for its personal effect. The Christian does not control himself as a clever means of achieving self-advancement. It will be remembered that in following Christ the first principle is to deny self (Matthew 16:24). When the Holy Spirit keeps the things of Christ in the consciousness of the believer the commitment to deny self is constantly refreshed. Any soul in loving communion with the Lord will be led to deny self in pleasing the Lord.

Such is the blessing brought into the life of the believer by the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In amazing fashion this fruit enriches the Christian and is a blessing to others. The wonder seems even more remarkable when it is noted that such results are not aimed at by the believer. When Moses came down after forty days on the mount with God, he "Wist not that the skin of his face shone" (Exodus 34:29). And yet there is something the Christian can do to help these results appear.

It has been noted above that the believer has in him two natures: the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh which focuses attention upon self would naturally be "contrary to" the affect of the Spirit. So Paul points the way to more and more blessing when he writes "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24). This is to release the Spirit to respond to the will of God in Christ. When a soul receives Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord, God sends forth the Holy Spirit into the heart. The Holy Spirit energizes and directs the regenerated soul to obey the Lord.

This relationship can be entered into in one act of commitment. The soul can receive Christ Jesus as He died for our sins on Calvary in one act of believing. God will send forth His Holy Spirit into the heart in one significant action like Pentecost. Then the Christian can live moment by moment, day by day, in the light of His Presence. The Holy Spirit Himself will work in the believer "to will and to do" the will of God. The result will be this glorious fruit which will glorify the Father (John 15:8). "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).