

Fruit of the Spirit

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ISN'T the Gospel exciting! The Lord is wonderfully good. Let us turn in our Bibles to the Gospel of St. John, the 15th chapter, and we will read a bit about fruit bearing. We all want to be fruit-bearing branches for the Lord.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

"I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:1-7).

Isn't that a marvelous promise? The Lord is very much interested in us, calling us to salvation and to the deeper experiences, but we are really blessed to be a blessing. We are saved to serve. We are not to consume these blessings upon ourselves, just to enjoy them. We must live a Christian life in such a way that we can bear fruit for the Master. Is that your prayer? We all want to be able to lay sheaves at the Master's feet.

The Lord is looking for spiritual fruit in your life and mine, and we want it to be sweet fruit. We want it to be evidence that the Master has done a work in our lives so that we can glorify Him.

Fruit needs care and attention. Down in the Indio area of Southern California, about one-quarter of the possibility for growth is cut out of the date trees. Then the fruit that does grow is larger, sweeter, and has a better flavor. Whether there are a whole lot of leaves and wood, or whether the strength of the trees goes into fruit makes a great deal of difference. They don't want the sap from the main vine to be diverted into just foliage. What they really want is fruit.

The kind of fruit is vitally important, especially if you want to preserve it. Remember, preserving is with sweetness. God preserves His saints. I remember, as a young man, hearing Brother Jack Robbins say that the devil pickles his people, and God preserves His. If you have the love of God, the sweetness of God's love will continue to bear fruit in your life even unto old age.

It is vitally important to us that we follow the Word of God. When Jesus said, "I am the vine," He indicated from where we need to get our strength. "And my Father is the husbandman." Husbandmen do things in orchards. They cut out the grass, they plow, they disk, they harrow, and they prune the trees. Pruning is not a painless process. You view some orchards in early spring when they are being pruned, and you wonder if they will ever bear fruit. You think the orchard has been ruined. But about six months later, props have to be placed under the limbs to keep them from breaking off because of the load of fruit.

The pruning process works. The husbandmen get rid of the dead wood but leave the fruit-bearing branches. And the

branch that bears a lot of fruit bends low. God's people are formed, nurtured and pruned. And nobody has said that the pruning process is all joy.

God loves His children, and the Scripture tells us in Hebrews that whom He loveth He chasteneth. When you use the word "chasten" you hear "ouch, ouch," under a lot of people's breath. But just remember, to be chastened is a sign that God loves you. Chastening is interesting and it is encouraging! We've all had it and we are not through with it yet. But what God purposes to do in your life and mine we want to see accomplished.

I heard Brother Frost say one time, "The time that God called you He had a divine plan in mind for your life." Now we want to be able to fulfill God's plan. So the God who knows the end from the beginning, and knows all about us, can surely lead us. Let's put it all into the Lord's hand. "My Father is the husbandman." If He prunes on our lives we want to say, "Thank You, Lord, for caring," because really He does.

Notice this second verse: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit. . . ." That means there is no fruit on it. Do you want that to be your case? When the Lord looks for fruit, do you want Him to find just leaves? Not really! "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

How do you feel when you tell somebody the story of Jesus, and he says, "That sounds very interesting. When is your next meeting? I'd like to be there." Then you see a soul kneel at the altar of prayer, asking God for forgiveness, and the light of God's love bursts forth upon his countenance. That's what fruit is! You and I want to be able to tell the Gospel story in such a way that it will be interesting, desirable. In fact, we'd love to create a hunger. We long to see people respond to the Gospel message.

I heard something rather interesting recently. Arabs in the Middle East thrive on dates. It is a basic fruit and there are many different kinds. The Arabs put a handful of dried dates in their pocket, and when they get hungry or run out of energy, they munch on some dates. They are sweet and filled with energy.

A young child with no ability to chew dates is often given a taste for them. The parent will cut a date in two, rub the date on the child's lips and gums; and the child begins to get the flavor of dates and learns to love them before he can even chew them. I pray that God will give us a taste for the Gospel, a desire to have that fruit in our lives. It is marvelous that, as parents, we can teach the children about the love of God to the point where they have a desire, a taste for it. It is important that we present the Gospel to the young ones.

We are confronted by a lot of timewasters that divert our attention. They may not be evil or wrong in themselves, but if they draw away our energy so that we don't bear the fruit that we should bear, it is bad. You and I have to appraise our life often. We have to decide, "What is the number one priority in my life? Where do I put my loyalty and my affections and my energies? Where am I really going?" We do want to be fruit-bearing branches.

I have heard testimonies in the Apostolic Faith since 1917, and I have heard accounts of people who had lost the love of God out of their heart. Now that's not the major story — that just happens now and then — but in almost every case, when they came back to the Lord, they gave as the cause for their failure, "I failed to read the Bible and pray. The enemy got his wedge in and began to pound on that wedge until he toppled me over." Now if we know that — and that is the root cause of backsliding — then you and I should be very, very careful that we read the Bible and pray every day so that we can retain our integrity, be fruit-bearing branches and do the things the Lord has called us to do with victory and with joy.

Who has a better time than Christians? No guilt, no condemnation, no kickback from the good times we have. So often around the altars of prayer God blesses us so abundantly that we don't want to leave. Why? The Spirit of the Lord is there. We are gaining strength and courage for the express purpose that we might be fruit-bearing Christians, wanting to win souls for Christ.

Let's turn to Matthew 7:15. We are not all "orchardists," but we are all "fruit inspectors." The Scripture tells us some things we need to understand.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. "Ye shall know them by their. . ." leaves?"

Did I say something wrong? Yes.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:15-20).

Some people can behave themselves for a few days, put on a good front for a period of time, but eventually the fruit begins to show. We want to be very sure that we show forth the love of God and His wonderful power to change hearts and lives.

Some people don't want to believe there is a hell. But this Scripture says very clearly and plainly that "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." That has an eternal connotation. We do not want to be hewn down and cast into the fire.

The Scripture says that a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, and an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit. I like that. People say, "We are almost like you are — believe almost like you do." Really, the way we believe is the way the Bible says. We are preaching the Bible doctrines, **not** denominational doctrines. This denomination believes all of the Bible. What the Word of God says and how it says it is important to you and me.

The Psalmist said that he wanted to hide God's Word in his heart that he might not sin against God. There again is the importance of the study of God's Word. People who do not read and study God's Word are short-changing themselves. The entrance of God's Word gives light, and as we walk in that light, we have fellowship one with another — but more important than the fellowship of man is the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Father who is in Heaven.

Another verse of Scripture says that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." You cannot sow to the flesh and reap eternal life. You can't be worldly minded, worldly in your actions, and have the blessing of God on your life at the same time. They are poles apart.

Let us turn to Galatians 5:19:

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

"Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

"Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Let's not just skim over the words in this chapter and say, "Yes, I've seen those words before but I don't know what they mean." Let's find out what some of them mean, because that is what we are surrounded by in the world today. The world talks freely about a lot of things that Christians would like to shy away from, but there are times when we need to understand what God is warning us about.

When are you going to teach your little daughter that divorce and remarriage is wrong? After she has been married five years and has already seen the lawyer? Oh no, you want to start in at about age three to tell your children what is right and what is wrong, and they will grow up knowing that.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery. . . ."

Is there any question in your mind about that? Our country is surrounded by cheap attorneys who will get you a

divorce for \$55 (or what- ever) in three days, and that's all there is to it. Wait a minute! Adultery is an act; it is also a state! Some people live in a state of adultery. That is not pleasing to God even though the laws of our land say it is all right. God's Word is the final word.

In the Gospel, when we marry we understand that it is for life. The marriage vow says you will keep yourself to her and to her alone until death shall separate you. Is that too long? We had better be very sure we have God's will in whom we marry.

Many people even leave out marriage today, and live together and call it a life-style. God calls it SIN. It has the hiss of the serpent in it. Young people, be alert, and wake up to what is going on around us and do not be a party to it. It breaks my heart when I see young people's homes broken up — and how about those people who live together in harmony for something like 27 or 30 years and then get a divorce! What's going on?

God is interested in your life. He wants you to be happy. He wants you to enjoy the blessings of life. But He said that adultery is one of the works of the flesh. This is the fruit that some lives bear. You can't change wives like you change tires, but some people do that. "If this one doesn't work, I will leave her and get another one." The Word of God says that the works of the flesh are **not** going to enter Heaven. That isn't a bishop's edict; that isn't your pastor talking, neither is it your Sunday school teacher. That is the Word of God. "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

You ask, "What about the innocent party?" The Bible doesn't say a word about innocent parties. It talks about sin and forgiveness. Is that too strong? We want to avoid these pitfalls. We can't solve all the problems people have, but we can personally avoid some problems when we follow God's Word.

Fornication. That is sexual relationships between unmarried people. It is wrong in God's sight. It will keep you out of Heaven — and I know you want to go to Heaven. Don't let the devil snare you. Don't let somebody trap you. Remember what God's Word says, and be careful.

Uncleanness. We have gone through an era in the last 20 or 30 years when to be unclean and unkempt was a sign of some sort of pres- tige. Christians never did like it. God doesn't like it. He said so in His Word.

Lasciviousness means wanton, lewd or lustful. Does that have any part in a Christians's life? A Christian lives a clean life.

Idolatry. Somebody may say, "You don't catch me bowing down to Buddha." No, but I know a lot of people who bow down to the al- mighty dollar — which is not so almighty. Allowing anything to come between us and God becomes an idol, and is a work of the flesh.

Witchcraft. Why do you need a horoscope? That horoscope is from man and some necromancer. I have often wondered why the palm readers don't read their own palms and get rich. They are after your money. The occult has no part whatsoever in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is of the devil. We don't even play games like that, but stay away from it completely. We want to be pure, clean, holy, fruit- bearing branches. That is important to us! Avoid evil like the plague. When you meet temptation, turn to the right every time. Want the things that are right, not that are wrong.

Hatred. It is malice and ill will one to another. Hatred is far afield from the Christian life. When a man is angry and hateful he doesn't even have the ability to make good judgment.

Variance. Some say, "We can't all believe alike." I am glad that in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ we do all believe alike. We all believe that we need to be born again and we need to walk in the light of God's Word. We realize that sanctification is the literal hub of the Gospel. We know the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a must. We need the Teacher to lead and guide and instruct us day by day. We need the Lord very much. We need more of His power, more of His grace. We do not want divisions or isms or schisms — variance. Sanctification brings unity.

Emulations. They are rivalry. It shows up when people say, "You know, I should have had that position but he got it. There is one job I always wanted in the church, and I never got it." Where you sit or the privileges and the blessings that you have are not what will get you to Heaven. You can serve God with all your heart and enjoy His blessing in

any seat in the church. So there should be no rivalry one with the other. We appreciate the fact that we are all children of God with no rivalry between us.

Strife. You have heard people say, "Well, he can always stir up strife. Wherever he goes there is trouble." That is not the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Sedition. These are insurrections, getting up a petition or putting together a plan whether others like it or not.

Heresies. They are false doctrines and are everywhere — cults of one kind and another.

"Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings. . . ."

"Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die," all around us. Restaurants say they cannot make a living unless they have a cocktail lounge and bar. Thank God, we can come to a Gospel feast, and we can revel in the love of God and how good it is!"

. . . and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

That's positive! They shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love. . . ."

If I asked for a definition of love I could get many different answers. But love is a deep affection, appreciation, and respect. We hear the songs of the world that talk about love — mushy, gooey, lustful stuff that's very degrading. But the love of God is deep, deeper than the ocean. The love of God among ourselves is deeper than the people of the world can comprehend. The love of the brethren is absolutely marvelous. We pray one for another, encourage and uphold one another. This love is divine love. You can have a measure of that in your home. Young men and women who build their homes upon the Word of God and the love of God can know genuine love in their home. The children recognize it. It is important that we understand. And that's a fruit of the Spirit: love.

Joy is another fruit of the Spirit. I look around and see all these smiling faces and realize they know what the joy of the Lord is. The joy of the Lord is our strength. Joy is happiness without alloy. It is clean, pure, and holy. There is a real thrill to the joy that the Lord gives. In fact, Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

Peace. Peace is the absence of all war. It is the absence of all conflict, friction, and troubles. We sing, "Sweet peace, the gift of God's love." That is marvelous peace, peace that flows like a river.

Longsuffering means patience that is able to put up with contrary winds, and not get distraught; and to do what is right under the circumstances.

Gentleness. There are many definitions for gentleness. If you are gentle, you are not harsh. Being a gentle man or a gentle woman is part of the attributes of a Christian. God says in His Holy Word that we are to be courteous and kind. We all have different personalities, but God adds a measure of gentleness to everyone who is truly saved.

Goodness. The Bible says that Jesus went about doing good. Wouldn't you like to have the goodness of Christ in your life?

Faith. On one occasion, when the winds were blowing and the disciples were afraid the boat was going to sink, they awakened the Master, and Jesus said, "Where is your faith?" If the Lord asked me that question, I'd like to say, "Lord, my faith is in You." Isn't that a good place to put it? Some people have faith, but they put it in the wrong places. Let us be sure we put it in the Lord, because He can do marvelous things.

Meekness. The Bible says, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Some people say that you have to get in there and get it or somebody else will. The Lord says, "Don't worry, you will get it all in the end." He will give it to us without all of the hassle.

Temperance. "Against such there is no law." Temperate in all things. That doesn't mean just non-alcoholic. The Bible says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men" (Philippians 4:5).

Oh, I love the fruit of the Spirit! In the fruit of the Spirit we have such wonderful joy and victory!

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:17,18).

Let us do some sowing. If we sow in peace, we shall reap in peace. But if we sow to the flesh, we will reap corruption, the Bible tells us.

"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

"And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

"And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

"For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Peter 1:5-8).

Do you want to be fruitful? Add these things to your life, by God's help and grace.

Turn back to John 15:16. This is the verse that the Lord gave to our Sister Florence L. Crawford many years ago when He called her for service:

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

Isn't that beautiful? "Ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." It is a marvel to see the fruit of the Gospel and how it continues to grow year after year, on and on.

There is a passage of Scripture that should be an encouragement to those who are growing older:

"They shall still bring forth fruit in old age" (Psalm 92:14).

Strengthwise, there are some things older ones can't do that they used to do, but we can all pray, still bringing forth fruit in old age.

The Lord must have been quite interested in fruit for all the things He said about it. We are glad we can be fruit-bearing branches. When the purging and purifying comes and the Lord shows us something that needs to be pruned off, we can take it and say, "Lord, by Your help I will line up to the Word of God," and thus we will find ourselves growing stronger, having more victory, bearing more fruit. We can say, "Thank You, Lord, for even the purging and for the pruning." It is marvelous that God gives us the power to do what He shows us so that we can have the victory and the fruit that goes along with it.

I am sure we can all pray, "Lord, I want to bear more fruit for You. I want to be a fruit-bearing branch. I want Your power and Your presence to abide in my life and make me a blessing to others."