

A Derek Prince Teaching Letter

No. 24: The Fruit of the Holy Spirit



Dear Friend

My previous letter focused on the **gifts** of the Holy Spirit. The focus of this letter will be the **fruit** of the Spirit.

There is a difference in kind between gifts and fruit. This may be illustrated by comparing a Christmas tree with an apple tree.

A Christmas tree carries gifts. Each gift is attached to it by a single act and received from it by a single act. No time or effort is required of the person receiving the gift.

On the other hand, there is both time and hard work required to cultivate an apple tree. To produce fruit, it must go through a series of stages that takes several years.

First, the seed must be placed in the earth. From this a root goes down into the soil and at the same time a sprout rises upward. Over a period of years the sprout grows into a tree. In due course blossoms appear on the tree. Then these fall off and fruit begins to develop.

But if the tree is to become strong, the blossoms or the young fruit must be plucked off in the first years so that the tree's root system will develop to support a strong tree. Several years must pass before the apples are fit to eat. (Under the Law of Moses at least four years were required.)¹

At various stages in its growth an apple tree is very fragile. Strong winds may uproot the young tree, or at a later stage frost may destroy either the blossoms or the fruit.

In this process seed and fruit are inseparably linked to each other. Fruit must grow from a seed, but on the other hand it takes fruit to produce further seeds. At the beginning of creation God ordained that every "fruit tree should yield fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself."²

This establishes an important spiritual principle: Christians who do not produce spiritual fruit in their own lives have no seed to sow into the lives of others.

The New Testament speaks of spiritual **gifts** in the plural. The nine gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. On the other hand, the New Testament speaks of spiritual **fruit** in the singular. The nine forms of spiritual fruit are listed in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Love – the primary form of fruit – is listed first. The others that follow may be understood as different ways in which the fruit of love manifests itself.

joy is love rejoicing

peace is love resting

longsuffering is love forbearing

kindness is love serving others

goodness is love seeking the best for others

faithfulness is love keeping its promises

gentleness is love ministering to the hurts of others

self-control is love in control

We could also describe the fruit of the Spirit as different ways in which the character of Jesus manifests itself through those whom He indwells. When all the forms of fruit are fully developed, it is as if Jesus by the Holy Spirit is incarnated in His disciple.

Seven Stages of Spiritual Development

In 2 Peter 1:5-7 the apostle lists seven successive stages in the development of a fully formed Christian character:

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

Peter begins by warning us that to go through this process successfully will demand **diligence**. Paul expresses the same thing in another way when he says, “The **hardworking** farmer must be first to partake of the crops.”³ There can be no real success in developing Christian character without diligence, or hard work.

The process Peter describes could be compared to that by which an apple seed develops into a mature apple. The seed is God’s Word implanted in the heart. This produces faith, which is the indispensable starting point. Then out of faith there follow seven successive stages of development. Stage One is variously translated “virtue,”⁴ or “moral excellence.”⁵ Originally, in secular Greek, the word was applied to excellence in any area of life – to moulding a clay pot, steering a boat, or playing a flute. Here in the New Testament also, I believe, its meaning should not be restricted solely to moral character. It covers every possible area of life.

A teacher who comes to Christ should become an **excellent** teacher. A nurse should become an **excellent** nurse. A Christian businessman should excel in his field of business. There is no room for sloppiness or laziness in any area of the Christian life. Very rarely, if ever, does God call a person out of failure in a secular calling to success in a spiritual calling. He who is unfaithful in the least (the secular) will be unfaithful also in the greatest (the spiritual).⁶

Stage Two of spiritual development is **knowledge**. There are, of course, many different forms of knowledge. The knowledge extolled in Scripture is primarily practical, not merely theoretical. It is knowledge that **works**. Coming to Christ out of a background of speculative philosophy, this was what impressed me most about the Bible. It was so intensely practical!

The scriptural example is the teaching of Jesus Himself. It did not come under the category of what we would call “theology.” He never propounded complicated, abstract theories. His teaching was based on familiar, practical activities: sowing seed, catching fish, caring for livestock.

The most essential form of knowledge in the Christian life is the knowledge of God’s will as revealed in Scripture. This, too, is practical. It demands a regular, systematic study of the whole Bible. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”⁷

I have been shocked to discover how many people who would claim to be serious Christians have never once read through the entire Bible. Such people set limits of their own making to their spiritual development.

After knowledge comes **self-control** – also called self-discipline.⁸ This is the stage at which a Christian must prove himself a genuine **disciple** – that is, a person under **discipline** – and not a mere church member.

This kind of discipline must be applied in every major area of our personality – our emotions, our attitudes, our appetites, our thought life. It must govern not only our actions, but – more importantly – our reactions.

Until we have developed this kind of discipline, we cannot move up to the next stage – perseverance – which implies the ability to overcome the various tests and trials that will inevitably expose any

weak, undisciplined areas of our personality. That pinpoints one major reason why some Christians never progress beyond a certain stage of spiritual development. They never fulfil these two requirements of self-control and endurance. To take an illustration from the apple tree, their blossoms are blown away by the winds of adversity or their young fruit is killed by the frost of rejection.

The Three Final Stages

In the three remaining stages of development, the beauty of a truly Christian character unfolds. **Godliness** is the mark of a person whose life is centred in God – a person who has become a vessel of the presence of God. Wherever such a person goes, the atmosphere is permeated by a faint, but unique and pervasive fragrance. There may not be any preaching or other religious activity. Yet people become strangely aware of eternal issues.

The late British evangelist Smith Wigglesworth relates an incident which illustrates the impact that a godly presence can have in a non-religious atmosphere. After some moments of private prayer Smith took his seat in a railway carriage. Without a word spoken, the man in the opposite seat – a complete stranger – blurted out, “Your presence convicts me of sin.” Smith was then able to introduce him to Christ.

The last two stages of development depict two different kinds of love. The first – **brotherly kindness** – describes the way that believers in Jesus Christ should relate to their fellow believers – that is, their brothers and sisters in the Lord.

When I first began to consider this list of the seven stages of spiritual development, it surprised me that “brotherly kindness” – the kind of love that Christians should have for one another – should be the last stage but one. But then I realised that the Bible is very realistic. It does not paint a sentimental, religious picture of the way that we, as Christians, relate to one another. Let me say something which may shock you, but which is based on more than fifty years of close association with Christians of many different backgrounds: **It is not easy for Christians to love one another.**

This is amply confirmed by two thousand years of Church history. Scarcely a century has passed that has not been marked by bitter strife and contention – and even open hatred – between rival groups of Christians, all of whom often claimed to be “the true Church.”

The fact that a person has repented of his sins and claimed salvation in Christ does not mean that his whole character has been instantly transformed. Certainly a vitally important process of change has been set in motion, but it may take many years for that change to be worked out in every area of a person’s character.

When David needed smooth stones to fit in his sling to slay Goliath, he went down to the valley – the lowly place of humility. There in the brook he found the kind of stones he needed.⁹ What had made them smooth? Two pressures: first, the water flowing over them; second, their continual jostling against one another.

That is a picture of how Christian character is formed. First, there is the continual “washing of water by the word.”¹⁰ Second, as the stones jostle one another in personal relationships, the rough edges are gradually worn down, until they become “smooth.”

In parentheses, let me add that when Jesus needs “living stones” for His sling, He too goes to the valley – the place of humility. There He chooses stones that have been made “smooth” by the action of God’s Word and by the pressures of regular fellowship with other believers.

It is a mark of spiritual maturity to sincerely love our fellow Christians, not simply for what they are in themselves, but for what they mean to Jesus, who shed His lifeblood for each of them.

The final stage of development – **agape love** – represents the full, ripe fruit of Christian character. This is no longer how we relate only to our fellow believers. It is God’s own love for the unthankful and the unholy. It is the love that causes us to “bless those who curse [us], do good to those who hate [us], and pray for those who spitefully use [us] and persecute [us].”¹¹

It is the love that Christ demonstrated on the cross when He prayed for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."¹² It was the same love that caused Stephen to pray for those who were stoning him, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."¹³

It is the love that changed Saul the persecutor into Paul the servant of Christ, who became "all things to all men, that [he] might by all means save some."¹⁴

For my part, when I contemplate the Bible's picture of the fully developed fruit of the Holy Spirit, I am both humbled and inspired. Humbled, because I still have so far to go. Inspired, because I have caught a glimpse of something more beautiful than anything that this world has to offer.

I echo the words of Paul: "I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."¹⁵

Yours in the Master's service



Derek Prince

¹Leviticus 19:23-25

²Genesis 1:12

³2 Timothy 2:6

⁴2 Peter 1:5

⁵2 Peter 1:5, NAS

⁶Luke 16:10

⁷2 Timothy 3:16-17

⁸2 Timothy 1:7, NIV

⁹1 Samuel 17:40

¹⁰Ephesians 5:26

¹¹Matthew 5:44

¹²Luke 23:34

¹³Acts 7:60

¹⁴1 Corinthians 9:22

¹⁵Philippians 3:13-14

For further study, we recommend the book
B44 Who Is The Holy Spirit?

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