

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

### *Habits of a Changed Heart*

I've seen car ads recently on television that not only offer a competitive price for the car itself, but with it comes the gas to run the car for the full first year. That's pretty impressive. And given the price of gas in recent months, such an offer is quite appealing. But we all know that you can have a beautiful, expensive new SUV, with a lifetime supply of gasoline, but if there is no oil for the proper lubrication of the vehicle, you've got problems.

I speak from experience. During my seminary days, I purchased a fuel economy car – a used but sporty 1972 Opel that I was quite proud of. But there was one problem. I failed to regularly check the oil level and was soon looking for a new engine. You can have a full tank of gas, but if the working parts of the engine are not properly lubricated you'll not go very far.

To take the analogy further, we might compare the gasoline in the tank to spiritual gifts which we studied last week. Through our gifting, the Spirit of God empowers us to carry out his will and work. And we might compare the oil in the engine to the spiritual fruit that Paul speaks of in Galatians 5. These Spirit produced virtues provide the necessary lubrication in our relationships to prevent “engine failure.” We need both gifts and fruit. We need both the *charisma* (i.e. gifts) provided the Spirit and the *character* (i.e. the spirituality) produced by the Spirit.

What is this character produced by the Spirit? Or put in other terms, what is authentic spirituality? What is Christian maturity? What do “Spirit people” look like? Paul answers these questions in Galatians 5:22-26:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

My purpose today is not to analyze each of these fruit of the Spirit. You can do that with any good Bible dictionary. What I believe is more important for you and me is to understand some basic principles underlying these “habits of a changed heart.” In other words, what does it mean for the Spirit of God to produce this fruit in our lives? And just how does that take place?

## **The fruit of the Spirit defines authentic spirituality.**

The first thing I want you to notice about this fruit of the Spirit is that we have here a snapshot of what true spirituality is all about. And spirituality or Christian maturity is not about activity or achievement. It's not about the number of church meetings you attend or the tasks accomplished. And it has nothing to do with efficiency. But it has everything to do with character.

For some of us, the greatest hindrance to authentic spirituality or Christian maturity in our lives is *busyness*. We've bought into our cultural perspective that the busiest people are the best. We're simply too busy to love, to busy to be patient, to be busy to be kind or to be gentle. We're too busy to nurture in our lives the various means of grace that God has given us: prayer, the Word, fellowship with God's people and family devotional times. We've forgotten that the "stops" of Jesus are just as important as His steps.<sup>i</sup> And we're just too busy to stop. Our busyness and task orientation quenches the work of the Spirit who is more than ready to produce this fruit in our lives...*if we would just slow down.*

The old hymn says, "Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord," seems more and more irrelevant in our present day society. I've been challenged recently with the words of Robert Murray McCheyne, the well-known pastor and revival preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He said this: "My people's greatest need is..."

How would you expect a pastor to complete that sentence? ...Maybe a new program, an innovative approach, a bigger budget, or a new building to meet in? Well, McCheyne completed it this way: "My people's greatest need is...*my personal holiness.*"<sup>ii</sup> And if you want to know how best to pray for me, that is it. Pray for my personal holiness; pray for authentic spirituality in my life. That is what Paul gives us in these verses – a composite view of what authentic holiness, or spirituality really is. He gives us an objective standard by which to measure whether or not we are truly walking in the Spirit.<sup>iii</sup>

## **You cannot produce this fruit by human effort.**

The fruit of the Spirit defines authentic spirituality. But there's something else I see here: *You can't produce this fruit by human effort.* The last thing Paul wants us to do is to read these habits of a changed heart and think: "I must be more loving, more patient, more gentle, more self-controlled." The fact of the matter is that you will never know real joy by trying to be happier. You will never conquer

temptation in your life by gritting your teeth and striving for more self-control. And you will never achieve lasting peace by attempting to worry less.<sup>iv</sup>

All of these character qualities are the “fruit of the Spirit.” And the fruit of the Spirit stands diametrically opposed to the “works of the flesh.” They are habits of a changed heart that only the Spirit of God can produce in our life. The result of human effort is called “works,” and these “works of the flesh” are listed in verses 19-21. But while “works” speak of human effort, “fruit” speaks of the empowerment (Romans 8:1-4).

It makes good sense that Paul would emphasize this distinction, because this was the very problem the Galatian believers were struggling with. And we do too. There were certain heretical teachers infiltrating the Galatian churches. These teachers taught that, though we are saved by faith, we grow in the Christian life by keeping various rules and regulations. Paul summarizes the difficulty with this perspective in Galatians 3:1-3:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Paul is saying: If you are *saved* by grace and not by human effort, then you are also *sanctified* (i.e. made more like Christ) by grace and not by human effort. The law of God was given to *show* us our sin, but it was never given to *save* us from our sin or to make us more like Christ. The law is the *standard* of righteousness, but it is never the *source* of righteousness.<sup>v</sup> Just as Jesus doesn't “help” us get saved (by making up what we lack), Jesus doesn't “help” us live the Christian life (by picking up the slack).

Have you ever tried to put out a grease fire with water? I did once. And it only made things worse. That's what happens when you try to deal with your sin and temptation by depending on human effort. It will only make things worse. Why? Legalism *promotes* sin; the liberty of the Spirit alone can *prevent* sin and *produce* the fruit of righteousness (Philippians 1:11).

Little wonder that right in the middle of this description of fruit, Paul adds: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). “Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it cannot bring forth fruit,” Jesus said. And until you recognize and count upon your death

with Christ to sin, you can't bring forth fruit either. The only solution to the works of the flesh is death through crucifixion. And the only source of this multi-faceted fruit is the life of the Spirit.

In autumn, the leaves of the trees turn and drop off. This makes quite a bit of work for us, as I have a large sweet gum tree situated in our front yard. But have you noticed how tenaciously some dead leaves cling to the branches even into the spring months? But when the sap of the tree begins to flow, new life appears pushing those dead leaves to fall to the ground unnoticed.

This too is what happens in our lives. The Christian life is not simply "putting off," it is also "putting on." And really, the two are inseparable. The life-giving Spirit is like the sap in the tree that pushes out the old and brings in the new.

### **Fruitfulness comes from remaining in close fellowship with Christ.**

Here's something else: Fruitfulness only comes from remaining in close fellowship with the vine, Jesus Christ. Jesus uses this same image of fruit, but puts it in these terms:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.  
John 15:4

In this image, we are the branches, Christ is the vine. The branches of a tree or vine are relatively worthless, except for bearing fruit. The branch only *bears* the fruit, but it does not *produce* the fruit. That is the job of the vine. Snap a branch from the vine and it will die.

The *source* of this fruit is Christ, who lives in us by His Holy Spirit. And the *result* of this fruit is Christ likeness. This is our focus – Christ.<sup>vi</sup> Our focus should not be spirituality, even though that is a very popular concept these days. Our focus should *not* even be fruit-bearing. According to Jesus, the ultimate focus is to "abide in the Vine," which is Christ (John 14). And as we do this, the fruit comes naturally.

Something else about the *source* of this fruit. As we see from Jesus' words in John 15, to remain in Christ is to remain in his love (John 15:9). And so also in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit, love has pride of place. It is listed first. Love comes

from remaining in Christ, and it is from love that all the other fruit derive their strength.

Someone has put it this way:

Joy is love exalting and peace is love at rest.  
Patience, love enduring in every trial and test.  
Gentleness, love yielding to all that is not sin.  
Goodness, love in actions that flow from Christ within.  
Faith is love's eyes opened, the loving Christ to see.  
Meekness, love not fighting but bowed at Calvary.  
Temperance, love in harness and under Christ's control.  
The Christ is love in person, and love, Christ in the soul.<sup>vii</sup>

### **This fruit is produced and seen in our relationships with others.**

Jesus' teaching on the vine and the branches as well as Paul's teaching on the fruit of the Spirit tells us something else: *This fruit is produced and seen in our relationships with others.*

I've told you about our four large apple trees in our backyard. I've never yet seen one of those branches detach itself from the tree and from the other branches, jump around as an individual branch on the ground and still bear fruit. Branches that bear fruit are in relationship not only to the tree or vine; they are also in relationship to the other branches. Fruit bearing is not an individual affair, but a community affair.

Paul's teaching on the fruit of the Spirit applies not only to you as an individual, but to us as a church body. In fact, this is probably Paul's *primary* application for you and me. Notice what he says in verses 14-15: "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." And then he concludes the chapter by saying in verse 26: "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." And it is between these two verses that we find the description of the fruit of the Spirit. The point is this – Paul is talking about the fruit of the Spirit being produced not only in the lives of individual believers but especially in the believing community.

This, of course, is easier said than done. When we look at the works of the flesh as listed in verses 19-21, we tend to focus on the "filthy five" of verse 19: sexual

immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft. The more self-righteous among us may pat ourselves on the back and take pharisaical pride in our abstinence from such sins. And yet Paul continues: “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions...” All of these sins are *relational* in character and unfortunately have become the more “socially acceptable” sins of the church. The very Christian that may abstain from sexual immorality and look with disdain on any believer who falls in this area, may himself be the very one most guilty of sins that are just as serious by causing discord and division in the local church.

If this fruit of the Spirit is indeed produced and seen in community, in our relationships with others, then the last thing we should do when facing difficulty in a local church is to get up and leave. To do so is to detach myself from the vine and the other branches. And as with any detached branch, you will die.

### **Spiritual fruit is rarely, if ever, produced apart from testing.**

This subject of difficulty leads us to another observation about the production of fruit in our lives. *Spiritual fruit is rarely, if ever, produced apart from testing.* That’s why James tells us:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

If the fruit of the Spirit is Christ likeness, and Jesus, our model and mentor endured great suffering – how can we expect to be like him apart from suffering and testing in our lives? Therefore, “don’t waste your sorrows,”<sup>viii</sup> and don’t fight against them...but allow them to be used by the Master Gardener (John 15:1) to produce divine fruit in your life.

### **There are no shortcuts to the production of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.**

One final word. There are no shortcuts to maturity and authentic spirituality. You and I do not grow into adulthood overnight. Fruit does not ripen and mature overnight. Spiritual growth, like physical or agricultural development, takes time.

Did you know that tomatoes are often picked before they are ripe so they won't bruise when shipped to the stores? Then, before they are sold, these green tomatoes are sprayed with CO<sub>2</sub> gas which turns them red. These gassed tomatoes are edible, but the flavored can't be compared to the vine-ripened tomato that is allowed the time to mature.<sup>ix</sup>

What is authentic spirituality? What is true Christian maturity? Paul has given us a snapshot in these verses. When all is said and done, it boils down to being like Jesus.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. John 4.

<sup>ii</sup> Cited by J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 99.

<sup>iii</sup> That's why he says in Galatians 6:4 "Each one should test his own actions." The sign of true spirituality is the fruit produced by God's Spirit within you.

<sup>iv</sup> What then does Peter mean when he says: "...*make every effort* to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love." (2 Peter 1:5-7). The relationship between our effort and God's enablement is brought out clearly in such passages such as 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 6:7; and Phil 2:13. The solution is found in doing all we do in dependence on the Holy Spirit who applies in our hearts and minds the realities of our new identity in Jesus Christ (Romans 6; Colossians 3:1-4).

<sup>v</sup> After listing these nine virtues, Paul adds: "Against such things there is not law." When such qualities are evident among us, there is no need for Law...it is irrelevant. The Law is now sketched on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27).

<sup>vi</sup> Paul writes to the Ephesian believers, saying that they "learned Christ" (Ephesians 4:20). And he writes to the Roman believers, speaking of being "conformed to the image of Christ" (Romans 8:29).

<sup>vii</sup> Missionary Dr. Kenneth Moyner, quoted by John Stott, "A Vision for Holiness," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 94. Taken from [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com).

<sup>viii</sup> The title of an excellent book on suffering by Peter Billheimer.

<sup>ix</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 217.