

Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control

A Series on the Fruit of the Spirit: Part 4

The Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) can be categorized in three groups of three attributes:

Love, Joy and Peace can be seen as character qualities given by God.

Patience, Kindness and Goodness can be seen as qualities that enable human relationships pleasing to God.

Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control can be seen as qualities that enable an abiding life with God.

When speaking of the Fruit of the Spirit, Paul has in mind that the Old Covenant is no longer in force (Gal 5:6), and the New Covenant finds its fulfillment in the love for others (Gal 5:14). Paul's view of faith emphasizes the Spirit as the means for a Believer's transformation (Gal 5:5).

Thus, as Paul speaks of the tension between the "deeds of the flesh" and the "Fruit of the Spirit," he makes clear that obedience in faith is required to overcome this ever present conflict (Gal 5:16-17).

Faithfulness

In Galatians 5:22, faithfulness (or the King James version: faith) is translated from the Greek noun "pistis." Paul often speaks of faith as believing in Jesus Christ and living in a manner reflecting a genuine trust in the gospel (Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 2:3-5; 15:14-17).

But there is something circular here: one must have faith to receive the Fruit of the Spirit which itself includes faithfulness.

With His Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30), Jesus provides some clarity to this potential confusion. In this parable, three slaves, each according to his capabilities, are entrusted with a large sum of money. Assuming that a talent is worth twenty years of a laborer's wages, and assuming a laborer wage of \$10 / hour, 8 hours / day, 5 days / week, 50 weeks / year for 20 years, then a talent would be worth around \$400,000 in today's dollar. In this context, each slave received huge sums of money: the first slave \$2,000,000, the second slave \$800,000 and the last slave \$400,000.

When the master returns, the first two slaves double their allocation. For their stewardship, the master praises them, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." (Matt 25:19-22)

The last slave did not attempt to invest his allocation; he failed in his responsibility of stewardship and revealed a lack of love to his master (Matt 25:24-26).

The first two slaves were called "faithful," because of their fidelity and remained true to their master striving to please him. In like manner, faithfulness, in the Fruit of the Spirit, is about fidelity and remaining true to God so that a Believer will strive for holiness and live a life pleasing to God.

Gentleness

In Galatians 5:23, the Greek noun for "gentleness" is "praÿtēs," which could also mean "humility," "considerateness," and "meekness." It is a character of benevolence one has towards friends or a character of nobility such as a wise man who remains meek in the face of insults.

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Gentleness is an attitude that a Christian should have towards all people:

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle (**praÿtēs**), showing every consideration for all men. (Tit 3:1-2)

Although it may be challenging, Christians are to have an attitude of gentleness towards Christians who have committed a sin:

Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness (**praÿtēs**)? (1 Cor 4:18-21)

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness (**praÿtēs**); each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. (Gal 6:1)

Paul clearly teaches that gentleness is demanded of all Christians, because it is a part of one's sanctification and pursuit of holiness and through him testifies to Jesus Christ and the New Covenant of loving others:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness (**praÿtēs**), with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1-2)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness (**praÿtēs**) and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Col 3:12-14)

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (**praÿtēs**). Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Tim 6:9-12)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness (**praÿtēs**) correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26)

As part of the Fruit of the Spirit, gentleness is an attitude given by the Holy Spirit, and is distinctive from the pagan act of gentleness in that it assists in personal sanctification, the attitude behind loving others and testifies to the love of God.

Self-Control

“Enkrateia” is the Greek term used in Galatians 5:23 for “self-control” with the sense of self-restraint. Paul's portrays self-control as a positive behavior in contrast to the deeds of the flesh such as immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, and carousing (Gal 5:19-20).

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“Enkrateia” literally means to “have power over oneself,” and in the physical and / or intellectual sense. It is a moderation or suppression of one’s strong personal desires.

Peter reveals that self-control finds its basis in the knowledge that comes from faith:

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control (**enkrateia**), and in your self-control (**enkrateia**), perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. (1 Pet 1:5-7)

Self-control is associated with perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love; it is the self-control of one’s personal desires for the love of others.

As part of the Fruit of the Spirit, genuine self-control is not something entirely under the willpower of a human being. The self-control that God intends is a consequence of faith.

Without a genuine faith, Spiritual Fruit is not humanly possible, and it is not a state of mind.

Genuine faith can be understood as creating a disposition that allows one to respond willingly to the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is in this context that as a Christian abides in Jesus Christ, so Christ abides in him and continues to produce Spiritual Fruit. This process of sanctification, expressed through the love of other human beings, testifies to the love of God and to the work of His Son Jesus.

In understanding the meaning of Spiritual Fruit, one can understand clearly what James was speaking of when associating faith and works:

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:14-26)

References:

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