

The Fruit Of The Spirit

by John W. Ritenbaugh

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The Bible's peculiar elegance in its writing has helped make it the world's best seller decade after decade. The divine Author, who possesses beauty of expression far beyond even the best of human authors, has given us tiny glimpses of His genius in the soaring literary majesties of Psalms, Isaiah and Hebrews. He also shows us another side of His literary abilities in the simply stated but discerning, penetrating and practical insights of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The value of Scripture, though, does not lie in its elegance of style. It lies in the fact that the great God, the sovereign Governor of all creation, has chosen to write His law, His instruction to men revealing Himself and His purpose, in the common tongues of people worldwide. The more plain the Word and law of the Almighty, the more becoming the divine Author and Lawgiver—and the more profitable for mankind. His Word becomes like bread that can nourish every palate (Matthew 4:4).

God gives much of His instruction in similes, parables, allegories, metaphors, types, figures and symbols, providing illustrations that virtually everyone, no matter what their background or station, can grasp. To this He adds true, real life examples drawn from the whole spectrum of human and spirit life over vast expanses of time. We have access to the very wisdom of the ages! The Bible is a fund of knowledge especially useful concerning relationships, applicable and practical to anyone who believes at any time in human history.

A great deal of biblical instruction reflects the agricultural realm. God makes use of familiar aspects of agriculture like grapes, olives, apples, figs, oxen, mustard, pomegranates, wheat, corn, barley, flowers, farmers, plowing, sowing, planting, harvesting, fertilizing, rain in due season, weeds and seeds. He uses these ideas to illustrate practical moral and spiritual instruction for those who believe.

As a teaching vehicle, the general term "fruit" may be used more frequently than all other farming terms. In the physical realm, fruit is generally considered to be the seed-bearing product of a plant. Many of these are edible and very enjoyable and nourishing to eat. While the Bible agrees with this, it also frequently presents fruit as the product of effort or to provide a symbolical meaning.

Thus, we find phrases such as, "fruit of the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:2), "fruit of the ground" (Genesis 4:3), and "fruit of the womb" (Genesis 30:2). In the New Testament more than the Old, fruit is often understood symbolically as the product of either a good or evil life, or an obedient or disobedient life.

Fruit as a Symbol

John the Baptist's teaching to the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3:8 is an example of this: "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." Fruit symbolizes the consequence or product of repentance. The fruit of repentance toward God is, among other things, a change of attitude toward Him and His law. It represents quenching one's enmity toward Him, as well as turning from disobedient to His Word to obedient. It may also indicate a change of status and relationship from son of Satan (John 8:44) to son of God (Romans 8:14).

Jeremiah 6:19 is a clear example from the Old Testament:

Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it.

Calamity is the effect, the fruit, of evil thoughts. The lesson is clear: Calamity of this sort begins with evil thoughts, proceeds to evil actions, producing bitter and painful experiences for the self and others. Why not strive to avoid the bitter fruit evil thoughts produce by changing our thoughts to the good?

Romans 6:21-22 shows fruit as a product in both a bad and good sense:

What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

The context answers what the fruit in each verse symbolizes. In verse 21, the product of actions of which we are now ashamed would have been death. But because of God's calling and our subsequent repentance, our status and relationship with Him have changed—and so has what we are producing with our lives. We are now His slaves rather than sin's, producing fruit to holiness rather than shame and death. In the end God will give us everlasting life. The choice is ours. Which fruit would we rather have, shame and death or holiness and life?

Producing Good Fruit

The Bible shows that producing good fruit has other, more specific causes than God's calling and repentance. Romans 7:4-6 is a good place to begin:

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

We will add to this Romans 1:13, 15, where we need to remember that Paul addresses the congregation in Rome, one he had neither founded nor yet visited:

Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. . . . So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

The fruit he wanted to see produced was not new conversions. Philippians 4:17, where Paul instructs a congregation to which he felt especially close, helps to explain what the apostle meant: "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account." In writing to an existing congregation of converted people, he wanted them to exhibit the fruit of righteousness by making use of faith in God's Word (the gospel). They could do this by yielding in obedience to God's instruction through the power and guidance of His Spirit in them.

As a shepherd or pastor, he claims the fruit would also be his, since it would accrue in them as a result of his teaching them the gospel in greater detail. The teaching in Romans exemplifies the detail of the messages he would have given orally had he been there. The good works that they produced by making use of God's Word would also accrue to him as the fruits of his labors for them. When students do well, their success is the fruit of a teacher's labors.

Conversely, Philippians 4:17 explains that Paul is not being self-centered in this. He yearns that they produce fruit through good works so they can receive the benefits. The fruit accrues to *their* accounts. Thus, producing good fruit requires sound instruction from a qualified teacher (Acts 8:30-31), the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, a believing and receptive mind and applying the instruction.

Bearing Much Fruit

In John 15:1, Jesus begins a message using the grapevine as His illustration. He concludes by stating in verse 8, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." In verse 16, He again mentions fruit in relation to His instruction:

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

In this context, the bearing of fruit is generalized. It includes everything produced as a result of their labors of publicly preaching the gospel, their service to the church in pastoring, and their personal overcoming and growing in the image of God. They all bring honor to God by declaring the dramatic change for good that takes place as a result of being connected to the Vine and thus able to draw upon Him and His power to produce fruit.

Verse 16 briefly touches on the quality of fruit God desires. It implies that the disciples should be rich in good works and be striving to produce fruit that endures. God wants the fruit to endure both within themselves (by taking on God's character) and in others (in conversions so that the church grows and continues).

The remainder of the verse ties answered prayer directly to the production of fruit. We are all called to participate in the work of the church, if only to pray for it. God has not called everyone to work on the front lines of evangelizing as apostles. But because God has called and chosen all of us, upon us falls the responsibility of producing fruit within the scope of our place in the body that we all glorify God.

The Fruit of the Spirit

The fruits we are most concerned about are those listed in Galatians 5:22-23, where Paul writes: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

These qualities or virtues are produced by the action of the Holy Spirit in us. They grow in a person who, by faith, obeys God's Word through the guidance and power of God's Spirit. Clearly, elements of this equation must be used so that the right fruit is produced—God's Word, His Spirit, faith and obedience to God's Word. These, along with some others, produce the major fruits of righteousness.

Led by the Spirit

Paul writes in Romans 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." Galatians 5:18 is especially helpful in understanding the fruit of the Spirit because it directly precedes Paul's naming them: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Being led by the Spirit is a necessary precursor to producing the fruit of the Spirit in us.

Notice that the verse says "led," not dragged, forced, imposed upon or imputed to. This supplements what Jesus says in John 16:13:

However, when It, the Spirit of truth, has come, It will guide you into all truth; for It will not speak on Its own authority, but whatever it hears it will speak; and it will tell you things to come.

Some of the verbs in this sentence are telling. "Guide," "speak" and "tell" show that God has chosen to persuade rather than force us. In addition, they give the distinct impression that the followers and hearers will need to do something on their own.

They will have to make choices, pay attention to what is said or written, and set their wills and follow through on their choices in order to accompany and learn from the Guide. Without these, they will not produce fruit because they are doing insufficient or the wrong activities.

A teacher cannot impose knowledge, understanding and wisdom upon a student. The student must cooperate in the process. Without this, little or no fruit is produced. The Bible shows the Spirit of God as influencing, suggesting and, if we choose to permit it, dominating—perhaps even controlling—our lives. This is good because God is good, and if we will yield, the fruit of His Spirit will be produced in our lives.

Are we aware that a divine influence is drawing us away from the corrupting passions and vanities of this world? Are we conscious of a desire to yield to that influence and be conducted along the path of holiness and life? Do we resist, or do we follow cheerfully and energetically, mortifying pride, subduing passion, destroying lust, stifling talebearing, humbling ambition and annihilating the love of the wealth and fashions of this world?

God will not lead us astray. Our real love, joy and peace consist only in yielding ourselves entirely to Him and being willing to be guided and influenced by His unseen hand. To be led by the Spirit is to choose voluntarily and consciously to submit to the Word of God.

The Power of God

The Holy Spirit is described generally as the power of God, which is certainly correct, but power comes in a number of forms. There is a flowing power caused by the movement of an object. Thus God uses water to illustrate an aspect of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). There is healing and nourishing power, so God uses oil to symbolize His Spirit. Words, symbols we use to represent ideas, the raw material of our thoughts, have awesome power to influence. Thus God says through Jesus that His words "are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Words give us the power to communicate ideas from one mind to another or to many minds. They carry the power to instruct, encourage, discourage, mollify, anger, vilify, inspire, exhilarate, create or

destroy. They can make a person change his mind, motivate him to stop or move, do, undo or redo. The power of words is almost limitless.

If we examine the fruit of the Spirit, we find that they all have something to do with our minds. Words are a large portion of the mind's working material and therefore play a huge role in what the person produces with his life. It is no coincidence that Jesus is the Word of God, and the Bible, the written revelation of God and His purpose, is also the Word of God! God is trying to tell us something. He is concerned about our minds because what goes into them will determine what we produce with our lives. Will it be fruit leading to eternal life or fruit leading to death?

We cannot think with what we do not have. If we do not have the right material upon which to base our thoughts, how can we possibly produce the right things? We are always, whether pauper or king, limited by what is in our mind. Paul shows this in Ephesians 2:1-3:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

This reveals to us that every human being who has ever lived (except Jesus) has been enslaved to a way of thinking generated by the prince of the power of the air, Satan. Because of this, we fulfilled the desires of our flesh and mind. Indeed, because our minds had little else with which to work, we could not produce anything else! We produced the fruits of a spirit but not the Spirit of God.

I Corinthians 2:7-8 clarifies this:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

By using those who killed Christ as an illustration, Paul shows that everyone has been held captive to ignorance of God and His way. God's wisdom was hidden from "the rulers of this age." Had they had it, their minds would have had the material to reach a far different conclusion about what to do about Christ. They would have produced a different result.

The wisdom of God was hidden from us too until God began to lead us by His Spirit. I Corinthians 2:10-12 informs us of the change this has wrought in our lives:

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

God had the gospel preached to us through the medium of words. We believed them, and having been freed from enslavement to deception and spiritual ignorance by God's calling and forgiveness through Christ's blood, we now have access to a new and infinitely larger dimension of life. Beyond that, we now possess the raw material for our minds to produce the fruit of Spirit of God.

I Corinthians 2:13-14 adds:

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Without God's Spirit, we were limited to producing only things within the capabilities of the spirit in man coupled with the influences of Satan. Though we could produce wonderful material things, the spiritual and moral fruit was overwhelmingly bad. What else can Satan's spirit produce? But now, as the saying goes, "the sky is the limit" because access to the Spirit of God empowers us (with His help, of course) to produce the life God Himself lives—eternal life.

Produce Fruit by Wishful Thinking?

However, doing this will not be easy because the Christian becomes a man with two natures. The old nature, ingrained with the thinking patterns and habits learned in this world, which lies under the sway of the evil one (I John 5:19), and the new divine nature, received as a new birth from God (II Peter 1:3-4), exist together. These two are irreconcilable antagonists—with the Christian in the middle, forced to make choices between them.

In Galatians 5:16-17, Paul says:

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Again, the context in which these verses appear is important to understanding the production of the fruit of the Spirit. This immediately precedes the listing of the fruit of the Spirit, showing that Paul means that they will be produced through much internal conflict.

This is true because obedience to God's Word is required to produce the Spirit's fruit, and the Christian is being pulled or led in two directions. The one tries to make us satisfy the desires of our old nature, and the other leads us toward producing the fruit of the new. Paul expresses his experience with this in Romans 7:15-19:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Christians, as Martin Luther stated, "are not stocks and stones." As humans, we are creatures of desires, drives and emotions. Certainly, as we learn to walk in the Spirit, we increasingly subdue our flesh. But flesh and Spirit remain, and the conflict between them is fierce and unremitting.

We need not become discouraged over this conflict, though, because Paul also gives us a very hopeful solution. In Romans 7:24-25, he exclaims: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me

from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

Every Christian striving to produce the fruit of God will experience this combination of lamentation over sinfulness and joyous expression of gratitude over the certainty of deliverance. The unconverted do not feel the agonizing struggle against sin with the same intensity as the converted. The converted have their peace disturbed and can feel wretched in their conscience.

But this has a good side to it as well. We know it is degrading to the divine nature, and it humbles us to know full well that we have succumbed to evil passions. We then realize more fully that the law cannot come to our aid, neither can other men, and our strength has already betrayed us. Therefore, if we really desire to glorify God and produce spiritual fruit, this conflict will drive us to God in heartfelt prayer for the strength only He can give. God's Word and eventually our experience prove that without Christ, we can do nothing!

A Singular Fruit

It might be helpful to note that Paul wrote "fruit" in the singular, indicating that we should understand that the fruit has a number of components, but at the same time, all of them will be produced within each person the Spirit leads. This does not mean that each component will be in exactly equal proportions like so many segments of an orange. Nor does it give any indication of its quantity or quality in each person. However, it ought to encourage us to know that some part of each of them will be produced.

Paul pointedly drew attention to the source of the fruit as being "of the Spirit" to make us fully aware that these qualities do not flow from our natures. The vices or "works of the flesh" listed in Galatians 5:19-21 are the product of our human heart. But the spiritual fruit is produced by means of a "foreign" influence, the agency of the Holy Spirit. Even after conversion our heart is not the source of this spiritual fruit.

A final factor to consider is that Paul names nine qualities. This divides neatly into three general groups, each consisting of three qualities. Of course, we can expect some overlapping of application between the groups, but generally the first group—love, joy and peace—portrays a Christian's mind in its most general aspect with special emphasis on one's relationship with God. The second group—longsuffering (patience), kindness and goodness—contains social virtues relating to our thoughts and actions toward fellow man. The final group—faithfulness (fidelity), gentleness and self-control—reveals how a Christian should be in himself with overtones of his spiritual and moral reliability.

Each of these virtues is a quality we should greatly desire, for without them, we cannot rightly reflect the mind and way of God. The fruit of the Spirit reflects the virtues God would manifest before mankind. Indeed, when Jesus became a man, it was by his life He glorified our Father in heaven. God, of course, is far more than this brief listing describes. But seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness through yielding to His Word will produce these characteristics of God in us. Then, as we become like Christ, we will, like Him, glorify God.