This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8, NIV).

In this the introductory article for the series on the fruit of the Spirit, three divisions will be considered:

1. Comparing and Contrasting the Gifts and Fruit of the Spirit
2. God Expects us To Abide in Him and Bring Forth Fruit
3. The Fruit of the Spirit Is More Powerful Than the Gifts of the Spirit

I. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE GIFTS AND FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

1. Pentecostals and charismatics are often accused of neglecting the fruit of the Spirit for the more visible gifts.

The Scriptures would bring us to a balance of the two—like presenting a perfectly formed and healthful piece of fruit in an appropriate and attractive package. Together they make a perfect team and, if held in proper perspective, will result in a fully developed, ‘mature New Testament believer—much like a piece of “gift-wrapped fruit!”

“Spirituals” (gifts) are often highly visible. Like wrappings; they tend to be quickly seen and sometimes are even noisy (1 Corinthians 13:1). God’s Word teaches the need for both gifts and fruit. The use of public gifts is to be judged and evaluated for its meaning and appropriateness (1 Corinthians 14:29,32) by the assembly and/or others used in operation of the gifts. But never does the Scripture encourage believers to inspect people’s characteristics by their gifts. Jesus did say, however, that we should evaluate people by the fruit they produce.

2. God instructs us to be fruit inspectors.

“Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16). Nowhere in the Scripture does it say, “You shall know them by their gifts.” It would be like judging a farmer only by his tools. Rather one should judge him by the crops he produces. It doesn’t say by their gifts you will recognize them. No, by their fruit you will recognize them.

“Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:16—20, NIV).

Can you imagine someone who has a peach orchard or an apple orchard saying, “Oh, would you come to my place? Would you come to my orchard?” When you arrive he takes you out to the tool shed and says, “Say, would you look at these rakes? Would you look at my shovels? Just look at these wheelbarrows!” You would probably say, “I thought I came here to look at fruit, and he is showing me tools. Why doesn’t he show me some peaches?” Now his implements do play a part, of course. One way of looking at the relationship of gifts and fruit would be: Gifts are tools God has given the Body to help get the work done in the garden to produce fruit.
3. Gifts are given (and are not a sign of holiness).

Somehow, however, all across the Pentecostal world was allowed this belief and understanding that a gift was a sign of holiness. All across the Movement in many quarters came imperfect teaching that one being used in the operation of the gifts could never make a mistake. How unfortunate! We should now know, however, that the gifts of the Spirit are not signs of holiness. Much to the consternation and misunderstanding of the church, the gifts of the Spirit are sometimes given to imperfect people as tools to work in the field to produce fruit.

Gifts are given to imperfect people in the Body to help perfect the body so it will produce not just leaves, but fruit— that which the Master so desires to find. Wouldn’t it be better if we would really understand that almost every time the Scripture talks about human behavior and attitudes, it doesn’t talk about gifts; it talks about fruit. Is it any wonder that the church would rather talk about gifts than fruit? You see the difference is that gifts indeed are just that. Gifts are given but fruit is grown. Love, joy, peace, and on down the list in Galatians 5:22,23—these are commodities that you and I have to grow. Fruitbearing is nothing but hard work.

II. GOD EXPECTS US TO ABIDE IN HIM AND BRING FORTH FRUIT (John 15)

1. Fruit isn’t what you do. Fruit is what you are

Some think Jesus said, “Go and do witnessing.” He didn’t. But He did say, “Go and be my witnesses.”

Others think Jesus will say, “Much done, thou good and prosperous servant.” He won’t. He will say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. “

Numbers (statistics), like gifts, are in themselves no proof of spiritual strength. In God’s value system being is a higher order than doing. Why? Because He knows you can do without being produce activity and pile up statistics without possessing the right qualifications). But you can’t really be without also doing.

It’s much easier to build a Sunday school than model the fruit of the Spirit! It’s much easier to have your name inscribed on a plaque for financial giving than to be known in the congregation for the model of love or meekness.

2. Fruit has too long been defined as only winning souls.

I grew up thinking that when the Scriptures talked about fruit, it was talking about souls. I’m not saying that is a wrong interpretation. I believe it can very legitimately be found in the Scriptures. Remember, fruit is not a gift. Fruit is produced and grown. It is much more biblical to see the fruit of the Spirit as personal characteristics that are worked out because of the nature of what’s inside; because of attitudes made about obedience. You can’t talk about fruit without talking about obedience. It’s right here:

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing . . . . If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (John 15:4,5,10, NIV).

3. “Remain in me” (stick with me wherever I take you) = fruit production.

How can that be? Let me give you Tarr’s translation of this verse. I would much rather have a joyous life all full of continuous feelings of victory symbolism by luxurious leaves, perhaps. Look at all my leaves! God comes along and cuts off a bunch. Then He cuts off another bunch. “Oh Lord, what are you doing to me?” I ask. He says, “If you are going to be fruitful, I’ve got to get rid of the leaves because they are suckers. They take strength from the fruit.” “Lord, I don’t like it, it hurts. “ “Well, you have only one other choice. I can either prune you or I extract you.”

“I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean [prunes] so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:1,2, NIV).
Now we surely don’t like the first option. The second choice is: Every branch that does bear fruit he still cuts it! I can hear us pray, “Oh Lord, I don’t like either choice–give me a third!” It’s not popular. It’s like this:

The Lord says, “Come on Tarr, are you going to serve me? Then stick with me always.” “I’m going to follow you wherever you go,” I answer! (I’ve sung all the missionary songs.) He says, “All right, let’s go–are you coming, Tarr?” “Yes, I’m coming Lord.” He says again, “Are you sure you’re coming, Tarr?” “Yes, I’m coming Lord,” I say. The Lord does a miracle in my town, and a new church is raised up. At another place is a big Sunday school, and over there is a big building program. I say, “It’s wonderful Lord–following you is so wonderful!”

All of a sudden I notice the ground starts getting steeper, and I am dragging behind a little. He says, “Are you coming, Tarr?” “I’m coming, Lord.” The ground really rises, and I look up and see we’re climbing a steep mountain. What does He say? He says, “Stick with me and remain in me wherever I take you.” “Well, Lord, don’t go so fast, and why are we going up?” He says, “This is the way.” I looked at the top of the hill, and there is a cross. I say, “Lord, I don’t want to have anything to do with this! Lord, I’m going to take a detour. You go on–I’m going around.” And I repeat, “Lord, I don’t want to go to the cross; a cross means death! So that would mean something in Tarr will have to die.”

The Lord says, “Are you coming, Tarr? Stick with Me, abide in Me, remain in Me, and you will have fruit that will remain–and it will please the Father.” That’s how He produces fruit. Fruit-bearing is tied to relationships. Who has He placed in your life right now teaching you patience? Your boss? Your overseer in ministry? Your spouse? Your children? Isn’t it possible some situation you’d really like to escape is your “mountain”? If the Lord answered all our prayers, especially our carnal, selfish ones, we wouldn’t produce fruit. We would just ask for more gifts–or more luxurious leaves!

III. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Don’t misunderstand. In no way would I diminish the importance of the gifts. But let’s remember: The gifts of the Spirit are like tools given to the church to work in the fields to produce fruit. “OK,” you say, “what is its purpose?”

1. Purpose of fruit.

Who is the fruit for? The most common answer is for the Master. That is true, but it is only indirectly true. Let me tell you who I think the fruit is for. The fruit produced in our lives–love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, NIV), is for the weary traveler. Here is where the fruit of the Spirit becomes one of the most dynamic evangelical tools God has ever created.

The world is sick of sin. Its people are bogged down in their debauchery, in their faithlessness, in their cynicism, in their defeat. They are sick and alienated from God. They know exactly where the Christian television channel is, and they know exactly where the Christian radio station is. They are experts at going right by them on the dial. They think the church is full of hypocrites, and we can’t get them inside our four walls.

Nonetheless they are hungry and thirsty. They have heard enough gospel in our country to smell it 100 yards away. Fruit defined as personal character (brought forth, grown) can disarm our skeptic. When present, fruit can attract and nourish the weary traveler. That sin sick soul in the world, weakened by the debilitation of sin, can be blessed by fruit. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love . . . “ (John 13:35).

Here’s the way it works: When you find a weary traveler and when he says, “I am sick of the church,” you say to him, “Have a grape.” He takes it and tastes it. He says, “That is the sweetest thing I have ever tasted,” and you invite him to take another. So when he comes struggling and limping to you and plucks a grape from your hand, he says, “Wow! That’s good! You must be a real Christian.” The true sweetness of service, the care, the genuine love, the giving, and sacrifice are something that blows him away, because the world doesn’t how it. The world is alien to this. When you are full of meekness, joy, peace, faith, and love, he will say, “Where did you get that and where can I get some?” The fruit of the Spirit is for the weary traveler. It may be the only way many of them will ever get near enough to the gospel message to find out about their own sin and need of a Savior.
2. God teaches the paradox of fruit-bearing.

American culture’s emphasis on doing (performance, advancement, assertiveness, success) easily measured and quantified, leaves us unprepared even to think about fruit properly. You don’t do fruit—you are fruit.

The paradox is here. Fruit’s attractiveness, so highly valued by the Master, will draw souls to the place of repentance and association with Jesus.

It should disturb us that we don’t have an award system for churches and individuals who demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. Why not a trophy for temperance? A loving cup for meekness? A wall plaque for peace or for joy? Granted, it’s not easy to count or measure these abstractions, but couldn’t we try? Why should we spend such an inordinate emphasis on the things that are easier to run through a calculator? Why should we only give out symbols of plaques and gold seals for the lesser, external things? It’s a little-taught truth in our churches, but in the New Testament fruit-bearing is probably the greatest tool for evangelism. Consider this:

1. Demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit exemplifies the supreme truth of belonging (John 15:13). How shocking to find out God never asks me to lay down my life for the heathen, but for my brother—yes, and that is what will convince the heathen! What a paradox!
   2. Proof of the soul’s transformation is a fruit (1 John 3:14).
   3. Showing fruit makes our lives redemptive (John 13:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:7, 8). Clearly the Thessalonians’ fruit (joy, faith) were examples not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place the testimony was spread around.

CONCLUSION

Fruit-bearing, or fruitfulness, is much better seen as quality than quantity. Though both are important and scriptural, God’s priority seems to be being over doing. God looks for “brought forth” products from the essence of a person’s being. These are personal characteristics coming from the nature of the whole tree.

“A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit” (Luke 6:43).

The quality that pleases God in a mature life also, paradoxically is the same quality that makes our lives redemptive in the eyes of the sinner. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:18).

Maturity in Christ does not neglect either gifts or fruit, but through balance of the two produces gift-wrapped fruit for His pleasure and for the healing of the nations.

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