

The Fruit of Love

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22).

The Holy Spirit of God could not be present in us without affecting us, anymore than a seed could be planted in fertile soil without producing after its kind. Thus, in Paul’s declaration to the Galatians—“*The fruit of the Spirit is* (not, ought to be)”—the power rests in the seed of God and not in the flesh of man.

But how can that be, when the fact is that most Christians are struggling with the very traits that are here declared to be the fruit of the Spirit? Even if there are periods when love and joy seem to flow, there are all too many periods of emotional vacillation. The emotions are hard to control. In fact when people speak of controlling the emotions they usually mean covering the emotions. Christians struggle continually with negative emotions—dislike, resentment, disappointment, discouragement; even doubt and despair. To deny that, is to cover the true feelings—to put on a front. It is often assumed that these emotions are forbidden to the Christian; that if they are there, it is a sign of spiritual weakness and defeat. It is often alleged that such human feelings are an evidence of the lack of the Holy Spirit, and that the overcoming of them is simply a matter of the filling of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is there (or so goes the argument), one will always be filled with love and joy and peace. Conversely if these virtues are not there, one has lost something of the Spirit (or never had Him). Such a system of belief is a sure road to guilt and despair; discouragement and defeat. Who has not experienced these distresses at one time or another? The truth of the matter is that the very fact that one cares about such things is an evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The problem lies in two areas—failure to grasp the meaning of the flesh, and failure to understand the nature of the fruit of the Spirit.

First of all it must be understood that there is a distinction between flesh and Spirit, and that the flesh still remains with us, and will be with us until we are glorified. Paul often refers to the great conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, and is quite bold to judge the flesh to be totally inadequate to accomplish the requirements of the Spirit. He is also bold to admit that he struggles with the flesh like everyone else. “*In me, that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.*” He spoke of the natural man as clinging to him like a dead body. His great hope and expectation was that one day through Christ he would be delivered from this wretchedness in the glorification of his flesh; but for now he must rely on the grace of Christ to carry him successfully in this world. To the Corinthians he expressed his dismay at the “messenger of Satan”—“*A thorn in the flesh*”—constantly badgering him, and was given assurance by Christ that though he would not remove the “messenger,” the grace of God would sustain him in his weaknesses. Paul was no doubt referring here, not to a given affliction, but a demonic agent of Satan, constantly troubling him in the flesh and keeping him from being “overexalted.”

The comforting truth in the midst of this disheartening reality is that the Spirit of Christ within our spirits remains our eternal strength and hope. It is here that the eternal Deity meets mortal spirit and embues it with the divine life. It is here that Christ establishes His eternal dwelling place. “*We will come unto him and make our abode with him.*” The flesh is a temporary abode of the

Spirit. Now fraught with corruption, it will one day be glorified and be a fit abode for His Eternal Presence. Meanwhile our spirits are sustained by the life giving presence of Christ, in spite of the hostile milieu which is always at war with it. *“The flesh lusteth (has its desires) against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh and these are contrary one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would”* (Galatians 5:17).

Satan attacks the flesh continually, but cannot penetrate the spirit, where Christ dwells. Christ does not run out on us just because of Satan’s attacks. He is not such a coward (as some seem to think He is). Satan may affect the Christian in the flesh, but can never possess the spirit of the Christian as he does the spirit of the unsaved.

Now, assuming that Christ dwells in the spirit of the believer, then it is logical to assume that the attributes of Christ are also there. The problem is the expression of those attributes through the limited instrument of the flesh. The love is there in the spirit as Christ is there—and so joy and peace and faith. And they are in the very roots of our spirit-being, but we express them imperfectly. But how does one know they are there? That we shall determine as we examine the fruit.

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If Christ is in us, we have His love. But you say, “I have trouble loving people.” No, you have trouble liking them. The word used in this text is *agapé*—“caring.” The Greek word for love in the sense of liking is *philé*—“affection,” quite a different thing. *Agapé* is the word used for loving God, but also loving our enemies. We are never commanded to “like” our enemies, only to “care” about them. We are not even commanded to feel affection for God, although such emotion often accompanies our “caring.” Christians do not always like God, just as children do not always like their parents. Parents often have to make decisions that do not please children. That is because the children do not understand. So also God sometimes does things (or allows them) that we do not understand, and we may be a bit resentful or questioning. That does not mean we do not “care” about Him. If you did not care about God you would not be reading this article. No one can possess the Spirit of Christ within and be indifferent to Him.

So when the Spirit of Christ comes in He brings His love to the human spirit. We possess the love of Christ as surely as we possess the Spirit of Christ. It is expressed by our human minds in the form of “caring.” We do not always like others, but we do care for their welfare. The Spirit of Christ within us does produce a new kind of caring—for God and for others—but does not always change our emotional patterns. If you care about Christ, you are already producing the fruit of His love.

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