

The Holy Spirit 6

The Fruit of the Spirit

Today, in our series on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we come to the Fruit of the Spirit. The phrase comes in Paul's letter to the Galatians:-

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23 NKJV)

He is telling them to live by the Spirit, not by the desires of the flesh:-

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16 NKJV)

Let me just remind you that everyone in this world is born of the flesh, that is to say our natural birth gives us a body and a soul. We are world conscious and self conscious. But our human spirit, that part of us designed to be God conscious, is not functioning properly and so we operate on two cylinders, body and soul, which the Bible describes as 'flesh', instead of three. We need to be born again of the Holy Spirit if our own spirit is to be brought to life. What Paul is telling the Galatians is that although they have been born again, they are living as they used to do, following the prompting of the flesh; and he lists a number of shameful acts - immorality, drunkenness, jealousy, rage and so on. He contrasts this with what he calls the fruit of the Spirit.

Before we look at this, however, I need to clarify two things. First, do not confuse the fruit of the Spirit with the gifts of the Spirit; they are totally different. The fruit has to do with personal attitudes and character; the gifts are abilities. The fruit is to do with us, the people we are; the gifts are simply something we

carry from one person (God) to another as messengers and need not affect us as individuals at all. Let me give you an illustration. When I was vicar of a church, on occasions one member of the congregation would give some money to another - perhaps to pay for an air fare to enable a parent to visit a son or daughter living abroad. Because they wanted to do this anonymously, they would ask me to deliver it to the person involved. I was simply the messenger. I had the joy of seeing the person's face as he or she opened the envelope, but it wasn't my generosity, it cost me nothing except the journey and the time. It didn't affect my character, make me a better person. It was important, of course, that I should be trustworthy, and should be known to the giver, but the gift itself did not affect me. It is like that with the gifts of the Spirit.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: (1 Corinthians 12:7 NKJV)

Paul is saying that every Christian has at least one gift imparted by the Holy Spirit, but it is not for him or herself, it is for the benefit of others. Of course, it is good that we should be holy and righteous if we are to be entrusted with such a gift, but not essential. In the Old Testament Samson's character left much to be desired, yet God used him and gave him the gift of supernatural strength. So there is no cause for boasting of any gift we may have. We are simply carrying something from God to others and, in itself, it has no affect on us, the person we are.

With the fruit of the Spirit, however, this does affect us; it is supremely to do with the person we are, or at least the person we are to become. It is part of the Spirit restoring the original image in which we were created and making us Christ like. Because of this, some believers say that they would prefer to have the fruit rather than the gifts. If we had to choose, they may be right, although the work of God would be sadly impoverished if the

gifts to accomplish it were to be withdrawn. But why get involved in debating such a choice, when no choice has to be made? We are all given spiritual gifts and we are all to show forth the fruit.

The second thing to understand is that Paul speaks of the gifts in the plural but of the fruit in the singular. That is to say, there are many gifts and different believers have different gifts, probably more than one but certainly not all. But there is only one fruit with many different aspects, and every believer is to manifest them all. We cannot say, "I have been given the fruit of joy but not of peace," or "the fruit of love but not of patience." The Lord would say to us, "Then work on it – with me." No, it is the whole character of Christ that the Spirit is working to reproduce in you. So never make the mistake of referring to the fruits of the spirit in the plural - there is only one fruit with nine aspects and you are to have them all.

As we turn to consider just what the fruit is, do remember that fruit takes time to form and mature. The seed becomes a plant and the plant produces flowers and from the flowers come the fruit which has to grow, and in due course there is the harvest. Selwyn Hughes tells the story of the Christian who wore a large badge bearing the letters,

PBPWMGHNFWMY.

and when asked what it meant replied,

“Please be patient with me, God has not finished with me yet.”

We are all called to be saints but we are saints in the making and we need to be patient with each other, indeed patience is one aspect of the fruit, as we shall see. The point is not have we arrived? but are we on the journey? are we changing? It is a

matter of co-operating with the Holy Spirit. We have seen time and again that we are not to be robots but men and women able to make a free-will offering of ourselves moment by moment to God. It makes me sad, no, more than that, it makes me angry when I hear a Christian say, "Well, I'm like that, you'll have to take me as you find me. I can't change how I am." And they use that as an excuse for their bad temper or their outspokenness which hurts others. No, they can't change how they are, but if they are a Christian then the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within them and he is changing them, restoring the image of God. Such people have given up, they are quenching the Spirit, they are not co-operating with him in his work of restoring the image of God in them.

All of us... seeing the glory of the Lord... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NRSV)

We are being transformed; it is a process and a progress. I am sure you will recognise in yourself my own experience when I have acted wrongly - lost my temper, or said or done something unkind. At first, I try to ignore it, but it niggles away in me. Then I try to excuse it, "It was their fault, they did such and such first." Eventually, I give in and phone up or write a letter or, preferably if it is possible, go and see the person I have hurt and say sorry. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. As we allow him to work, so he develops his directing. We will find that instead of it being after we have acted wrongly, it is just before that we sense a warning within us, "I am about to do something wrong." We still do it and so we still have to ask forgiveness but, as we progress, so we learn to obey that warning; indeed, the warning gets clearer and clearer every time we respond rightly to the prompting of the Spirit within our spirit and we slowly reach the stage when we obey before we act in a wrong and un-Christlike manner. So the fruit is formed and ripens.

Some may be prompted to ask that if it is the work of the Spirit to produce the fruit, why detail what the fruit is, will he not produce it in us anyway? Because, as I say, the work of restoring the image of God in us is a progress, a journey. If you set out on a journey which you have not undertaken before, it is helpful to look up the route on the map prior to setting out rather than rely solely upon the signposts along the way. Of course, we need the signposts - especially if there is a temporary diversion over some part of the route: but it is helpful to know the towns and areas to look out for on the way. It is an encouragement to know we are heading in the right direction. We can work alongside the Spirit as he works alongside us.

So let us look briefly at the various aspects of the fruit; first LOVE. There is a special New Testament word for love, 'agape'. It is different from every other sort of love in that all other love is drawn from us by the person to whom we show the love. We see something in them which is attractive and desirable. It may be simply that they love us first and we respond to that because there is in each of us that which wants to be wanted. But agape love does not depend upon the object of our love at all but on us. It is not that it is drawn from us, it is freely given by us and so it is indiscriminate. Christ commanded us to love one another and it cannot depend on feelings because no one can order another what he or she must feel. Feelings arise and we then have to do our best to control them. Agape love is an act of will; we *decide* that irrespective of our feelings we will do the loving thing and seek the highest good of another. That will mean loving the unlovely. But that is exactly what the love of God is:-

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 NKJV)

and it is that love which the Spirit is seeking to reproduce in us:

The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5 NKJV)

Incidentally, notice in passing that when Paul is speaking of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, he contrasts them with love, but he doesn't call love a gift, he calls it 'a more (or the most) excellent way.' Do you know the greatest need of the human soul? It is not success, although many think that it is. It is not physical healing, although that is important. It is to be accepted; to know that I matter to someone. That is why the cross is so important because when we understand it, or at least something of it, we hear God saying, to us individually, "I love you". If you want to show Christ to someone else, love them.

Then there is JOY. Just as agape love does not depend on the person we love being lovely, so joy does not depend on outward circumstances. It is not to be confused with happiness. The astonishing thing is that those who have suffered torture and beatings for their faith have testified that they have experienced deep joy even while they have been in extreme pain. Indeed it is the joy which has sustained them through it. It is certainly supernatural in the sense that it is spiritual. It arises from the presence of God as he comes to us through the Holy Spirit.

And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, (1 Thessalonians 1:6 NKJV)

They were in much affliction, but they had joy brought to them by the Holy Spirit. Don't think, however, that you always have to be suffering to experience the joy of the Lord. I hope you have known times of overwhelming joy as you contemplate and worship the Lord for who he is; and I hope those times become more and more frequent.

The next aspect of the fruit is PEACE. It is the task of the Holy Spirit to declare or apply the things of Christ and so it is Christ's peace that he gives us. Do you remember at the last supper Jesus said to his disciples:

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27 NKJV)

It is a special form of peace that Jesus gives, not that of the world. What is the world's idea of peace? An absence of stress and tension. In that sense it is a negative thing, it is when noise and conflict are not around us; it depends on what is *not* there. But the peace of Christ is positive and overcomes the things that cause stress and conflict. Think of the situation when Jesus spoke these words. Judas was betraying him at that moment and he knew that the cross lay immediately ahead, yet here he was speaking of his peace. Like love and joy, this peace does not depend upon outward circumstances. Do you remember the occasion when Jesus was with his disciples in a little boat and a violent storm blew up? They were in panic thinking they were about to drown. He was asleep in the stern. He may well have been tired, but that does not explain it. It was deeper than that. He walked every moment in the will of his heavenly Father. If it was his Father's will that he should reach the other side of the sea, he would get there. If it was his will that he should drown, then he would go at once to his Father. Whatever happened all was securely in the hands of his Father, so Jesus was at peace and went to sleep. If only we had the same trust, we would have the same peace.

There is one caveat I would add. It seems to me that there is one situation where temporarily we do not have that peace and that is when we face temptation. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus

was tempted to avoid the cross and his agony was so great that his sweat actually contained blood. It was once he had made his decision to obey his Father's will that the peace returned. We see that immediately afterwards when Judas returns with the soldiers to arrest him. Christ is in command of the situation. Do not misunderstand; I am not saying that temptation is sin, it isn't. Have you noticed what Matthew says about the temptations of Jesus directly after his baptism?

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1 NKJV)

The Holy Spirit put him in the place of temptation so temptation itself is not sin. God allows us to experience it to strengthen us. Botanists tell us that plants which have had to stand up to the buffeting of the wind are healthier and stronger than those in a greenhouse. Once we use our will to resist temptation, the Holy Spirit is there to strengthen us in our resolve and give us his peace..

PATIENCE. This is a lovely trait of character. It can be translated as long-suffering or tolerance. It is having the power to take revenge but not doing so. Many people can be patient if to be otherwise would bring suffering on themselves. An employee may appear to be patient with a difficult employer but only because if he wasn't he would lose his job. The sort of patience the Spirit gives is that of God towards us. He could destroy us, but he saves us. For us in practical every day life, it is having the power to say or do something unkind to someone who annoys us, and not doing it.

KINDNESS is the positive side of patience. If patience is not using our power to hurt, kindness is reaching out to encourage and help. Why are we so slow to congratulate or to thank others? Is it because they are better at something than we are and we are

jealous? How much happier every church fellowship would be if we were all looking out for opportunities to encourage each other. This word is the one used to describe Christ's yoke:

"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:30 NKJV)

There are some people who are good and stimulating but you always have to be on the alert with them in case they point out something wrong in your reasoning - and the annoying thing is they are probably right. There are others with whom you can just relax; they often have the gift of hospitality. They are easy. The Holy Spirit is seeking to make us kind like that.

GOODNESS. This balances the kindness we have just described. It is not right to be so easy, so undemanding that we countenance wrong rather than hurt someone by objecting to it. A parent needs to be kind and encouraging to his or her children, so that they know they can come to them to tell them anything without rejection; but they need also to train their children in right or good behaviour. To do that, they need to be inherently good themselves, teaching by example as well as instruction. But it is not a goody-goody goodness. It involves a generosity of spirit. Not setting right in a proud or superior way but from a genuine desire to benefit others.

FAITHFULNESS. This could mean two things; to have faith or to be faithful. In its context it is almost certainly the latter. It is talking about trustworthiness. As a vicar what a joy it was for me to have people who were reliable. If they said they would do something, they would do it, I didn't have to spend my time checking up on them. If they said they would be there at six they were there at six and not five past.

GENTLENESS. This is a very difficult word to translate into English. The Authorised Version has 'meekness'; but unfortunately today that has overtones of being weak. In fact it is the very opposite. It is a person who is so sure of his position in Christ that he or she does not have to assert themselves. You will have met the sort of person who is always letting you know how important he is. Christians can do it in a very holy way - "I had the joy of leading so and so to the Lord. And then the Lord used me to heal them... but you did notice didn't you that *I* led them to the Lord and that he used *me* to heal them?" 'Gentleness' doesn't really explain it because that has to do with how we behave towards other people, whereas this is an attitude of mind. As long as we are right with the Lord, then everything is all right. He can choose whether we are up front or out of sight round the back where nobody sees us; oh, and we don't mind if we are not thanked.

Finally, SELF-CONTROL. This is basically just what it says. In particular it relates to response. I have said many times that we cannot control all that happens to us, but we can always control how we respond to what happens to us, and how we respond makes us into the person we will be when we stand before Christ on the last great day. Self control enables us to respond rightly.

If you think about it, all these aspects of the fruit of the Spirit simply describe Christ. When we are born again, the Spirit puts us into Christ and Christ into us, so that the original image of God in which we were created is restored.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV)

Do not quench the Spirit; allow him to produce his fruit in you.