

Features of the fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace

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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

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

If you visit the Geneva region of Switzerland in the summertime, you will see the lower slopes of the mountains covered in grapevines packed with grapes. It is a pleasure 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 winemaking. It is a joy to stand by the press with a glass in hand to drink the juice as it flows out. There is no better taste of summer in the Alps!

In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul uses the metaphor of fruit to describe the life of the Lord Jesus Christ reproduced by the Holy Spirit in our lives as a result of walking in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Paul tightly packs these extraordinary characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit into two verses of Scripture, like a bunch of grapes. The Lord Jesus uses 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 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).

DL Moody commented as follows on the Fruit of the Spirit:

Love is the first thing...Someone has said that all the other eight can be put in terms of love. Joy is love exulting; peace is love in repose; long-suffering is love on trial; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in action; faith is love on the battlefield; meekness is love at school; temperance is love in training."

Going back to Switzerland for a moment, if you visited the Jura in the wintertime, you would see the same slopes covered with individual grapevines that have neither leaves nor fruit. They look barren and lifeless. Sometimes we can be tempted to feel like those branches look; failing and fruitless. But there is a person who never thinks about these plants in this way - the vinedresser, who works skilfully, patiently and tirelessly on each branch, preparing them to be fruitful. He knows

they have life in the vine. And he knows they are capable, in the words of the Lord Jesus, of producing fruit, more fruit, and finally, much fruit.

The vinedressers on the Jura slopes of Switzerland care deeply for their vines. But they are not connected to their plants as we are to our vinedresser. Our vinedresser is not a paid expert. He is our Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We often consider the grace of the Lord Jesus in stooping from glory into this world to become our Saviour. We often think of the Holy Spirit stooping down from heaven to be in us and with us. But how often do we think of the Father stooping down? He does this with all the gentleness and wisdom of His heart of love to make us like Jesus, His glorious Son. Never allow Satan to diminish the value God has placed on you. We cost the blood of His own Son. The Father cherishes our lives, and despite all our shortcomings, failure and wilfulness, He never ceases to act in all the patience of His marvellous grace and loving heart towards us to make us fruitful until the day He brings us home.

So let us consider "love, joy, peace."

The last chapter of Luke's Gospel records two disciples walking to Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they talked together about the life and death of Jesus, the resurrected Jesus joined them and walked with them. Luke tells us their eyes were restrained, so that they did not recognise Jesus. The Lord asked the His disciples what they were talking about and why they were sad (verse 16-17).

One of the disciples replied,

"Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" (v.18). Jesus, the Person who was the centre of the things that happened graciously asked, "What things?" (v.19).

They told Him,

"The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see" (verses 19-24).

In the sequence of events that follow, Jesus teaches the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and later his other disciples at Jerusalem, some important lessons which were grounded in the Word of God.

1. The Lord taught them that Word of God is Christ-centred (Luke 24:25-27).

The Lord immediately turned to God's word and, in an orderly exposition, unfolded to the two disciples how the Old Testament Scriptures foretold the coming of Christ, His death, resurrection and the glory which would follow. In doing so He challenges their faith and reveals the Christ centredness of the Old Testament Scriptures.

“Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

2. The Lord taught them that the Word of God opens our eyes (verses 30-31).

Following the Lord’s revelation of Himself in the Old Testament and at the end of their journey to Emmaus, the disciples invite Jesus into their home. As He sat with them for a meal, Jesus took bread, blessed it and gave it to them. Immediately their eyes were opened, and they recognised the Saviour before He disappeared. This scene is an illustration of how the word of God opens our eyes to the Person of Christ, and leads us unto communion with Him.

3. The Lord taught them that the Word of God captures our hearts (verse 32).

After the Lord disappeared, the disciples recall how their hearts burned within them while the Lord talked with them on the road and opened the Scriptures to them. The exposition of God’s word should always touch our hearts and teach us about the Person of Christ.

I remember the story of a church in small town which caught fire. The congregation gathered and passed buckets of water to put out the flames. The pastor of the church passed the water to a man he had never met before and said to him, “I’ve never seen you at our church before.” The man replied, “It’s never been on fire before!”

God’s word set the hearts of the two disciples on fire. It led them to seek His company, invite Him into their home and empowered their witness to the risen Saviour. It should do the same in our lives.

4. The Lord taught them that the Word of God empowers our witness (verses 33-35).

What happened next is quite remarkable. The disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem. They explained to the eleven disciples and the company gathered with them that the Lord was alive. They also shared their experience of what happened on the road and at the meal in their house. This demonstrates how the word of God empowers our witness. They did not give a second thought about the seven-mile journey back to Jerusalem. They simply had to share the news of Christ’s resurrection. This is great encouragement to share our experience of Christ with fellow Christians and with people generally.

In the assembly where I grew up in was an old brother who was a remarkable Bible teacher. When he was 50 he was diagnosed with cancer of the throat. The operation to cure it involved removing his larynx. He learned to speak again by controlling the air travelling through two holes in his throat. Over the years he taught many other people to speak in the same way. He lived about a mile or so from the assembly and walked to all the meetings. He was in his nineties when he died. Often when he came home from a hard day’s work he would tell his wife he felt really tired but he would never miss a Bible Reading and always said how much he was refreshed by the ministry of the word of God.

The two disciples teach us about how the power of God’s word refreshes, inspires, and empowers us completely, body, soul and spirit.

5. The Lord taught them The Word of God transforms our understanding.

Notice how the Lord organised events so that his disciples would be together, so He could appear to them. He gave them proof of His death on Calvary through showing them His wounds. He proved He was not a spirit but genuinely alive by eating a simple meal with them. But most of all He opened their understanding of the Scriptures.

“Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (verses 44-45).

These steps lead us to the end of this beautiful chapter where we read,

“Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high”” (verses 46-49).

In these final verses, we see the disciples experiencing Love, Joy and Peace as they begin their wait for the "Promise of the Father", the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord prepared them for this by assuring them of His love when he showed them His hands and His feet, simultaneously witnessing His death for them on the cross and the power of His resurrection life. He also demonstrates the love of the Father in the promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them in John 16:27,

“For the Father Himself loves you”.

It is through the Holy Spirit that,

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

Then Jesus led His disciples out to Bethany,

“And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24 verses 50-53).

In these four verses, we see the disciples experiencing three characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. They experience the love of Christ as He lifts His hands in blessing whilst returning to heaven. They share the joy of Christ as they return to Jerusalem. And they experience the peace of Christ as they fearlessly worship in the temple awaiting the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Let's look further at these first three characteristics of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, love, joy and peace.

The fruit of the Spirit: Love.

God is love. So, it is no surprise that the first attribute of the fruit of the Spirit is love. The Lord Jesus Christ perfectly expressed the love of God, and the Holy Spirit produces this love in the lives of Christians. As we have seen already in Romans, Paul explains that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts. It enables us to respond in love to the One who has loved us, and it enables us to love others as God loves. The Lord Jesus describes this love in John 13:34-35. It was a new commandment He gave to His disciples to love one another in the same way He had

loved them. By this love people would know we are the disciples of the Lord. He also speaks of the action of this love at the other extreme in Matthew 5:44,

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

This love is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 as a love that never fails. This beautiful and powerful passage of Scripture is very challenging. We can, at times, struggle to express love even to our brothers and sisters in Christ. We feel guilty about this and try harder to do better. We try to force ourselves to love. But do you remember when you first discovered the love of God? When God saved you, His love flooded into your heart. Do you remember how natural it was to respond in love to God, your new family, and your neighbours? Remember how Zacchaeus was willing to cheerfully give half of his wealth to the poor (Luke 19:8). When the Lord opened Lydia's heart, she invites Paul and his co-workers into her house to stay (Acts 16:15). And in one of the most powerful examples of the transforming grace of God, the once-cruel Philippian jailer took Paul and Silas into his home, washed their wounds, and provided food. Joy filled his heart as he and his family were baptised (Acts 16:33-34).

The power to love comes from the One Who loves us. The Vine produces the branches, and the vinedresser cares for every branch. The branches simply abide. The power of life in the Vine is manifested in the production of the fruit. It takes a long time to learn this vital lesson. And we have to re-learn it, too, when we get drawn away from the Lord. But the Father's patient love which we first learnt, as the prodigal son did, when we were embraced in His arms, is a love that will not let us go and would always keep us near. I am no vinedresser, but it appeals to me that when vine branches are pruned, they are made shorter and consequently closer to the vine. It is from this place, they draw more effectively from the life of the vine, to grow and become fruitful. God often uses events in our lives to humble us and bring us closer to the Saviour. This is always for our ultimate blessing. And the revelation of His divine love, through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, is always to His glory.

The fruit of the Spirit: Joy.

There was once a Christian could not contain his joy in the Lord. He would continuously add his loud "Amen" and "Praise the Lord" to the prayers and ministry he enjoyed so much. The church he attended became a little uneasy about his enthusiasm but unsure about what to do. Until one of the elders came up with a great idea. The brother was not a rich man and had a large family, so the elder suggested that, as winter was approaching, they bought the family some blankets. When they presented the brother with the blankets, he was overcome by their kindness. The elders then asked the brother if he would tone down his expressions of praise in the meetings. He said he would try. The first week he did very well. The second week he was struggling. The third week he stood and, in his loudest voice, said, "Blankets or no blankets, Praise the Lord!"

I can still remember a brother who did this in the meeting where I grew up. I don't think he was drawing attention to himself; he simply expressed what we all feel in our hearts. This joy comes from the experience of God's love for us. We see it in the lame man in Acts 3:8 when he stood up, walked and leapt while praising God. And at the other extreme, we see it in Peter and John and later Paul and Silas, when they all experienced profound joy in the most adverse of circumstances (see Acts 5:41 and Acts 16:25). Of course, joy is not always loudly expressed, but it is something God wants us to enjoy as a reality in our lives. It is not reserved just for the special times like birthdays, anniversaries and weddings. God wants to pervade our lives with His joy - the joy we have when we look back to Calvary, when we look up into heaven to see Jesus living for us, and when we look on to the joy of His return. This joy is known by faith in the Lord Jesus:

"Though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

In Luke 15 the Lord Jesus illustrates the joy of the Trinity in finding the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. This joy is our strength,

"For the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

Its source is in God, not in ourselves. It is compelling that in the chapter where Jesus teaches us about how we live fruitful lives for God, He also says,

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full," (John 15:11).

The joy is in the Person of Christ and becomes our experience through abiding in Him. John, who was there when Jesus said these words, later wrote,

"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).

But there will be times in our lives that are very painful and bitter – times, like the present crises, when faith will be tested, and we will feel at our lowest. It not by mistake that God allowed the prophet Habakkuk to give voice to these experiences. He writes of a time when the fig tree may not blossom, the vines have no grapes, there are no olives, the fields produce no harvest, and there are no herds or flocks. Then in the face of all this desolation, he writes,

"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength" (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

God has saved us; God will keep us, and one day He will rejoice over us with singing. May we know His joy in our hearts, "Blankets or no blankets."

The fruit of the Spirit: Peace.

Peace is an elusive thing. The world speaks a lot about global peace and peace treaties between nations. But we have world leaders who use words that are anything but peaceful. Peace is missing in many communities, families and in the hearts of individuals. Abuse of all kinds, and the sinfulness that mars this world, robs us of peace. Religion generally, and Christendom specifically, has caused terrible wars and waves of persecution. This world, despite all its progress in so many fields, seems as far as ever from enjoying lasting peace.

It was in such a world that the Saviour lived and, on the eve of His suffering its hatred and violence, He says to his disciples,

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto 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).

Only the Prince of peace could speak such words as He went into death to enable us to have peace with God (Romans 5:1). On the cross He turned to the thief to promise He would take him to Paradise (Luke 23:43). The word Paradise is Persian in origin. It referred to the Persian aristocrats' beautiful walled gardens, which were places of safety, tranquillity and delight. But the Lord was not merely promising Paradise. He promised the redeemed thief he would be with his Lord in Paradise. The peace is not primarily the place, but the Person.

As with all the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit, peace has its source in the Saviour. Paul, in Romans, writes about how we find peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Then he writes in Philipians about how we daily experience the peace of God.

"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" (Philipians 4:6-7).

The apostles were not just writing beautiful words but conveying what they had learned from the Prince of peace. They knew God's peace in the storms of life. They enjoyed the quietness and contentment that comes from living close to the Lord in all life circumstances. That was not always the case. In the Gospels, the disciples feared their boat would sink, and learned that Jesus was able to still the wind and the sea (Mark 4:35-41). On another occasion, Jesus walked on water as the disciples struggled to bring their ship to land. Peter also walked on water, before fear overcame him, and he cried out for the Lord to save him. Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught Peter and challenged his little faith. When they got into the boat, the wind ceased (Matthew 14:22-33). As a group of disciples, and as a single disciple, they cried to the Lord, and the result was peace. What the Lord taught Peter when his faith was small became a reality when he experienced the Lord's presence and His peace before the Sanhedrin, in Herod's prison and ultimately in his own martyrdom.

But Paul doesn't only teach us about the peace that passes all understanding. He gives us a pattern of a life of fellowship with Christ through which we learn that the God of peace is with us (Philipians 4:9). One day this world will be ruled by the Prince of peace. In the meantime we are invited to let the peace of God rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15).

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk, "Features of the fruit of the the Spirit: Love, joy and peace." Talk number T1251.

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