

The Believer and the Holy Spirit X. - Innerworkings of the Spirit

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness [reasonableness, equity], goodness, faith, meekness [openness], temperance [moderation]; against such [in respect to such] there is no Law” (Galatians 5:22,23).

It is not too difficult to grasp the idea that the coming of the Holy Spirit changes our human and mortal natures into something of the Divine and eternal. It is quite difficult to sort out exactly what happens to our spirits in terms of our human function. What changes does the Holy Spirit make in our lives? How does He affect our daily attitudes and conduct? Do Christians automatically behave differently than non-Christians? What is certain and what is uncertain? The text quoted above indicates that if one possesses the Holy Spirit, the virtues there expressed will be certain. Would it then be equally certain that if one does not possess such virtues, one does not have the Holy Spirit?

That the text implies the certainty of the work of the Spirit within, yielding the fruit indicated is unquestionable. On the other hand, there is no certainty about the quality of the fruit. There are those who suggest that the production of such fruit requires a special “filling of the Spirit” beyond salvation. Salvation, according to them, is merely a first step. One of the problems with such a concept is that it is impossible to be saved apart from the Holy Spirit, and yet it is difficult to conceive of the Holy Spirit coming only in part and awaiting a further experience. But those who believe this further assert that the second experience of the Spirit requires a number of preparatory steps including consecration and purification; as well as faith and obedience. Thus, the special experience of the “filling of the Spirit” is seen as something as a reward for virtue rather than the source of virtue. But are these virtues after all the common experience of those who have acquired salvation? Are these virtues the natural result of the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell within all who are saved? Most believers would confess that they do not always experience these things. So where is the problem?

The bane of theology has always been definition—and so with this passage. What do we mean by love? By joy? By peace? It is easy to assume that we know what words mean, especially when we have heard them all of our lives. But that is just the point. How much of our understanding of words is based upon data from a myriad of sources, the input of which develops what we call a “mental grid.” This grid is made up of the genetic factors of personality, as well as the acquired knowledge and experience of a lifetime. Each one of us has our own peculiar “mental grid,” with which we perceive words. In this respect, everyone speaks a different language. All of our ideas must pass through this mental grid, which affects our understanding. The word “love,” for example, means a great many different things to different people.

We must deal with this problem by examining, in-depth, the words which we are confronting here. We must apply something of “scientific semantics.” That is, we must first examine the meaning of the words in the original Greek text—considering the roots of the words and how they were used at the time the New Testament was written. We must then consider how the words are used in our culture today and find some common ground of function. Unless we do this, we are hopelessly lost in a wilderness of ambiguity. In doing this we must rely on

the Holy Spirit to guide us, although as the history of the Church has shown, it is common for teachers to claim that they have special help or revelation from the Holy Spirit and yet are at odds with each other in the interpretation. The reality is that in addition to the guidance of the Spirit, there must be some substantial knowledge of the language and the text. Here, we must rely on the original Greek in a deeper way than mere lexicography or dictionaries of definition. And this we will do (without the assumption of absolute knowledge). We can have a functional knowledge of the words in a way that will give us basic understanding, and yet reserve the claim of ultimate knowledge for God Himself. If what we say comports with the general trend of the Scripture and if it offers help and comfort to the believers, then perhaps it is something that the Lord will use. The reader must be the final judge. Does the Spirit speak to one through the words; do they bring help and comfort? Accordingly, we will seek to determine the meanings of these words in Galatians 5:22 and see if we can identify with them. Are they indeed applicable to everyone who has received the Spirit of Christ through salvation, or is there something else needed? Is the fruit there? Remember we are not saying that such fruit is equally developed in everyone.

Love

Perhaps no word in the English language has more ambiguity in it or a wider range of application. The Greek language is far more precise in this matter, but unfortunately, the several words have all been translated by the same one. This will be somewhat old ground to the readers but must be given in the interest of completeness. The three basic words in Greek are *agapé philé*, and *eros*. Generally speaking, *agapé* has to do with “caring” or “considerateness.” *Philé* has to do with the more surface concept of affection, as with family and friends. *Eros* is used of physical expressions and is the basis of our word “erotic.” It is not used in the New Testament.

Agapé, which is the word used here, does not imply anything of the emotions, although it does not exclude them. Thus, for example, Jesus defined love with the parable of the “Good Samaritan.” The Samaritan attended to the wounds of the victim and took him to an inn (the only one on a very long stretch between Bethlehem and Jericho). There is no indication whatever that there was any further contact or that any human emotions either prompted the act or accompanied it. This word is also used in Jesus’ mandate that we should “love our enemies.” The statement was originally made to the Pharisees to indicate that no matter how much they might try to fulfill the Law, there’s a deeper sense that they were not fulfilling its original intent. Once again, the love required in this case did not involve human emotions at all. It was rather the kind of caring about humanity in general that would cause one to stop and lend a hand to one in great distress. While the Pharisees had no interest whatever in helping the Samaritan, it is quite likely that the one who possessed the Spirit of Christ in salvation would indeed do what the Samaritan did. One can care about one’s enemies to this extent and also to the extent of praying for them as Jesus suggested, without approving of their deeds or possessing any affection for them at all.

Paul said to the Corinthians—“*The love of Christ constrains [compels] us*” (II Corinthians 5:14). Note that it was not love **for** Christ, but the love **of** Christ. Love for Christ would imply a human affection that is most unreliable. Even what we perceive to be a love given by God is vacillating when expressed in the flesh.

However, the love of Christ as a fruit of the Spirit reaches out beyond our fleshly feelings to touch those whom Christ wants us to touch. It gets confusing when we are enjoined by humans to love others as an expression of the “milk of human kindness.” Such love commonly urged upon fellow humans becomes a burden when it is exercised as a human response to that appeal. “Feeding the hungry” is not necessarily a Divinely appointed task. If God does give us an assignment that includes feeding the hungry, He will give also the grace to handle it. It will not be a burden. If something is a burden, it is usually because it has been assigned in a human context. It is well to remember that Jesus refused the suggestion that He turns the rock into bread. He certainly could have done it, but then His mission on earth would have become “the celestial baker.” He came for a much different purpose. By the same token, He ignored Judas’ appeal to sell the perfume and give it to the poor. Jesus was not indifferent to the condition of the poor but assigned it in proportion to the capacities of the individual. Thus, the little boy’s lunch, so woefully inadequate, became, in the hands of Jesus enough for the multitude. The word *philé* on the other hand does involve emotions. It has to do with affection—it becomes confusing when people assume that caring is not enough, but that the coming of the Holy Spirit is always accompanied by great feelings of affection and warmth. Actually, such feelings have more to do with one’s personality than with religious experience. The Holy Spirit comes with energy, and not feeling. Thus, the Holy Spirit may be equally present in one whose personality is less expressive of outward feelings. There are so many variables in personality development that it is impossible to say how a person ought to feel, even when possessed by the Holy Spirit. Friendship is not an automatic thing. If one wants friends, one must be likable. It is never true from a Christian point of view that we must like people in spite of themselves. The Bible never suggests this. Jesus certainly did not like the Pharisees, but He cared enough for them to include them in His sacrifice of love. Given all the petty bickering and backstabbing that goes on in the Church, it is not surprising that many people wish to remain aloof. “Get your knife out of my back and I’ll like you better.”

So the *agapé* love of Galatians 5:22 is not only possible but actual in the coming of the Holy Spirit. If Christ has a task for you to perform in reaching out to others, He will give you the compelling and the capacity, and the compassion to do it. The evidence that the Holy Spirit is in you is the very concern that you have about the matter.

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June 1994

Next month “Part XI - The Fruit of the Spirit—Joy”
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