

The Believer and the Holy Spirit **XIII. - Sensitivity, Usefulness, and Goodness**

“The fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering [sensitivity], gentleness [usefulness], and goodness . . .” (Galatians 5:22).

Sensitivity

The Greek word—μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*)—is a complex word, and is not so easily handled with the simple definition—“longsuffering.” In general, we assume longsuffering to be a matter of patience. This immediately rules out the average person, who whether justified or not would not consider themselves to be very patient. But the Greek word has a wide range of possibilities. Actually its roots are in θυω (*thuo*) which originally meant “to sacrifice,” and then also “to slay” and then “to be angry.” But as with words they go through many shifts in terms of alternate meanings. For example, our own word “to kill” has many different applications. Thus, for example, one could say “I could have killed him,” and yet mean only that they were very angry. Sometimes the same word has almost opposite meanings. For example, the word “hope,” can either convey uncertainty as in “I hope so,” or certainty in the phrase, “at last we have hope.” It is quite legitimate then to think of the word *thumia* as meaning “sensitivity,” rather than rage or something very negative. As a fruit of the Spirit, it would have to be something of a positive nature. The other part of the word, *makro*, is a word that adds generally to size or scope or intensity. For example, microcosm is our own planet, or it can mean a very small area, while macrocosm has to do with the larger universe. By the same token macroeconomics has to do with the broad scope of economics on an international level, whereas microeconomics has to do with the more local economic picture. When we add this prefix to the idea of sensitivity, we come up with something like “keener sensitivity.”

As a fruit of the Spirit, we are dealing thus with a heightening of one’s inner sensitivities, both to God and to others. Apart from the presence of the Spirit of Christ we can become very “animal like” in attitudes that focus on mere self-preservation. In a certain sense, all sensitivity is actually part of the original *imago Dei* or image of God within us. When God breathed into man the “breath of life,” he instilled in him something of a moral likeness or a general “caring consciousness.” In the Fall, the pair lost the Spirit of God, which left them without immortality, but retaining some of the remnants of the image of God within, which we call the “relic of God’s image.” It is this that prevails in large numbers of activities and actions on the part of humans that reflect some deep caring for life and others. There is a limit to this, however, and it does not always emerge constantly. But when we receive the Spirit of Christ, we receive His “image” as it were within our spirits. The presence of Christ within restores that aspect of the Divine image, even though it does not always reflect itself in the flesh. And so, believers can be apparently quite callous in the flesh, and yet still possess the sensitivity of Christ in their spirits. When we take Christ within, we find that the whole of life and God and the universe takes on a new meaning. As Paul tells the Ephesians, “We being dead in our trespasses have been made alive in Christ...” The effect of the Spirit of Christ within us is to bring our spirits to life and with that, an intensifying of our sensitivities. It is most important at this point to understand the deeper meaning of sensitivity as it is used here. It does not refer to mere emotional feelings, which are quite vacillating. It has more to do with “awareness.” The presence of the Holy Spirit

within us gives us a far keener awareness of God and of others and of the world around us. It is not so much that we are sensitive to them in the flesh (a variable of personality), but rather aware of them in the Spirit. Indifference to God, for example, is replaced by the awareness of God. Indifference to others is replaced by a caring or awareness of others in the Body. Conquering the problem of insensitivity in the flesh is a matter of personality adjustment. The conquering of insensitivity to God is accomplished by the presence of the Holy Spirit within us.

Serviceableness

The common translation of the Greek word χρηστοτης (*chrestotes*) is “gentleness.” But “gentleness” has such a variety of meanings and implications as to be all but useless. Jesus was certainly not gentle, in the accepted use of the word, when He drove the money changers out of the temple. Paul could hardly have been said to be characterized by gentleness. But when we trace the word back to its roots it moves more in the direction of “serviceableness” or “usefulness.” How the translators derived “gentleness” from the word is not easily determined. Going back to the Greek classics, we find the most basic use of the word illustrated in a passage from Herodotus. Cambyses of Persia made a statement to Croesus of Lydia—“You have governed your own country quite serviceably . . .” (Htd. 3.36). The Gospels record a statement by Jesus—“*Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart . . . for my yoke is easy [chrestos, serviceable]*” (Matthew 11:29,30). Some have suggested that the word originally meant “cut to fit” which, in the case of oxen, makes it more serviceable, rather than gentle. In other words, when we identify with Christ we become serviceable to Him as befits His purposes for us. If we try to bring in the idea of “gentleness,” we get into difficulty with the variables of personality. It is better to rely on the root meanings of a word, when there is a question, than to go along with the multitude of derived meanings that may accompany many words in language. Whatever others may think of us or we may think of ourselves, the evidence of the Holy Spirit within us is not a radical personality change, but rather the sense of fitting in with Christ and fulfilling whatever purpose He has for us (which may not always be obvious to us).

Goodness

Αγαθοσυνη (*agathosune*) is a special word referring to an inner quality. One can engage in a good deed and yet not possess the quality of goodness. Just so, one might be engaged in a bad deed and still not be characterized by evil. When Paul tells the Romans “*The good that I would I do not and the evil that I would not, I do*” (7:19), he is referring to practices of the flesh. In fact, the word “evil” is really *kakos*, which merely means unsoundness. In other words, Paul was engaged in unsound practices in the flesh, but in the spirit “delighted in the Law of God in the inner man.”

The word *agathosune* does not occur in the Greek classics. The Greeks may have been capable of good deeds, but did not possess the quality of goodness. It occurs only in the New Testament and there, only four times (Romans 15:24; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9; and II Thessalonians 1:11). In every case we are dealing with a work of the Spirit within. To this end, Paul tells the Romans, whom he chastised from time to time in his epistle, that he was “confident that they are filled with all goodness.”

On the surface of things it would seem that one would not be able to call oneself good. The fact is that Jesus Himself, testing the rich young ruler, asked, "Why do you call Me good, seeing there is no one good but God?" Jesus was speaking only from the fleshly point of view. But normally Christian people would not classify themselves as good. It is such a sliding scale, that it really doesn't mean anything at all. But where we possess the Spirit of Christ, His Spirit within us is the essence of goodness. Unsound deeds of the flesh do not alter the fact that we possess goodness as a fruit of the Spirit.

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