

BASIC CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE 10: GROWING IN THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Introduction:

We have been talking a lot about growing in holiness/godliness/Christlikeness over the last two lessons. And in doing so, we have focused on *how* to grow in Christ. In this study, we continue talking about how to grow in Christ, but we are going to bring some greater focus to the content of spiritual growth, what Christlikeness is. Some focus on spiritual gifts, making power the mark of spirituality. Others focus on accomplishing things for God. But haven't you known of Christians who are gifted or accomplished but spiritually immature? Christlikeness is more fundamentally about character. And that is where what the Bible calls "the fruit of the Spirit" comes in.

The fruit of the Spirit is foundational to healthy and balanced Christian living. The Holy Spirit indwells us. He is our constant companion to guide, empower, and make us more like our Lord Jesus. As we acknowledge him and embrace his presence, he will work in our lives and transform our character into the image of Jesus. He will empower us for service and make us more godly. We are called to bring God's reign upon the earth. We will accomplish that as we become people who more and more manifest the fruit of the Spirit, which attests to God's ability to transform our lives. In this study, we will talk about growing in the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

I. Galatians 5:16-25

- What is the fruit of the Spirit?
 - It is godly character generated by the Holy Spirit. It is the character of Christ.
 - Go over the fruit of the Spirit handout appended to this lesson. Point out that it is important to consider these character qualities because the Holy Spirit uses that to produce them in us and grow us in them. As we behold these character qualities in God's word and know that God wants us to be like that and will be working to grow us in them, the Holy Spirit does just that. When we are walking in submission to the Holy Spirit, there is great transformative value in observing how God wants us to be. Cf. 2 Cor 3:18 and the sanctification method of beholding the glory of the Lord. Questions to ask as you cover the handout: What does each piece of fruit mean? Can you give an example of this piece of the fruit? Do you feel special need of any aspects of the fruit more than others?
- How many fruits of the Spirit are there? (This is a trick question.)
 - Only one. Fruit is singular. Think of an orange. One fruit but many sections. The fruit of the Spirit is godly character manifested in terms of love, kindness, self-control, etc.
- What is fruit?
 - Fruit is the mature product of the plant. Similarly, Christian character is the mature product of the Holy Spirit. A tree planted in bad soil will produce bad fruit. A tree planted in good, well-watered soil produces good fruit. If our lives are rooted in the Holy Spirit, then we will produce good fruit.
- What does Paul mean by "live (walk) by the Spirit"? (Galatians 5:16)
 - a. "Walk" by the Spirit = obedience
 - b. Walk "by the Spirit" = dependence

- How can I cause this fruit to grow in me in addition to contemplating what the fruit is?
 - Yield to the impulse of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-18).
 - Remember and re-embrace that you have crucified your sinful nature (Gal 5:24).
 - Remember and re-embrace that you live (have spiritual life) by the Spirit (Gal 5:25).
 - The filling of the Holy Spirit. We have talked about this multiple times in this Basics course. But it is so important. So one more time, what is the filling of the Holy Spirit and how can we be filled with the Holy Spirit? → Being filled with the Holy Spirit means to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And we are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith, by trusting him to fill us. Reminder of a simple way to approach it practically: In prayer, (1) confess any know sin; (2) submit yourself to God; (3) ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit, and then continue on knowing you are filled.

II. 2 Peter 1:2-11

1. Verse 3 – What does this mean for the fruit in your life?
 - Peter says we have everything we need for life and godliness. We have it but we don't always use it, enjoy it or live in it. Children have all the body parts they will ever need but it takes practice and growth to use them to their full potential. So it is with the fruit of the Spirit.
 - So it is not about getting something out there, but about yielding to the Spirit within you to bring out what is already there in the Spirit, seeking him to manifest it more in your life and to help you gain proficiency in exercising it.
2. Verse 4 – Notice that we participate in the divine nature! How? → The Holy Spirit within us
3. Verse 8 – What do these qualities (or this fruit) do for you? → Make you effective and productive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ
4. Verse 9 – What if you don't have them? → You're nearsighted and blind.
 - Why would that be? What is the connection to the forgiveness of our sins? → Forgetting one's sins are forgiven is being spiritually blind and keeps one from Christlikeness and godly character.
 - What does that suggest for how we might foster the growth of these qualities (fruit)? → Continuing importance of remembering the gospel; going to the cross, living a lifestyle of repentance, etc.
5. Verses 10-11 – What does practicing these things guarantee you? → Not stumbling (i.e., turning away from Christ/falling into a lifestyle of sin) and entrance into Heaven
 - Is this works righteousness? Do we get into Heaven for practicing these virtues? → No, but practicing and growing in these virtues reflects faith because sanctification/growth in Christ is the path that faith travels. Remember, v. 9 tells us that the person without these virtues has forgotten he has been forgiven.

- How does having these virtues in increasing measure keep you from turning away from Christ or falling into a lifestyle of ongoing, unrepentant sin? → Because that is spiritual growth and it encourages faith and it is increasingly the opposite of forsaking Christ or sinning. It is like saying that a man who loves his wife more and more will not forsake her or that the person who is telling the truth is not lying.

III. The Gardening Analogy

1. Planting – We need to be planted in God (John 15:5)

- How do we get planted in God? → Believing in Jesus (John 1:12-13; Eph 1:13-14)

2. Weeding/Pruning – John 15:1-2

- a. What would the spiritual weeding process be? → Getting rid of sin in our lives; putting to death sinful desires and practices in our lives (God does this and we do it inspired and empowered by him).

- b. How do you think God prunes us? → Various ways that he fights and removes sin from our lives, including convicting us, guiding us, speaking to us, instructing us, motivating us, and using difficulties in our lives

- Pruning is a trial for a tree but it yields great benefit. It is under fire in daily life that we find “rot” and also grow and change.

- Cf. James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5

- How has God done this in your life?

- How can we go about the process of weeding/pruning?

a. Colossians 3:5

- What is involved in this? → Denying the sinful desires and practices of our flesh, rejecting them, regarding them as foreign enemies.

- Remember Gal 5:24, which says that we *have* crucified our sinful nature.

- Why command us to put it to death if we already have? → Something we did fundamentally at conversion, but need to continue to carry out every day. Already and not yet!

- Why do this? What reasons do the following verses in Colossians give us (3:6-11)?

- Col 3:6 → the wrath of God

- vv. 7-11

- Sin is not our identity any longer. That is our old man/self. We have put on the new man/self. (vv 9-10)

- Our new self is being renewed in God’s image. (v 10)

- Christ is all! (v 11)

- Christ is in us! (v 11)

- So what is the basis for our ability to put to death what belongs to our sinful nature and to rid ourselves of sin? → Christ in us / the Holy Spirit / a new nature / God's power working in us
 - It is key for us to rely on this, claim it, remember it, etc.
3. Nurturing (food, water, sun etc.)
- Colossians 3:12-17
 - How can we nurture the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives?
 - vv. 12-17 lists more fruit of the Spirit, but these are also things that nurture the fruit of the Spirit in us like a circle of blessed fruitfulness.
 - Nurturing our relationship with the Lord is fundamental since the fruit grows out of that and his work in us.
 - A few things here stand out as particularly helpful tools. What do you think?
 - The word of Christ (v 16), community (vv 15-16), worship and thanksgiving (vv 16-17). We have talked about Christ, community, and worship while talking about growing in holiness in previous lessons. So let's talk about thanksgiving, which is a fundamental Christian practice, the sort that encourages a lot of other types of the fruit of the Spirit. How does thanksgiving do that? → E.g., thankfulness to God makes you love him more, makes you joyful, gives you peace, etc.
 - John 15:5-12
 - What does "Remain in me" mean? → to abide, dwell, continually live; refers to continuing to trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior and to walk in relationship with him.
 - What is involved in that? → the word (v 7), prayer (cf. v 7), obedience (v 10), receiving Jesus' love (v 9; continually remember the gospel!), love/community (v 12), imitating Jesus (v 12; WWJD – "what would Jesus do?")
 - Of course, repentance is implied in trust and obedience.
 - It's all about focusing on Jesus and our relationship with him. We don't so much focus on getting fruit, but on our love relationship with Jesus. He can lead us to giving attention to developing specific fruit. But that grows out of our relationship with him and his leading as we give attention to him and his word and the means of growth he has given us.

CONCLUSION: God's goal for us is to glorify him by being conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ. And he has given us his Spirit to produce that in us. This work arises out of our relationship with Christ, and so nurturing that relationship is vital to growing in the fruit of the Spirit. Giving ourselves to practicing the basics of the faith will nurture our growth in the fruit: the word, prayer, obedience, trust in the Lord and his love and forgiveness, repentance, fighting our sin, community, worship, thanksgiving, the filling of the Holy Spirit, remembering and claiming our identity in Christ, trusting that God is transforming our character, etc. As we follow the lead of the Spirit, he can direct our attention to specific areas to focus on. Being aware of what the fruit of the Spirit/godly character is will also aid us. But let us remember that it is not obtained by trying harder but by submitting ourselves to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to grow us into mature, fruitful disciples.

[Teacher's note: Depending on how long it takes to go over the handout, which should be prioritized, this lesson might and probably will need to be shortened. To shorten the lesson, the material under Point III from Colossians 3 could be removed entirely, or preferably, removed except for asking how can we go about the process of weeding/pruning, reading Col 3:5 to give the answer to that from that verse and then asking how we can nurture the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and quickly sharing various tools from Colossians 3 listed in the lesson.]

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:22-23

1. **LOVE:** Paul probably had two meanings in mind: Love for God and love for others. Love for God has to do with treasuring him above all else. Love for others is unconditional, seeks other's good even at expense to self, lays down life, initiates, tough.
2. **JOY:** active and sometimes exuberant. Happiness not based on circumstances but in knowing God and His character. We are joyful simply because we are in Christ, he is awesome, and it is well with our souls forever (see on peace below).
3. **PEACE:** wholeness, order, total well-being. It is not based on feelings but on the fact that we are forgiven in Christ and accepted by God. Because of Christ's death and resurrection and our union with him by faith, we can be at peace with God, with ourselves, and with others.
4. **PATIENCE:** perseverance, endurance. It is a position of strength, handling anger and frustration slowly and with calm determination. Persevering in other virtues such as gentleness, kindness, love, and joy despite difficulty.
5. **KINDNESS:** benevolence in action. Practical expressions of love that are appropriate to the recipient.
6. **GOODNESS:** God is good and the measure of goodness. To be good is to be devoted to God's will and glory above all else, walking in God's will, and doing God's will. To glorify God in what we do is good.
7. **FAITHFULNESS:** integrity, honesty, dependable, loyal. Being true to and adhering to God's will. It arises out of our salvation. Faith leads to faithfulness.
8. **GENTLENESS:** meekness/humility in action. Receiving humbly what God speaks or does in our lives. It is how you treat someone when you think of them as better than yourself.
9. **SELF-CONTROL:** mastering self. Mastering the Flesh. Managing the things in our lives that would put us off balance and out of God's will. Controlling oneself to do God's will. Doing what one intends to do.

Bonus piece of the fruit not mentioned in Gal 5:22-23:

10. **HUMILITY** (Eph 4:2; Phil 2:3; Col 3:12): An attitude toward self in relation to God and others that sees God as supreme and self as his servant, nothing apart from him, and totally dependent on him. Sees self realistically with one's flaws and weaknesses, as no better than others, and intentionally treats others as better than self, issuing forth in selflessness, others-centeredness, concern for others, and service to others.

All of these can only be lived out on a consistent basis with dependence on the Holy Spirit.