

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit

A Talk on the Fruit of the Spirit

Sermon Parables and the Teaching of Jesus 4 April 2009

John 15:5

Galatians 5:22-23

John 13:35

1 John 3:14

Many books are written about the Holy Spirit, and many prayers are said pleading for this power. Scores of Christians would like to have the Spirit, but most have a very foggy idea about Him. To do justice to a topic of this nature in ten minutes is a challenge in itself; it is like trying to capture the ocean in a coffee cup. We will, therefore, restrict ourselves to an overview of the subject, and discuss in some detail one of its critical aspects — the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Let us spend a few minutes setting the background, so as to understand the subject in its right perspective. Human beings have two great spiritual needs. One is for forgiveness, and the other is for goodness. Consciously or unconsciously, our inner beings long for both, because we are sinful by nature. God heard our first cry, for forgiveness, and answered it at Calvary. Our Lord Jesus Christ took upon Himself all our sins and died for us on the Cross, to give us the gift of salvation.

And God heard our second cry, for goodness, and answered it at Pentecost. God does not want us to come to Christ by faith and then lead a life of defeat, discouragement, and dissension. Therefore, to the great gift of forgiveness, God added another great gift: the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote, this is God's indescribable gift ("Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift," 2 Corinthians 9:15) to all those who receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and who admit that they have fallen short and sinned. If we are to live a life of sanity in our modern world — if we wish to be women and men who can live victoriously — we need this two-sided gift God has offered us: first, the work of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; second, the work of the Spirit of God in us.

When we attempt to study the doctrine of the Trinity, we accept the fact that the Holy Spirit is God, just as much God as God the Father and God the Son. To accept this is of the greatest importance to every Christian, both theologically and practically, even though we are incapable of fully comprehending this doctrine, for it contains an element of mystery. We have to leave it at that, accepting it as a revelation of God.

It is also necessary for us to understand that the Holy Spirit did not manifest Himself only from the day of Pentecost. He was at work in creation ("And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," Genesis 1:2); He was present throughout Old Testament

times; He was present at the incarnation and at the baptism of Jesus; He was present in the resurrection; and He has been given to us as our Helper, in fulfilment of the promise Jesus Christ made. We often fail to grasp that it is this same Spirit of God — who defied death, defeated all the powers of evil, and raised Jesus from death — who has been given to us also, to be with us for all time to come.

However, it is essential to understand that while He was a visiting Spirit in Old Testament times, He is an indwelling Spirit from the day of Pentecost. As faithful Christians, we died with Jesus, were buried with Him, and have been raised again with Him in newness of life when we were baptised into Him. We should be prepared to lead our lives following the directions He has shown us. When that happens, we are anointed with the Holy Spirit, once and for ever. And when we accept Him, He unites us with Christ, convicts us, empowers us, teaches us, encourages us, and will never leave us.

The Bible tells us that every redeemed person is given some gift by the Holy Spirit, and that He holds us responsible for the way we use our gifts. He chooses who receives which gifts, and He dispenses them at His own good pleasure. We may pray for gifts we have not been given, but we cannot covet what someone else has, or be envious of that person. These gifts are listed both in the Old Testament and the New. There are other gifts not so explicitly named — mostly the talents we already possess, music being one example. Such gifts are numerous, but God can take any talent and transform it by the power of the Holy Spirit, using it as a spiritual gift. We are each given gifts appropriate to us, and we are accountable for using them to build up the body of Christ and to grow to maturity in Him. I shall leave this aspect of the Holy Spirit here, and move on to a discussion of the fruit of the Spirit.

It is no accident that the Scriptures call the Third Person of the Trinity the *Holy Spirit*. One of His main functions is to impart the holiness of God to us. He does this by developing within us a Christ-like character — a character marked by the fruit of the Spirit. The million-dollar question, therefore, is this: do we, as Christians, reflect Jesus Christ in our lives, for others to see? Put another way: having been anointed with the Holy Spirit, and having been given various gifts of the Spirit for the glorification of God, have we been responsible enough to bear the fruit of the Spirit? It also means that we need the Spirit to bring fruit into our lives, because we cannot produce godliness apart from Him. It is worth noting that the Bible speaks of the *fruit* of the Spirit, in the singular, rather than fruits. It is like an apple tree that bears many apples, but all from the same tree — the same principle Jesus Himself lays down: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

As gardeners do, fruit-bearing branches are pruned from time to time,

so that they produce more fruit, while branches that bear no fruit are cut off from the vine. The Holy Spirit works in us to do this pruning. He convicts us when we fall short of God's standards; He comforts us when comfort is needed; He helps us change our undesirable patterns of living; and He guides our actions. And when we submit to Him fully, we begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). Time will not permit us to examine each of these in detail. It is enough to say that we may divide these nine attributes into three clusters. Love, joy, and peace make up the first cluster, speaking of our relationship God-ward. The second cluster — longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness — points to our relationship man-ward. And the third cluster — faith, meekness, and temperance — is seen especially in our inward relationship, that is, in the attitudes and actions of our inner self.

I should not be doing justice to this discussion if I did not make special mention of love. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). And again: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John 3:14).

No matter how else we may bear testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ, the absence of love will nullify it all. Love here means caring for, and seeking, the highest good of the other person. Love seeks no gratitude, and no reward. It is the one attribute that holds all the others in place, as a belt holds the rest of our clothing in place.

The world today stands in desperate need of spiritual awakening. In the midst of the vast problems facing our world, Christians are strangely silent and powerless, almost overwhelmed by the tides of secularism. But Christians are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. If the greatest need of our world is to feel the effects of a spiritual awakening, then the greatest need within the Christian Church is to experience the touch of the Holy Spirit, bringing true revival and renewal to the lives of countless Christians, and, through them, to the rest of the human race.

May our Lord Jesus Christ bless us abundantly, and fill us with His Spirit, to lead us and guide us in this direction. Amen.