

Fruit in Season

“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).

The idea of fruit bearing is at the heart of Christian consciousness. If we have the life of God in us, should there not be some evidence of it? Jesus said it plainly—*“By their fruits ye shall know them.”* But what fruit? And how much? Jesus was speaking about the Pharisees. They had a religious facade but were void of the life of God within. Jesus called them whited sepulchres—glistening on the outside, but inside, full of death. The text is a contrast between life and death not a comparison of believers. *“Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?”* (Matthew 7:16). It is a contrast between good and evil; not between good and better. *“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit nor can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”* How much fruit is involved? Obviously it doesn't matter. One fig or one thousand, a fig is a fig and a thistle is a thistle.

So the text often quoted in regard to Christian conduct or service—*“By their fruits ye shall know them”*—is really applicable only to the Pharisees, who, in Jesus' view, were not men of God at all. What then was the evidence that was signified by figs and thistles? Measured in terms of conduct and service, or law and zeal, the Pharisees were exemplary. They would “compass sea and land to make one proselyte” (Matthew 23:15); they would keep the law even to the tithing of spices used in cooking (Matthew 23:3); but they had no life. They rejected Christ who was their only way to God. The “narrow road” of the Sermon on the Mount was the way of the Messiah. The Jewish remnant who entered that gate was small. The Jews of the nation had rejected Jesus. The broad road, *sans* Messiah was heavily traveled by the chosen of God. So, without Christ, there was no way to God. Rejection of Jesus was proof positive that the Pharisees were thistles and not fig trees.

But what of the Christian? What fruit would demonstrate identity with Christ? If rejection of the Messiah would constitute evidence of the thistle rather than the fig tree, the acceptance of the Messiah would show, conversely, the evidence of life and faith. And so Jesus avers, unconditionally, *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life...”* (John 3:36). Once again there are no degrees implied. One either has life or one has not. The quality of that life is a different matter. We shall deal with that later.

In Psalm 1, the Psalmist is contrasting the “God-person” and the Godless—the believer and the unbeliever. He is not comparing the “godlier” and the less godly—the pious or the impious. The figure is really the same as in Galatians 5. Paul says *“The fruit of the Spirit is”*—not the fruit of the Spirit ought to be. The Psalmist says that the godly shall be like a tree planted by the watercourses—not that one ought to be.

But what are the evidences? First of all the Psalmist says that such a one delights in the law of the Lord and meditates in it day and night. The Hebrew phrase, “day and night,” means the kind of time—daytime and nighttime—not the extent of time—day and night continuously. An evidence of faith is interest in the Word of God (for David it was the Torah). That interest may translate into avid study, or simple appreciation of the Word as the reliable guide to faith

and practice, but the presence of the Spirit of Christ within would certainly preclude an indifference to the Word.

But what of the fruit in verse 3? *“That bringeth forth its fruit in its season.”* The key phrase is *“in its season.”* The fruit is in the hand of the creator—when and how the fruit shall be produced. Jesus said, *“I am the vine and my father is the husbandman (vinedresser).”* God is in charge of the vineyard. The yield of grapes is in His hand. Symbols or metaphors are not usually applicable in all points. Thus, in the case of Israel, she was a planting of God, but refused to follow Him, so she became fruitless and given to the fire. The natural branch was cut off and another branch (the church) grafted in. This is the clear meaning of verse 2—*“Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away”* (John 15:2). But the branch that was grafted in was cared for by the husbandman—that the branch may bear greater (quality not quantity) fruit. *“Herein is the father glorified”*—not that the branch prunes itself or strives to produce. It produces naturally as the vinedresser does His work, Israel’s problem was not that God was displeased with her productivity but that she was apostate and had to be cut off.

The Father is glorified in the production of fruit, but it is Christ who is responsible for that productivity, since He is the keeper of the vineyard. He is in charge of the “pruning.” We do not prune ourselves. Our place is to remain subject to the pruning shears. Paul says, *“What hast thou that thou didst not receive (as a gift) and why does thou boast as though thou hadst not received it?”* If we bear fruit it is because we are first of all a tree in the garden of God and secondly because we are cared for by the ultimate husbandman.

“So shall ye be my disciples.” It is not that bearing adequate fruit is the condition of being a disciple, but that being under the care of the husbandman one will bear fruit; will glorify God; and so will be His disciples.

Galatians 5:22 says that *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, peace”* and so on. He does not say that it ought to be. We do not become Christians and then pray that we may have the fruit of the Spirit. If one possesses Christ, one will have the fruit within, as one has Christ within.

But what is the nature of the fruit? These are the attributes of Christ, resident within our spirits. They are there, as surely as we have taken Christ, but they are not always expressed adequately in our fleshly personalities, which are subject to limitations from the fall. The evidence of the presence of Christ within our spirits is not measured by the quality of our human perfections, but the reality of our desire to be identified with Christ.

Next month we will discuss the various characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit and show how they are, in fact, a vital part of the spirit of everyone who has received Christ.

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November 1986

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