

Developing the Fruit of the Spirit

The Fruit of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5:22,23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance : against such there is no law."

The Fruit of the Spirit is a gift of Christ whereby the Spirit works in those of us who are His, to produce fruit which becomes evident in every aspect of our lives. Though it is a gift, the sovereignty of God, however, does not deny our responsibility. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25). We can therefore develop this gift which is within us; we can develop the fruit by using the means. Prayer is one of the means as God has made it clear that in all things we are to seek after Him for blessing. Ask God for the grace to grow in the Fruit of the Spirit.

Love LOVE

Â - suffers long

Â - is kind

Â - does not envy

Â - does not parade itself

Â - is not puffed up

Â - doesn't behave rudely

Â - does not seek its own

Â - is not easily provoked

Â - thinks no evil

Â - does not rejoice in sin

Â - rejoices in the truth

Â - bears all things

Â - believes all things

Â - hopes all things

Â - endures all things

Â - never fails. We consider firstly love, a topic which the world seems to want to talk about all the time and yet can never fully define or perfectly attain. What is "Love"? Can we define it or even better, know it? All God's children may know it for it is His love that saves us and draws us to Him. We have no need to create a definition for God has done so already in that beautiful chapter on love in IÂ Corinthians 13. Stop and consider each point on the right, one by one. Examine your own life to see if these things are true of you, or where and how you might begin to practice these things.

As Christians, who should be the object of our love? Our Lord Jesus reminds us in Matthew 22:37-38 that the first and great commandment is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

So love to God is the first object with love to Christ flowing from that as Jesus says in John 8:42, "if God were your Father, ye would love me". The second object of our love is our neighbour, particularly the saints.

Obviously the central object of our love should be the triune God of Scripture and therefore if we wish to develop this fruit then we should concentrate on developing our love for God.

The best way to grow in love to God is to meditate on His great love in Christ to sinful man. Think on the great love of Jesus Christ in suffering and laying down His life for our sins.

Feed love on love - God's love for us is the best food for our love for Him. If we do not think regularly on His love then our love will soon die.

God's love is not only to be the motive but also the model for our love.

We must not love in word only but in actions, in truth, in self-sacrifice. Joy Having looked at 'love', we now consider joy, the second element of the complex known as the Fruit of the Spirit.

What is Joy?

Joy is a condition of deep happiness or contentment which only can be known truly, and experienced by the child of God. This true joy, of which the world knows nothing, is full in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (IÂ John 1:4); it is abundant and overflowing in our hearts (IIÂ Corinthians 8:2); it is everlasting (Isaiah 51:11); and, so profound and awesome is that joy, that sometimes it is unspeakable (IÂ Peter 1:8).

What causes Joy?

As already intimated, joy is a result of true faith alone (IÂ Peter 1:8) and comes of the Holy Spirit as He clears our

understanding of the darkness of sin and enables us to know the deep things of God. He gives joy in assuring us of the forgiveness of sins (Psalm 51:8,12). We also have the joy of

- the atonement
- living in the love of God
- possessing divine life
- unending grace
- the liberty, power and promise of prayer
- God as our Father
- Jesus as our Brother
- the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. Growing in Joy.

For growth in joy, read the Scriptures constantly - prefer it to other books. Search the Bible diligently, compare Scripture and joy will spread and deepen. (Jeremiah 15:16).

When our joy is full we will express it in praises and singing to our God (IIÂ Chronicles 29:30) and we are more than a match for evil. We bare up under the burden so much better, and temptation loses much of it's power. Pray for the spirit to bless and give you the joy of the Lord.

* Consider the joy of Mary in Luke 1:46-55.Â Peace We come in the third part of this series to look at Peace. Peace is something sought after by all people, and all hearts are restless, said Augustin, until they find their rest in God. Peace of mind is found only in the Christian who has learned to trust in God. Unfortunately and to our shame we as Christians often fail to avail ourselves of this gracious gift because we let our hearts be troubled and afraid.

What is the source of peace?

The only source of true peace is our triune God. Christ said "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid." We know from the very text we are looking at that it is part of the fruit of the Spirit, and in Philippians 4:7 we are told that peace is of God and that it passes all understanding.

How do believers obtain this peace?

Peace for believers comes as a result of the reconciliation made by Christ. Colossians 1:20 tells us that Christ has made peace through the blood of His cross. Peace is therefore a consequence of our justification. We are told in Romans 5:1, that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." But how do we obtain it? We are promised in Isaiah 26:3 that "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee." We lay hold on this peace therefore through faith.

Like each of the fruit, peace, although already belonging to the Christian, is something we are to strive after and cultivate if we are to fully appreciate and have a sense of it. We are reminded of this in both IIÂ Corinthians 13:11 and IIÂ Timothy 2:22.

Enemies of peace

The very fact that we are to strive for and cultivate peace ought also to warn us that there are enemies of peace. The three greatest enemies of peace are envy, fear and guilt.

- Envy eats up our insides (Proverbs 14:30). We will never have peace of mind if we are constantly planning how to acquire the next thing.
 - Fear is the result of failing to trust God, to take Him at His word or to claim His promises. (Proverbs 29:25).
 - Sometimes, because we fail to understand Christ's perfect work and all its precious implications, we suffer guilt. More often, our guilt is caused by unrepented sin which results in a troubled mind and a guilt complex - a lack of peace.
- Fighting the enemies

The solution to these three enemies of peace is not complicated but it is difficult for us because of remaining corruption. It takes effort but if consistently exercised the following suggestions can be very helpful in restoring peace of mind.

- Stop worrying. There are some things over which we have no control (Matthew 6:27). Worrying about them is a foolish waste of mental energy and is a drain on our spiritual strength.
- Control your imagination. (IIÂ Corinthians 10:5) We must learn to control and direct our imagination and not entertain every thought that enters our heads. We often allow our imagination to run wild and create frightening possibilities.
- Think positively. If we think on the positive things listed in Philippians 4:8 they provide a great antidote for the suspicious, critical, jealous or impure thoughts which so quickly undermine peace of mind.
- Praise. Think of all the wonders of God's work, and love in Jesus Christ, and be filled with praise. This will leave little room for negative thinking.
- Forget. While it is commendable to learn from past mistakes, it is useless and unhealthy to grieve endlessly over them. (Philippians 3:13-14).

- Expect. We may and should expect God to bless us, for He has promised that He will, and He does abundantly. (Ephesians 3:20).
- Refuge in comforts. Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit as our comforter and God has also given us many promises which should serve to comfort us. We should rest in these things. (IIÂ Corinthians 1:3) Long-suffering To be long-suffering is to be patient in bearing the afflictions and griefs which are a part of our Christian walk, and patient in bearing the offences and injuries of others. Long-suffering is the opposite of wrath and revenge.

As manifested in God

Long-suffering is an attribute of God (Exodus 34:6) and is manifested in His unchangeable goodness to His people whereby He brings them to full glory in Christ but by way of their suffering. So strong and sure is this attribute of God towards the elect, that Peter can write, "the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation." God's long-suffering is also manifested in His delay in exacting wrath and His dealing with sinful men (Romans 2:4, Romans 9:22).

As a Christian grace

Long-suffering is also an attribute of Christians, a gift of God graciously given to His people. We as Christians are to be long-suffering toward the afflictions and griefs which are a part of our Christian walk and toward the follies, weaknesses and injuries of men, whether they be our enemies or our fellow saints. Long-suffering keeps us from growing remiss and falling into sin through despair. It keeps us firm when facing daily evils in the valley of tears.

Practising long-suffering

The development of this attribute is not accomplished through the mere determination of our will. It is a gift of God; a fruit of the Spirit. If it is a gift then we must go to the Giver and ask Him to give it to us and to do so for Jesus sake.

We must pray for:

- The ability to see the end that the Lord has in mind for us. (Hebrews 11:10,26)
- The ability to see God's providential hand behind the actions of those who offend or persecute us and behind all the circumstances which bring us suffering. (Job 1:21)
- The ability to see God as our gracious, loving, heavenly Father, who is always purposing our good. (Romans 8:28).
- The ability to subject our desires and self-interest to the will of God; to be humble under the mighty hand of God. (IÂ Peter 5:6).
- The ability to accept, not just receive our Father's will to give us afflictions, troubles and persecution in our pilgrim way. (Job 1:21)
- The ability to leave the judging of others and of situations to God and the One who judges righteously. (IÂ Peter 2:23).
- The ability to look at the offender in a forgiving manner. (Matthew 18:21-22). Is there anyone in your life whom you find it hard to forgive or to suffer long? Then consider that "if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). Then pray for the grace to forgive and to suffer long.

The Lord is our best example. He is the only one who perfectly bears long with us, never striking out in sudden anger, but ceaselessly interceding for us day and night. He is a perfect Saviour, for He suffers long! Gentleness As with each of the fruit of the Spirit, gentleness is not an option for the child of God but an essential part of our Christian walk as we endeavour to be holy as our God is holy. It is important therefore to understand what is meant by gentleness as there are many who mistake what the practice of this grace entails.

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Gentleness is by no means a weakness. It is not a mere friendliness that one displays in order not to displease anyone, for that would entail the sins of insecurity and cowardice. No, gentleness must somehow be practiced while still adhering to truth and justice. What then is gentleness?

The Greek term, which has here been translated gentleness, is *chrestotes* and means "usefulness of persons to others"™ In other New Testament passages it is translated kindness (II Cor. 6:6; Eph. 2:7; Col. 3:11; Titus 3:4).

Gentleness, or kindness, is a mildness combined with tenderness: it is the opposite of all that is harsh, hard, sharp or bitter. A person who is gentle is easy to approach, is humble, speaks kindly, loves their enemies and does good to those who misuse and abuse them.

At the same time a gentle person has concern for sinners's™ repentance and restoration to the favour of God. Gentleness is not an excuse for cutting off the sharp edges of God's™ Word in an attempt to make it more palatable to men. On the contrary, gentleness describes the manner in which the truth is to be presented.

Developing this virtue.

As with all graces we must first ask the Lord to grant us the grace of gentleness by His Spirit. Then we ought to consider just how much we are the objects of God's kindness, despite our unworthiness. (Ephesians 4:4-7). This is also evident in Titus 3:2-6 where we are exhorted to be gentle/kind to others because of God's great love and kindness to us.

We ought especially to remember that gentleness is required when we face those who curse and hate us, it is not simply reserved for those who are kind to us as some would teach. (Matthew 5:43-48).

Finally, remember again that this is a command of God. It is a virtue that we must put on and that we must show to all.
Goodness What is Goodness?

Goodness is the desire and active disposition to promote the happiness of others which springs from the graces (fruit) of gentleness and longsuffering. Goodness is more than mere sentiment, it is taking up the opportunities that come our way everyday - the glass of water for the one who is thirsty, befriending the stranger, clothing the poor, visiting the sick etc. It can also at times be sharp as expressed in rebuking, correcting or chastening our neighbour for their sin. This of course is done in love, out of a desire for their salvation or sanctification. Goodness puts the needs of others first and requires personal sacrifice.

Our Great Example

The goodness of our almighty God is of course our great example. Our Lord describes Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6 as abundant in goodness. The Psalmist David speaks often of God's goodness. In Psalm 31:19 he describes this goodness as great towards all those that fear and trust Him. We are comforted in Psalm 52:1 with the fact that God's goodness is enduring, and promised in Psalm 65:4 that His goodness is satisfying.

God manifests His goodness in material blessings such as are mentioned in Matthew 5:45 and Acts 14:17. We, as His people, are thankful also for the manifestation of His goodness in spiritual blessings (Psalm 31:19) and forgiveness of sins (Psalm 86:5). As saints, we ought always to remember God's goodness (Psalm 145:7), rejoice in God's goodness (Exodus 18:9), and always be satisfied with it (Jeremiah 31:14).

Developing this Fruit

Firstly, as always, we must fall on our knees and ask God for the development of this grace. Be assured that He will give His Spirit and grace if you humbly, sincerely and continually ask for them.

Secondly we ought often to consider the goodness of God, as already we have done above. When we consider the goodness of God, we can find very practical examples in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. From our Saviour we ought to learn meekness if we will do good. Also we must learn a joy in doing the will of God. In Christ we see that doing good flows from a love for God. We love God because He first loved us; and because He loves us and does good for us, so we must love our neighbours and do good for them.

Thirdly, goodness is not a choice but, as we are reminded again and again in Scripture, it is a command of God - such as in Psalm 34:14, "Depart from evil, and do good." Compare also Psalm 37:3, 27; Romans 12:21, 15:2; and Galatians 6:10.

Lastly we are to have a concern for the spiritual well-being of those around us. The grace of goodness will automatically flow when we have a concern for the souls of those around us. Faith In considering the Fruit of the Spirit, we come in this issue to "faith". This is not that faith whereby we believe on Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, but rather faithfulness. Along with longsuffering, gentleness, goodness and meekness, faithfulness is a Christian virtue which ought to characterise the saints behaviour towards his neighbour. Although the emphasis is not on our faithfulness to God, nevertheless, without knowing God and being faithful unto Him, we cannot be faithful to our neighbour.

The Faithfulness of God

As always, let's consider this fruit in its perfection as an attribute of our almighty God:

- God is faithful. (I Corinthians 1:9)
- Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations. (Deuteronomy 7:9; 9:5).
- Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds, (Psalm 36:5; 89:1).
- But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you and keep you from evil, (II Thessalonians 3:3).
- If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself (II Timothy 2:13)
- Jesus is called the faithful witness and Faithful and True. (Revelation 1:5; 19:11).

Faithfulness in us

So what is this faithfulness which ought to characterise us as it does our Lord and Saviour? Faithfulness is being trustworthy, dependable, reliable, loyal and honest. As already stated, it is the way we ought to behave towards those around us and is particularly evident in love that never wavers despite all manner of difficulties.

How can we work at developing this virtue? As we have done already briefly we ought to consider the faithfulness of God by prayerful and careful meditation on His Word. Such a consideration of God's Word will reveal to us the incredible faithfulness of God towards His children even when they backslide, and this can only serve to produce a deep sense of gratitude in the heart of the believer. When we have a true knowledge and fear of God then we will serve Him more truthfully in awe and wonder.

We ought also study the word of God with the intention, by His grace to be obedient to it. We should daily use this means of grace, coming in prayer and asking the Lord for His grace and the work of the Spirit, acknowledging that we cannot produce this fruit in and of ourselves. In seeking to be obedient to God's Word then by His grace we will be faithful to Him and our neighbour.

Understanding the true significance of the Gospel and the need for us to be ambassadors for Christ should also stir us up to faithfulness. And lastly the knowledge of Christ's return should also encourage us to be busy in His service - faithful. Without faithfulness our profession becomes empty hypocrisy. What will Jesus find in us when He returns? Meekness. Meekness is not an attribute common to man, for by nature we are proud and ambitious for personal distinction. We are always keen to serve others and certainly not content to be last. Yet here we are called to walk in the way of meekness and God's word leaves us in no doubt as to the importance of this grace. Consider the following Scripture:

- I Peter 3:4 where Peter says that a meek and quiet spirit is of great price in the sight of God.
- Ephesians 4:1,2 where Paul encourages us to walk worthy of our calling which involves, among other graces, meekness.
- The Colossians (3:12) are encouraged to put on meekness
- Timothy (I Tim. 6:11) is instructed to follow after meekness.
- Titus (3:2) is exhorted to show meekness.

What is meekness?

Meekness is a patience, and longsuffering, and gentleness under injury. It is the opposite of pride and self-centredness, of party-spirit and vengeance. Meekness accepts God's dealings with us as good, both in the commands He gives and the afflictions He sends - it does not resist but rejoices. One of the ways that meekness expresses itself is in the way of serving others.

How may we develop this grace?

Our greatest example is the Lord Jesus Christ whose whole life was one of service to His people. He came as the suffering, servant King and fulfilled that role willingly and in love. While He was here in that role He instructed us with these words, learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, (Matthew 11:29). Let us look closely at our Lord's words in this passage and we will understand how to walk in the way of meekness.

When we look at the context of these words, we find that in order to be meek we must take Christ's yoke upon us. Immediately, because of our nature, we recoil, for who wants a yoke upon them; don't we have enough problems in life already?

But look at the bigger picture. We know from God's word that we can only serve one of two masters - either we are serving the Lord or we are serving the devil; and no matter who we are serving there is of necessity servitude and submission.

In his natural state, every man, woman and child on this earth carries a burden, the extreme and heavy burden of sin. This burden, if not removed, will bow us down to the grave and into hell. When Jesus saves us, He frees us from this burden and brings us into His service and binds us to Himself

Again we are in a state of servitude and submission but Christ promises that His yoke is easy and His burden light (Matthew 11:30).

But how can any burden be easy or light? Only through meekness can we fully appreciate the ease of Christ's yoke and this meekness results from understanding the incredible mercy and grace of God in choosing us and delivering us from the wretchedness of sin and damnation. The yoke of denying ourselves, following Christ and living a godly life is easy compared to the yoke of selfishness and unbelief.

If we are stubborn, rebellious and self-willed, then the yoke becomes heavy. But if we yield to Christ in meekness then the yoke is made easy. Let us learn of Him and grow in meekness.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Galatians 5:22.

by John Torlach

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