

Fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy and Peace

A Series on the Fruit of the Spirit: Part 2

With his contrast to sinful “deeds of the flesh” to God pleasing “fruit of the spirit,” Paul’s points out that outward behavior finds its basis on the condition of the heart. The imagery of fruit indicating a person’s observable behavior is used throughout the Bible (Deut 29:18; Ps 1:3; Prov 1:31; 11:30; 12:14; 13:2; 18:20; Isa 3:10; Jer 6:19; 32:19; Matt 3:8-10; Eph 5:9; Col 1:10). Jesus Himself uses the imagery of fruit in this manner (Matt 7:15-20; 12:33-37; Luke 6:43-44).

In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus reveals that close fellowship with Him is essential to bearing spiritual fruit and reflects the outworking of faith in the witness and conduct of the Christian, and building of the church (John 15:1-10).

The Fruit of the Spirit can be broken down into 3 groups of three attributes. The first group can be generally understood as attributes given by God, because the Bible specifically states that they were given through the Holy Spirit:

Love

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)

Joy and Peace

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:13)

Love

The Greek term “agapē” is used here, and in most instances in the New Testament, it speaks of God’s relationship with man and usually with the sense of God’s love of mankind.

Faith consists, in part, in the knowledge that Jesus’ atonement is God’s loving act towards sinners. When a Christian realizes that he is a sinner loved by God, he enters into God’s sphere of “agapē” love. It is this “agapē” love of God that is poured into the Believer’s heart through the Holy Spirit that moves the Christian to love others. In receiving divine love, Christians will love others. In receiving divine forgiveness, Christians will forgive.

In verses where a Christian is “in Christ” or Christ is “in me,” the implication is that this “agapē” love has taken hold of me and is making me into a loving person.

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal 2:20)

God’s love creates a new understanding about human beings and towards a new basis of genuine relationships; thus, love can be said to be the fruit of the Spirit. As God “agapē” loves mankind, so genuine Believers “agapē” love their neighbors.

Joy

Galatians 5:22 uses the Greek term “chara” for “joy.” From a human perspective, it has the meaning of genuine gladness caused from something, someone, or an occasion.

This can be seen in the joy (“chara”) of Jesus’ birth (Matt 2:10; Luke 1:14; 2:10), the joy in heaven over each sinner coming to salvation (Luke 15:7-10), and the disciples’ joy in seeing the resurrected Jesus Christ (John 16:22; Luke 24:41, 52).

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However in contrast, the Fruit of the Spirit is a divine joy that is beyond earthly human joy. To gain a sense of this divine joy, Jesus speaks of His joy during the Last Supper:

These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. (John 15:11)

Jesus' joy is based, not only on the prospect of being with His Father, but the accomplishment that will be validated with His return.

You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. (John 14:28-29)

Early in His ministry, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that the Son of God was sent from His Father's presence for a purpose:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. (John 3:16-17)

For Jesus, as He tells His disciples, doing His Father's will is what sustains Him:

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work." (John 4:34)

And at the cross, Jesus accomplishes the humanly impossible task of atonement:

Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (John 19:30)

Thus, Jesus' joy during the Last Supper, is in the prospect of completing His Father's will and returning to Him. As this was before the crucifixion, this joy would not be made full until atonement was completed.

Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'?" Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. (John 16:19-24)

I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:11-14)

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How does the Holy Spirit fit in all of this? When Jesus makes the atoning sacrifice, the New Covenant is initiated and the promised Holy Spirit comes. For Believers, in addition to Jesus' resurrection, the arrival of the Holy Spirit further confirms that Jesus' work has been done, and the promise of salvation and eternal life is assured.

But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, "Where are You going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; (John 16:5-9)

Divine joy has its source beyond earthly human joy and outside of ourselves. It is joy in God the Father and in His Son's supreme sacrifice of atonement. It is a joy that has its basis in the hope and confidence of faith and looks forward to the future of being in the presence of the Lord.

Peace

In today's contemporary culture, peace is seen as the opposite of war. It is a state of law and order where people are peaceful towards each other or have a peaceful and calm frame of mind.

The Greek term used in Galatians 5:22 for "peace" is "eirēnē." The New Testament concept of peace can be seen from the following observations:

It is a Messianic peace rooted in the reconciliation with God (Luke 1:79; 2:14; 19:42).

It results in a peace among men (Eph 4:3; James 3:18); however, it is a peace that arises from one who has reconciled with God (Matt 10:32-39).

The above two observations embody the essential goal of Christianity, and is the idea behind the phrase "gospel of peace" (Acts 10:36; Eph 2:17; 6:15).

As the mediator of reconciliation with God, Jesus Christ Himself is peace (Eph 2:14-18), and He gifts His peace to disciples (John 14:27). This explains how God causes peace to rule in the hearts of man (Col 3:15) and how a genuine church is built upon peace (Rom 14:17-19); harmony results when righteousness exists among men.

There is the idea that peace is a power (Rom 15:13), and one can see that during His ministry, Jesus encouraged His disciples to pass peace on to others, but if the recipient was found unworthy or refused, then it would return to the disciple (Matt 10:13; Luke 10:5).

As part of the Fruit of the Spirit, divine peace is the result of a Believer genuinely reconciling with God. It is a blessing that recognizes God as the source and giver of peace, and while the Holy Spirit is indwelling, the fruit only results when one is abiding in the Holy Spirit.

References:

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