

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Holy Spirit: The Fruit of the Spirit

Alfred went swimming. Living near the sea, he often did so. On this occasion the sea was rough and, suddenly, he found himself swept far from the shore. What could he do? The waves were too strong and he found himself in great danger. Nearly at the end of his strength, he heard a helicopter overhead. A crewman came down on a rope and lifted him out. How thankful he was to be saved! But there was more going on of which he knew nothing. Other services had been warned and, on landing, he was transferred quickly to hospital and, after recuperation, was sent home. All those arrangements were put into action without him knowing anything about them but they all acted together for his benefit.

We have been considering, over four weeks, the provision of the Holy Spirit to meet the needs of the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. This really is a tremendous provision! Once each believer was like everyone else and we all got on with our own lives in the best way we possibly could. The moment came when we knew our need and trusted the Lord Jesus for forgiveness from sin. Suddenly everything changed! God, in His wisdom, provided the Holy Spirit as a permanent companion, often behind the scenes, to teach, to guide and to go along with each of us until we reach the presence of our Lord.

Let us just review what has been occupying us over the past weeks.

1. The Lord Jesus promised His disciples a Comforter, One just like Himself, as He says, 'to be with you for ever'. Throughout a believer's life, the Holy Spirit is available. We are not even like the great men of the Old Testament who were only visited by the Holy Spirit. His is a permanent presence with us forever.
2. The guaranteed presence of the Holy Spirit to every believer is like the seal put on a legal document when it is signed. Every assurance is given that the believer has a place for eternity with the Lord. And in case we have any doubt, the very fact of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is just like the deposit the seller of a property receives that every penny will become available at the right time. Heaven, the presence of the Lord Jesus, and every blessing for eternity is assured.
3. We are not left helpless in this world while we wait. There is work to be done, firstly among the people of God, to encourage unity in testimony to Christ and also for every opportunity to spread the good news of the saving power of the Lord Jesus to unsaved people. So the Holy Spirit has given gifts to each believer to use for the Lord Jesus. Do you use yours?

There is a further stage to which we come today. When we became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, all the guarantees which are provided for the believer became immediately ours. In no way are we in the position of having to work for our place in heaven. We do have to admit however, that we are Christian novices. Not only do we need the gifts which the Holy Spirit gives us to be active for the Lord, we are also like children who need to grow up. Just like a child, each Christian already has built-in characteristics or qualities of behaviour, which need developing to make themselves mature and able testimonies to Christ. These characteristics are known as 'the fruit of the Spirit' and we will consider this today.

It is easy to think of fruit as being that which is added to the Christian church by way of newly saved believers. Of course, it is always wonderful and a matter of rejoicing when each believer first comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. The angels rejoice over this. 'There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner repenting'. So we *should* be overjoyed that another one has responded to the death of the Lord on the cross for sinners and come into the full blessing of salvation.

When we speak of 'the fruit of the Spirit', however, the Bible gives us a different perspective on this. We will find this in the letter to the Galatians 5:22-23. Let us read them. 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law'. We may well say to ourselves, 'What does this all mean'? So let us try to understand it.

It is important to notice that this chapter speaks of fruit, one fruit, but there are various aspects to this fruit. Spring and summer are great seasons to appreciate the creation of God. Just look at that rose. At first you see the stem with a small head on it, almost too small to see what it is. Slowly, as the stem and the single bud grow, you will notice a shape taking place. It will slowly mature to a beautiful flower. There is no doubt that life is in it. One day the outer cover commences to split and slowly the coloured flower is displayed. It takes longer for that flower to develop and gradually the bud opens to show first the outer petals, until the perfectly developed rose is seen in its many parts in all its glory, but as one rose. None of that glory was seen or, perhaps, imagined at the earliest stage. All that could be seen was one stem and bud which were alive. Now this is just like the believer who first comes to Christ. The Christian characteristics are all there but they need to grow. They will need 'the washing of the water by the Word', Ephesians 5:26. The 'lusts of the flesh', previously known must be abandoned and we bring into 'captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ', 2 Corinthians 10:5. The new believer will need encouragement by the whole surrounding atmosphere and 'gifts' within the church.

However, there is a power behind every feeble effort the believer may make. So, thankfully, we understand that it is the Holy Spirit Himself. The work in our lives cannot be of our own doing for we will fail. It is not even the work of other members of the Church although the Holy Spirit may use them in different ways to help the work along. It is 'of the Spirit'. So we find the deep interest of the Godhead working in the life of every believer, to bring about such a beneficial change in each life that the former life is unrecognisable.

Let us now look at the details of these verses to see what is included. We first notice that there are nine things listed in these verses and they slip easily into three groups of three and there is a distinct order in them.

1. The first three are foundation characteristics given to us by the Lord Himself – love, joy and peace, imparted to the believer.
2. The second three concern our relationship with others – longsuffering, gentleness and goodness.
3. The third three look inward to ourselves – faith, meekness and temperance.

It is noteworthy that the first group of three are all given by the Lord Jesus Himself to His disciples. As we think of **love**, here is the first display of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the new believer. This love is not that type of love to which we have been used in our daily life. The word used for our old love, 'phileo', really means a fondness or affection which comes from sentiment. Now we find the word 'agape' which is always used when referring to divine love, Calvary love. What a difference there is! Before we were converted, we had a human affection which was prone to show itself and then fade again. Now we have, placed within us, the same powerful, everlasting love which led the Lord Jesus to die for us.

Let us note what John records from the words of the Lord Jesus. The first is that we are told of the *quality* of His love. It is the same love as that of God the Father for His Son. 'As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love', John 15:9. So all the love of the Father is displayed within the Person of the Son. This is central to all that He is. The Lord speaks of love as a characteristic part of Himself, 'the love which is mine'. What a quality!

Then we are told of the *extent* of this love. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends...' verse 13. He gave Himself.

Lastly He reminds His disciples of the vital *necessity*, 'continue in My love'. verse 9. So the apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, says that the 'fruit of the Spirit is love'. The first evidence, and perhaps the most important evidence, of the work of the Spirit of God in my life and yours is the development of divine love in my heart and life. Have you seen this in your life?

The second is '**joy**'. Again, in John 15:11, the Lord Jesus indicates His desire: 'These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full'. How could this be possible for the disciples so soon to be separated from their Lord? No, says the Lord Jesus, there is a joy which should remain in you, a full joy. The joy that fills us more than any other is that of a perfectly completed work of the Lord Jesus, which has delivered us from every form of sin and fear of judgement; a work which has fully satisfied a righteous God.

Again he uses that word 'My', 'My joy', the joy that is Mine. That part of His own characteristic, that joy which was always within Him because of who He is. His joy is to be imparted to every believer. He desires that it will be lasting, that it 'might remain in you'. He also said that following the resurrection, 'your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you', 16:22. The joy which the Lord Jesus gives is a certain and lasting joy. It does not depend on our circumstances just as His joy did not depend on His circumstances. Are you really experiencing this joy today?

The third verse on this subject today is in John 17:13. In His prayer to the Father, the Lord Jesus says, 'And now come I to Thee ... that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves'. If the Lord's blessing is not enough, He prays for the Father to honour His desire for His joy to be permanent in His own. So it is that our verse in Galatians 5 indicates that the 'fruit of the Spirit is joy'. What a blessing!

The third foundation characteristic is **'peace'**. This peace does not relate to our surroundings or to outward events in the world, but is an inward peace. Again the Lord refers to 'My peace'. It really describes the harmonious relationship which can exist between God and man and the contentment obtained from this relationship. This contentment is also to grow as the 'fruit of the Spirit'.

In John 14:27 the Lord Jesus told His disciples, 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you'. 'My peace', the peace that is Mine, part of My character, is to be imparted to every believer. Nothing can happen in this world to any believer which cannot be handled by the Lord Himself, so we have His peace.

'His peace' is demonstrated to us in Mark 4. In the storm on the lake, the Lord slept while the disciples struggled to hold the boat afloat. 'Carest Thou not that we perish?' they cried, verse 38. How well He came to their rescue. Could that boat ever sink with Him on board? Other examples are given in the Gospels. We will look at only one. As the Lord stood before Pilate, that man used words which would bring fear into any other person. 'Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?' In total peace with His Father, the Lord could answer, 'Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above', John 19:10-11. So the Lord Jesus says, 'My peace I give unto thee'.

Paul wrote to the Philippians saying, 'Be (anxiously) careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep (surround like a garrison) your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus', 4:6-7. So we read that the 'fruit of the Spirit is...peace'. What a provision in difficult days! Here are the three foundation characteristics, as the personal characteristics of the Lord Himself, given to every believer. Does the Holy Spirit encourage you to enjoy the love of God flowing from your life, the joy of the Lord cheering you day by day, and the peace of God encouraging you in every circumstance? This is the fruit that will grow.

The next three characteristics of this fruit concern our **relationships with others**. Let's look at these one at a time.

Longsuffering. With the growth of love, joy and peace within, longsuffering should be displayed to others. This quality of restraint in the face of provocation is not easily learned. The Lord Jesus was often tested by those around Him. After the marvellous visit to the mount, where He was transfigured, the Lord Jesus returned to the people only to find much lack of faith there. All His teaching and work seemed ineffective! 'How long shall I suffer you?' He says, Matthew 17:17. In His own wonderful way, His longsuffering turned to blessing as He cured the sick child. We need to display longsuffering which will let no amount of provocation deter blessing.

Gentleness brings the meaning of kindness or goodness of heart. We see so little of this in the world today. Many have only themselves to be concerned with and have no time to consider others. This quality of gentleness is so vital today.

Goodness is a similar word but brings added qualities to it. It is not just a description of wellbeing but rather is goodness in action, expressing itself in deeds; such actions will be for the real benefit of others. How well this is seen in the Lord Jesus. Mark 1:41 expresses the Lord's feelings: 'Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean'. Here is the essential quality of goodness at work. The Holy Spirit will encourage this in you and me.

Now we must come to the last group of these characteristics which the Holy Spirit is working on to make us mature useful believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. These three are personal to us and are necessary to keep us as we go through this world.

The first is **faith**. It is the firm conviction, based on all we have heard of the truthfulness of God, particularly in the matter of salvation. When we first believed, did we have doubts? When the father came to the Lord to seek help for his son who was possessed by a demon, the Lord said to him, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him who believeth'. This man burst out, with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief', Mark 9:24. This is just how the Holy Spirit works, strengthening our faith in God.

Then we come to **meekness**. This word speaks not so much of an outward display but of the work grace has wrought in the soul. It indicates the attitude of spirit in which we accept the Lord's dealings with us without resisting. Some like to think that this must be a display of weakness. The Lord Jesus was also described as meek but the force behind

this was not that He was weak but that He had all the resources of God behind Him. We have those same heavenly resources and the Holy Spirit to satisfy our souls concerning them.

Lastly we come to **temperance**. This word would be better rendered self control. We are all capable of abusing the various powers given to us by God but when we believe, the Holy Spirit works within us to help us control any wrongful desires. We are responsible to lead a life of righteousness and to do this we need to control those urges to excess and sin which we formerly had.

What a work the Holy Spirit is doing within our lives! Let us measure ourselves and ask ourselves, 'How has the Holy Spirit achieved this in my life?' Our verse 23 reminds us that there certainly is no law prohibiting these things. Let us just read the next two verses. 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit'. Yes, we have our part to play. We must have finished with all those wrong longings of the flesh 'which war against the soul', 1 Peter 2:11, and we have unreservedly to permit the Holy Spirit to do His gracious work in our lives. We will then see what changed persons we become. May the Lord help us every day to allow the Holy Spirit to do.

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