

## The Fruitful Tree

***“And He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth His fruit in His season: His leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever He doeth shall prosper”*** (Psalm 1:3).

Fruitbearing is a sign of life. It is a source of satisfaction. It is the fulfillment of purpose. It is what the grower expects when he plants a tree. The kind of tree that is planted determines, of course, the nature of the fruit.

Fruitbearing is a continuous symbol both in the Old and New Testaments, of God's expectations for His people. The expectation is rooted in the realities of God's universal creation. It is also rooted in the essence of God's Being. Who and what God is expresses itself in His offspring, who, like Himself, were bursting with vitality and productivity in their original creation. However, electing an alternative to God's intention, through the wiles of Satan, the original pair lost the capacity to bear the fruit of life and godliness, and bore instead the Satanic fruit of death—of earthly reed and self-ambition. Cut off from God in that desolate moment, the wondrous creature in the garden of God became a worthless weed in the wilderness of Satan. Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees reminded them that the planting of God, intended to produce grapes and figs, had brought forth instead, thorns and thistles. And thus they demonstrated that they were not trees of God at all, but weeds of Satan. But is that not a terrible thing to call God's noble creatures—worthless weeds? Not if you realize that, void of God's life, they would simply revert to dust—*“Ye shall surely die.”*

So what is the cure? And what the expectations of God for His creatures? Jesus did indeed come to recover the vineyard. David heralds it a thousand years before—*“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth His fruit in His season, and whatsoever He doeth shall prosper [come to successful fruition].”* The tree will bear the fruit it was intended to bear. And what is that? “Godness!” Not godliness in the sense of personal piety, which can be counterfeited, but “Godness” in the sense of the life of God within—the possessing of the Divine nature. The fruit of “Godness” can never be counterfeited or equated with productivity in the sense of services to God. Nor can it be equated with the rather commercial idea of making “recruits” (a common concept). That would be tantamount to making other fruit trees—a task for the nurseryman (perhaps the evangelist in a figure), but not the tree itself.

So what then is fruitbearing all about? How do we become “fruitbearers”? Where does the average Christian come in? What does God expect of us? What can we expect of ourselves? These questions have tormented believers for centuries, trying to produce fruit in accordance, not with the expectations of God, but the demands of religious leaders—of would-be prophets and self-styled teachers. Motives are often mixed in a confusion of evangelistic zeal and the self-image of empire builders. The believer is caught in the middle—urged to serve God by serving the ambitions of individuals or groups bent on success. Such fruits may be called “designer fruits” (after the modern patterns of “designer fashions” and even “designer drugs”)—that is, something designed with a special flair or customized purpose. These so called “designer fruits” in terms of the church, are dictated by specialized human theological perceptions based on an inadequate knowledge of Scripture.

But what does the Bible really mean by “fruitbearing”? How does it happen? What is the fruit that God expects?

First, what is the meaning of “fruitbearing,” insofar as the believer is concerned? Is it any different than fruitbearing as a natural phenomenon? In the biological sense, bearing fruit is the natural expression of a normal tree. It is not a highly specialized thing occurring in only specialized trees. These trees do not have to be “super trees.” Nor does the tree itself have much to do with it. It is the caretaker who is responsible for the nurture of the trees. Apparently, in the Biblical analogy is it assumed that the fruitful believer will see to the availing of oneself of nourishment through the Word. “*As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby*” (I Peter 2:2). But the application or assimilation of the nutrients would be a natural process.

When one receives the Spirit of Christ in salvation, one receives the “seed of God”—that is, the living essence of the Divine nature. This seed within us takes root and grows and bears the fruit of “Godness.” We become “God trees” by the process of the infilling of the life of God. It is not, of course, that we become little gods, but that we partake of the Divine nature. “*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by Me ye might be partakers of the Divine nature...*” (II Peter 1:4). So fruitbearing really means producing the fruit germane (intrinsic to the seed) to a “planting of God.”

But what is the fruit and how is it produced? Paul spells it out in Galatians 5:22—“*the fruit of the spirit is love [agape, caring], joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*” These are all attributes of Christ which, because He is in our Spirits, are also resident within us.

However, these attributes are not true of our flesh, only our Spirit. Paul says, “*In me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing*” (Romans 7:18). The Holy Spirit does not dwell in one’s flesh. The Spirit can affect our flesh—motivating, directing, instructing—but does not permeate it as He does the inner spirit. Thus, even though we are producing the fruit of the Spirit within us, yet the flesh is not always able to express it without the limiting effects of the fall. For example, “love,” which is the first fruit mentioned, is the Divine quality of “caring.” It is the Greek *agape* (and not *phile*—“affection,” a matter of the emotions). From the deep reservoirs of the Spirit, the Divine caring reaches out to others, but that caring is imperfectly expressed in our human efforts to relate to others. Nor do we have to feel affection for another—a human emotion—in order to care, which is a Divine concern for another’s welfare. It is this sense in which we possess the Divine attributes in our Spirit, but express them imperfectly in our flesh.

Everyone who has received Christ has received His Spirit. Everyone who has received the Spirit of Christ has also received the seed of God, which produces the “God tree,” and bears its fruit of “Godness.”

In subsequent issues we will examine these various “fruits” in detail and seek to determine what is actually involved in each. But, meanwhile, one thing must be clearly understood—the fruit of the Spirit is not something we hope to have or need to strive for, it is the natural expression of God in every human who has received His Spirit.

Two things confuse Christians in the understanding of the above truth. One is

the failure to grasp the difference between Spirit and flesh. The flesh, or “natural man,” includes the mental processes or soul (psyche) and not just the physical aspects. Hebrews 4:12 makes this clear. *“For the Word of God is quick [living] and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* In the matter of love, for example, agape love is of the Spirit and does not include the emotions of human affection, which are of the mind or soul. And thus it is that we may possess the Spirit of Christ within and yet have difficulty with our human feelings and relationships.

The second problem is the failure to understand the terms which are used for the various fruits. The word “faith” for example, does not refer to human feelings of confidence—a product of the mind, but rather a flow of Divine energy deep within the reservoir of the Spirit and unaffected by the human emotions of doubt and fear. It is that energy of God flowing through us, like an artesian spring, that keeps us always tied to Him and wanting Him within us, in spite of our failures and weaknesses. That is the evidence of His Spirit within—caring to stay with Him—and not the piety of good works, all of which can be and are commonly counterfeited by religionists who may be totally void of the Holy Spirit as, for example, the Pharisees of Jesus’ day.

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