

Truth for Today

The Bible explained

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Some Bible lists: The Fruit of the Spirit

If you visit the Geneva region of Switzerland in the summertime, you will see the lower slopes of the mountains covered in grape vines. It is especially nice to be there when the first harvest of grapes is brought into the local caves. You can buy bunches of beautiful sweet grapes and also watch them being pressed before they are stored for wine making. It is a joy to stand by the press as the juice flows out and fill a glass of freshly squeezed juice. There is no better taste of summer in the Alps!

When I think of the fruit of the Spirit I always picture a bunch of grapes. The Lord Jesus gives us a good reason for using grapes as an illustration of the fruit of the Spirit when, in John 15, He says, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing"* (John 15:1-5).

You may remember when Joshua sent spies into the land of Canaan, in the Book of Numbers, they returned carrying an enormous bunch of grapes from Eshcol. Even today, this iconic event is the logo of the tourism board of Israel. *"And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence"* (Numbers 13:23-24, Authorised Version).

The grapes of Eschol provide a striking example of abundant fruitfulness produced by a healthy plant, and a vivid reminder that God wants us, in the words of the Lord Jesus in John 15, to produce *"fruit"*, *"more fruit"*, and finally, *"much fruit"* (John 15:1-5).

In Galatians 5 Paul uses the metaphor of fruit to describe the life of the Lord Jesus Christ reproduced by the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian as a result of walking in fellowship with God. He writes: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law"* (Galatians 5:22-23).

Rather like a bunch of grapes, Paul tightly packs these extraordinary characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit into two verses of Scripture, rather like a bunch of grapes.

I was in at some meetings in Scotland recently when a friend quoted DL Moody on the subject of the Fruit of the Spirit. Using words from the King James Version of the Bible he wrote:

Love is the main thought, and what follows are attributes of love.

Joy is love rejoicing,

Peace is love resting or reposing,

Long-suffering is love enduring,

Kindness is love in gentleness,

Goodness is love in action,

Faith is love in trusting,

Meekness is love stooping,

Temperance is love restraining.

I think this is a helpful summary and this morning I would like to expand each of these themes.

Love

Love in this passage is the Greek word *agapē*, the word used for God's love towards people. The Lord Jesus Christ perfectly expressed the love of God and the Holy Spirit produces this love in the lives of Christians. In Romans 5:5

Paul explains that the love of God has been shed aboard in our hearts - and thus enables us to love others as God loves. It is an unconditional love. In Matthew 5:44 Jesus gives us a sense of what it means when He speaks about loving your enemies, *"blessing those that curse you, doing good to those that hate you."* I think, also, in Galatians 5 there is the thought of loving our fellow Christians in the light of what Jesus says in John 13:34-36: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

This love also manifests the characteristics we read of in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8: *"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails ..."*

It does us good to reflect on whether these remarkable characteristics are being produced in our lives, and to test ourselves in regard to the reality of the love of God being seen in us.

Joy

Joy is the next in the list of characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. Peter writes of this joy in his first letter: *"...that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith - the salvation of your souls"* (1 Peter 1:7-9).

This joy comes from the experience of God's love for us. It is not based on our circumstances, but upon our fellowship with God. It is remarkable that Peter and John and other apostles, and later Paul and Silas, all experienced profound joy in the most adverse of circumstances (see Acts 5:41 and Acts 16:25).

This joy should mark us as the children of God. John explains that it is connected to our fellowship with God our Father and His Son Jesus Christ: *"...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full"* (1 John 1:3-4).

Peace

The third characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit is peace. This refers to the peace of God in our hearts. It is expressed by the quietness and contentment that comes from living close to the Lord and knowing and doing His will. The Lord Jesus speaks of this peace: *"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).

Paul enjoyed this peace and explained that it is experienced through an effective prayer life and implicit daily trust in God. So he encourages the Philippians to *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6-7).

These first three characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy and peace, are experienced from fellowship with God. God pours into our hearts His love, joy and peace; then, in turn, the next three characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit, patience, kindness and goodness, can be demonstrated in relation to our behaviour towards others.

I always like to relate this to the humble teapot. The teapot is passive but receives tea and boiling water and as result becomes full of one of the most refreshing drinks known to man. It is then moved by an outside force to deliver its contents to family, friends and strangers, and everyone benefits.

God pours his love, joy and peace into our opened hearts. This then results in us being used to pour blessing into the lives of others. To do this we need to be guided by His hand so that when He fills and blesses us we can be directed in such a way that others may profit from what God has done in our lives.

Patience

The first of next three characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit is patience towards others. Without the experience of God's love, joy and peace in our hearts, showing patience is a tall order. If we live in fellowship with God, daily seeking His presence, understanding and doing God's will, we will be equipped to express patience towards everyone we meet. This patience is characterised by self-restraint, especially when faced with provocation. Sometimes, when people rub us up the wrong way or irritate and annoy us, we try to subdue our inner feelings, but when pushed further

we often lose our tempers. This creates difficulty and stress, and sours relationships, particularly when it relates to repeated problems with the same people.

Our relationship with God is vital to our relationships with others. If we are happy in the presence of God, patience, consideration and interest in others will flow out and replace sterile attempts to simply control ill will. We will begin to act towards others as God has acted towards us.

Kindness

Kindness is a wonderful thing. Paul writes about the kindness of God in his letter to Titus: *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”* (Titus 3:3-5).

Kindness expresses a compassionate heart and a readiness to show grace to everyone in all circumstances. Sometimes it is conveyed in a look, a word, an act, or a simple gesture which conveys a genuine consideration for others and a willingness to support and help in whatever way we can.

It is interesting that Luke records in Acts 28 the kindness of the people of Malta following Paul’s shipwreck, when he writes: *“Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold”* (Acts 28:1-2).

The ability to be kind is a human attribute. But for Christians daily kindnesses to friends and strangers in an increasingly aggressive world are a fundamental expression of the kindness God has shown to us, and should not be under-estimated.

Goodness

Goodness is something which springs from within - goodness of heart. It is best seen in the character of Barnabas in the book of Acts. We first meet Barnabas at the end of Acts 4 when he sells his land and brings all the proceeds to the Apostles (Acts 4:36-37). He is the only person to be named in relation to this activity and stands in contrast to the deception of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. The action marks out Barnabas as someone who, in response to the Saviour’s love for him, becomes a self-sacrificing servant of Jesus Christ. Christians in Jerusalem were afraid and suspicious of Saul when he came to Jerusalem after his conversion because of his history of persecuting the Church. It was Barnabas who saw the goodness of God in life of Saul and brought him to the Apostles (Acts 9:27). Then following the remarkable work of God in Antioch, Barnabas was sent by the Apostle to encourage them because, *“he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch”* (Acts 11:24-26).

I think this description of Barnabas as a “good man” highlights the features of goodness as a characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit. Firstly it shows us that Barnabas sought the welfare and blessing of others and acted accordingly. Secondly, in going to find Saul to help in the work, it demonstrates a wonderful lack of self-interest and a willingness to include others with gift in the work of God. So often we see mixed motives and jealousies manifested amongst the people of God. Barnabas teaches us that goodness always seeks the blessing of others and does not act out of self interest. To repeat the words of 1 Corinthians 13: *“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own”* (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

I would like to go back to our illustration of the teapot. It seems to me we can look at love, joy, and peace as those features that which God pours into our hearts. As a result, patience, kindness and goodness are poured out of our hearts towards others. The last three characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, are, if you follow my picture, what the teapot looks like! Or, in other words, what the moral and spiritual features of the Spirit-filled life are.

Faithfulness

I think there are two aspects of faithfulness. Firstly, there is faithfulness towards God in the sense that we do not doubt Him, but trust His word and His promises, and own His faithfulness towards us as explained in Lamentations 3, *“Through the LORD’S mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I hope in him!’”* (Lamentations 3:22-24).

Secondly, and as a result of our faithfulness to God, there is our faithfulness and trustworthiness towards others. This underpins a consistency of life in accord with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Gentleness

Gentleness emerges from the inner strength of faith in God. The Christian is not to be characterised by pride, arrogance, self-promotion or bullying. The Christian is to be like Christ and, in Matthew 11:28-30, the Lord Jesus describes Himself in these words: *"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Earlier I referred to Barnabas' visit to Antioch. It was at Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). It was a name given to them by others because they were like the Lord Jesus. What a difference it must have made to the towns and cities which were suddenly populated by groups of people who were like Jesus!

Self-control

The final characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit is a very interesting one - self-control. The more old-fashioned word is "temperance", which we associate with self-control in regard to alcohol consumption. This is a problem Paul refers to in Ephesians 5, *"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit"* (Ephesians 5:18).

The Spirit of God within us provides the power of self-control needed to overcome the desires and temptations which cause so much damage and devastation personally and in society generally.

Before teaching us about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, Paul writes about these things describing them as the works of the flesh, *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Galatians 5:19-21).

As Christians we are all capable of the most dreadful thoughts and actions, and we have to recognise this. The matter of self-control is vital and it can only be achieved by submitting to the power of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts.

Conclusion

We have looked this morning at the wonderful characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. You might be thinking, How can these characteristics ever be seen consistently in my life? To answer this we have to remind ourselves it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. He produces this fruit. Our responsibility is to live our lives in fellowship with God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and with His people, and to allow God's word to direct and guide our lives. And, if it helps, have yourself a cup of tea to remind you of how God works!

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