

118 "The fruit of the Spirit"

We were reminded last week that all who confess in their lives that "Jesus Christ is Lord" are given various spiritual gifts, by the Holy Spirit, to be used for the building-up of the Church and for the greater glory of God. These gifts are varied and plentiful, meaning that each of us has a part to play in the health of the "body of Christ", His Church, His Bride.

Now those gifts are mainly given to us "early on" in our spiritual walk with Christ, to equip us and "get us into the action". We can think of them like those talents that were given out to the servants by the man "travelling into a far country", in the parable the Lord told (Matthew 25 / Luke 19): those talents, just like our gifts, involve responsibility, and accountability.

As our spiritual walk with Christ proceeds, so another sign of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives should become apparent - the presence of "spiritual fruit". The main passage describing this fruit comes in Galatians 5.22-23 - love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control (JPGreen Literal). The Holy Spirit here, through Paul to the Galatian Christians, is pointing out the contrasting results between the "works of the flesh" (verses 19-21, not a pretty sight), and this lovely "fruit of the Spirit".

We see that these qualities are termed "fruit", and not "fruits". We must not overdo this small distinction between singular and plural, but it does show that the Holy Spirit is far more concerned with fruit in the context of our whole rounded lives, rather than with a mere fruit-by-fruit, tick-box approach. It means that the life of a mature Christian, in which the Holy Spirit has been given room to work over the years, should be a thing of rounded goodness, even beauty, as opposed to being "spot on" on, say, Fruits A, B and C, but still woeful on all the others!

This spiritual fruit, by definition, grows gradually, and scarcely noticed. Ironically, it grows best when we are not trying to grow it at all! If I am forever checking my progress on that "fruit-of-the-Spirit checklist", I am actually ending up concerned far more with Me than I should be. Of course it is right that we are self-aware and perfectly honest as to what we are and how we are doing, before our own selves and before the Lord in our prayers; in repentance we acknowledge and confess our sinfulness and shortcomings before Him, and seek His fresh forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ (eg., I John 1.8-9).

But our Christian lives are not primarily about Me, or primarily about Us, but about Him, Jesus Christ the Lord. This brings us to the classic picture of the Vine and the branches of John Chapter 15 - for therein lies the key to the growing of spiritual fruit in our lives. "Abide in Me", the Lord tells us: we are to abide, abide, abide in Him. As we, the branches, so abide in Christ the True Vine, we see how obvious it is that the Holy Spirit Sap flows naturally, quietly, constantly, from the Vine into the branches, and those branches will in turn bear rich spiritual fruit.

So the branch sets its attention and will towards the Vine, not towards itself. The more it turns round and looks at itself for a "Fruit Progress Report", the less it is truly abiding in the Vine, and the more it is restricting the flow of the Sap. But by abiding in the Vine, "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12.2), the spiritual fruit can just "happen", probably to the great surprise, even denial, of the fruit-laden branch.

By the giving of His gifts and the bearing of spiritual fruit, the Holy Spirit plays His precious part in the lives of God's redeemed children. We do well to make Him welcome, and allow Him to get on with what He seeks to do.

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