

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT MANIFEST IN OUR LIVES

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law”.

(Galatians 5: 22, 23)

What effect does the outpouring of the Holy Spirit have in our lives? I mean, what practical effect? How does it change our lives, our thinking and our behaviour? We must deal with this question, otherwise the remembrance of Pentecost can become theoretical and formal.

Some may say: I don't really detect much difference in my life as a result of Pentecost. And this is where despair may set in: if the Holy Spirit is poured out, why do I see in my life so much of the works of the flesh and so little of the fruit of the Spirit? The works of the flesh can dominate us so strongly. And then it can become a matter of deep concern, for Paul writes, "I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21). We can feel so unclean and useless, so afraid and ashamed before God, because of the works of the flesh.

Paul makes it sound so easy, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus", he writes, "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5: 24), but we realize in our lives that something which is being crucified is not necessarily dead. The "flesh with its passions and desires" may be nailed to the cross, but it is putting up a tremendous fight to stay alive. This causes difficulties for us all.

Pentecost reminds us of our great riches. The fullness of the Holy Spirit poured out over us means that we are partakers of the anointing of Christ. We have received much. But now we must also render much! God wants to receive out of the fullness which He Himself has given.

The comfort of Pentecost is that He *will* receive, because the Holy Spirit exercises this decisive power in our lives that they bring forth fruit. In this chapter we will take a closer look at the fruit of the Holy Spirit as it is manifested in the life of the believer. We take note of the purpose and the great variety of this fruit.

FAITH ALWAYS EVIDENT IN WORKS

The churches of Galatia who were the recipients of this letter had been brought to confusion by a false teaching. They were told that one is not saved by faith only, but also by the works of the law, specifically the ceremonial laws, such as circumcision. This is the Judaist heresy which in so many forms can plague the church of Christ.

But whenever we are warned against this heresy, and told that we are saved only by faith, through grace, we are reminded that faith becomes evident in good works. There is no such thing as faith without works.

This is what Paul wants to drive home in chapter 5 of his letter. The liberty which we have in Christ may not be turned into a licence to do all kinds of evil. We read in verse 13, "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh."

MARKED CONTRAST

The "fruit of the Spirit" stands in contrast to the works of the flesh (see verse 19). That is why the text begins with the word but: "But the fruit of the Spirit. . ."

I am convinced that the apostle, guided by the Holy Spirit, has chosen his words with great care and discernment. Works (plural) of the flesh over against fruit (singular) of the Spirit.

The works of the flesh. Plural, because there are so many of them. “Our countless misdeeds and transgressions prevail from day to day” (Psalm 65: 2, *Book of Praise*). Evil is abundant and pluriform; there is no end to sinful ingenuity. But *fruit* of the Spirit. Fruit, singular, because in all its variety it is one and the same thing, coming from one Source and having one purpose, namely the renewal and transformation of our life.

The word *works* (of the flesh) stresses our own evil *will*. These works are the things we do according to our natural inclination. The term indicates the preoccupation of the sinful flesh, the searching after evil. We are always, so to speak, working at the pursuit of evil.

The word *fruit*, however, stresses God’s grace. Fruit is the product of growth, and growth is possible only through care and love. You cannot really grow something unless you nurture it with care and have patience with it as it grows.

GROWTH AND MATURITY

So we understand some of the beauty of this expression, “the fruit of the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit has been poured out over the church, and He has only one purpose: our growth and development as children of God. He patiently seeks fruit in our lives. The Holy Spirit does this in the love of Christ. Never think small of the love of Christ with which the Holy Spirit nurtures us so that we may grow and bring forth fruit.

When you read the word “fruit,” you must also think of maturity. We must produce ripe fruit, ready to be harvested. Now you know that all growth and development takes time. Ripe, fresh fruit does not appear overnight. It must have a starting-point, yes, but it must also go through a distinct process. Well, so it is with a Christian. We need time to mature, basking in the warmth of God’s love, nurtured by the nourishment of God’s Word. Then the Holy Spirit brings forth fruit in our lives. That means that then He develops in us a new nature, a new person, a Christian character, the mind of Christ. This is the purpose of the fruit of the Spirit: to show forth in us the mind of Christ.

HOW DOES FRUIT GROW?

Growth and maturity. This leads us to the question how things grow. The Bible has some beautiful passages on growth, especially spiritual growth.

I think of Psalm 1, the introduction to the whole Book of Psalms. It says there: the believer is like a tree “planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season” (verse 3). Planted in good soil, so that the roots can go deep. That is the first requirement for growth. And this is what the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about in the parable of the vine and the branches (John 15). We are rooted, in Christ. We are

connected to Him by faith. And now the Holy Spirit draws up from Christ the fruit, an abundant fruit wherein the husbandman, the Father, is glorified.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit in us is the same as the fruit of Christ in us. He is the vine, and we are the branches, and the fruit is the result of His live-giving and life-sustaining power. We do not bring forth fruit on our own. We cannot do so. We must be connected to Christ by faith. See how all is related here: there is no separation between Father, Son and Spirit. They all work together in one purpose: the growth and perfection of the Church.

ADVERSE CONDITIONS

The first thing that the Spirit always does, therefore, is lead us to Christ, through the Word. He says: here is your Source, here is the only connection. Believe in Christ that all your sins are forgiven, and then start to grow in faith.

Can we understand this growth? I know that I do not see it enough in my life. Sometimes I think that there is no growth at all and that I am actually withering. Remember also that everything that grows takes a beating. Think of all the contrary conditions to growth for a little plant. There is the wind, the drought, the trampling underfoot. It is often amazing that the plant even survives. Psalm 80 speaks about the need for divine protection, when it says: “O God of hosts grant preservation, protect Thy vine from devastation. Help Thou the son of man to stand.” The vine has no strength of its own. So it is with us. There is the leaven of sin, the weakness of the flesh, the temptations of the world, the power of the devil.

THE NEED FOR PRUNING

And when we do bring forth fruit, we get pruned. Christ said that “Every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes, so that it may bear more fruit” (John 15: 2). A pruned tree looks pitiful, stripped down, cut back, naked. Pruning hurts. But if you don’t prune the vine, it becomes unfruitful. There will be nothing but leaves.

The fruit of the Spirit, then, is manifest despite many contrary conditions and through much pruning. The book of growth, the Book of Psalms, speaks of those conditions. But it also rejoices in the abundance of fruit which in the end does appear by God’s grace. The same book which confesses that “our countless misdeeds and transgressions prevail from day to day” also says “the righteous man is like a tree which by the streams yields fruit abundantly.”

The command to bring forth fruit is seriously meant. There must be fruit. Christ said: every branch that does not bear fruit is taken away and burned. At the same time it contains much comfort, for it is the Spirit who will bring forth this fruit. We should not think lightly of the effective power of the Holy Spirit, of the love of Christ, and of the boundless mercy of God, who does not quench the flickering flame or break the bruised reed. Don’t give up, no matter how hard you fall, but flee to Christ, seek the Word, and pray for the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

ENDLESS VARIETY

The text continues by *describing* the fruit of the Spirit, and this description shows the variety of this fruit.

We should, incidentally, not confuse the expression “the fruit of the Spirit” with another Biblical expression, “the gifts of the Spirit,” as we meet it, for example, in I Corinthians 12. When we read about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we discover that the apostle means specific gifts which one believer may have in contrast to another. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are mentioned specifically as: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpreting of tongues. Not every believer has these gifts, Paul writes. They are distributed among the members. That is why the word is in the plural. There are many different gifts – literally “charismata” – in the church, and not every one has the same.

It is different with the expression “the fruit of the Spirit.” For this is given equally to and required equally of all believers. We do not all have the same spiritual gifts – and some of these, like speaking in tongues, have disappeared in the church – but the Lord requires of His church always, in Paul’s days and today, the same fruit. So keep them distinct, “fruit” of the Spirit as constant and common, in contrast to “gifts” of the Spirit as changing and specific.

And when you look at the description of the fruit of the Spirit you notice indeed how varied it is. Just as varied as life itself. And yet it all belongs together. It is like the colours of the rainbow: many different colours, yet one rainbow, and the colours together make the whole effect. Variety in unity, in conformity to the one Law of God.

I should point out that this listing is not exhaustive. There are known manuscripts, other than the ones used for the text of the Revised Standard Version, which contain even more Christian virtues. And there are examples of other listings (Ephesians 5, Colossians 4) which bring forward different aspects. The point is that the Bible speaks about every area of our life, and therefore such a listing of virtues, of spiritual fruit, cannot be formal or fixed.

FRUIT IN CLUSTERS

Fruit tends to come in clusters. Variety of fruit means an abundance of fruit. Christ said, “By this my Father is glorified that you bring forth much fruit” (John 15: 8). We may think that we have produced enough, but the Lord always seeks more fruit in us. He looks for constant growth and development so that there is an ever greater yield.

Speaking of clusters: our text mentions nine virtues which some explainers have divided by three, so that there are three clusters of three virtues each. Such a grouping is indeed relevant for a better understanding of the text.

The first three words (love, joy, and peace) speak about an upward line, to God. They are especially the fruit of a living relationship with God. The second cluster (patience, kindness, and goodness) suggest an outward line; they are the

fruit of a Christian fellowship with our neighbors. And the third cluster (faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) give us more an inward line: they refer to the fruit of the Spirit in our personal life, the deep transformation of our character. The fruit of the Spirit is evident in all our relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with ourselves.

NO CONDEMNATION

Our text also tells us that where this fruit appears there is true freedom and happiness. “Against such there is no law,” writes Paul. That means: the law does not condemn such people. It can also mean: more than this, God does not ask. The Judaizers said: God wants to you keep the whole law of Moses, with all the ceremonies, or else you are condemned. But Paul says: no, where the varied fruit of the Spirit is evident over the entire spectrum of our life, where much fruit appears, there is no condemnation and there are no further demands. God asks only that we bring forth much fruit of gratitude; He does not ask that we save ourselves.

It is Christ Jesus who “full atonement made and brought to us salvation” (Hymn 24: 5). What we are doing, or better yet, what the Spirit of God is doing, is building on the foundation of salvation laid by Christ.

Do you see the practical daily effect of Pentecost? And do you realize that now the fruit of the Spirit must and will become evident? From my side, never enough is done. I always come up short. My countless misdeeds and transgressions prevail from day to day. Yes, the vine is devastated and the branches flounder. And yet the fruit appears, the varied fruit, the undeserved bounty. The Spirit works, and we grow in Christ. And we have this hope that one day the fruit will be mature and the harvest abundant.