

The Fruit of the Spirit

Introduction

Imagine an apple orchard at harvest time. The trees are loaded with bright red apples, their branches bent under the weight of the new crop. The farmer is delighted. Passersby, whose appetites are whetted by the sight and aroma of the fresh fruit, stop to buy apples, then hurry away to enjoy and share them with others.

The Bible describes the Christian's growth and development in much the same way as apples are grown and harvested. As believers, we are "planted" when we are born again into a relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit then lovingly nourishes and prunes us so that our lives "grow" the character traits of Christ. Scripture calls these traits the fruit of the Spirit and tells us that spiritual fruitfulness is the Lord's goal for all believers.

Once we discover God's plan for us to become fruitful Christians, we can understand how important it is to grow the fruit of the Spirit.

Our Study

Much about the fruit of the Spirit can be best understood by looking at the process from a gardening point of view. Since God is the Master Fruit Grower, we need to cooperate with Him so our lives will grow and develop spiritual fruit.

Our Purpose in Being Planted

The Scripture: John 15:16

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last."

1. Although Jesus was talking to His disciples in this verse what He told them also applies to us. We have been chosen for a special assignment.

What is it? _____

2. What kind of fruit are we to bear? _____

Even the best natural fruit has a limited life span; it either is eaten or it withers and dies. Jesus was referring to spiritual fruit - the remaking of our lives into His image. Although this is a lifelong process, the "harvest" will have permanent value.

Paul talks about this kind of fruit in the following scripture passage.

The Scripture: Philippians 1:9-11

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God."

3. Here Paul refers to this fruit as the fruit of _____ that comes through _____, to the glory and praise of _____.

The Scripture: Galatians 5:22, 23

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

4. What is the special name Paul gives this fruit? _____

5. What are the nine varieties that make up this fruit? _____

We recognize this combined list as a description of Jesus. He is loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, etc., and His plan is that we have the same qualities in our lives.

Although we would like to experience more spiritual fruit, we know only too well how often our lives fall short of resembling Christ's. Instead of being discouraged, however, we can see what God has promised us through Scripture.

The Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Here we have Paul's clear statement of what happens when we become Christians and are born again of the Spirit. Our lives are never the same.

6. This verse says we have become _____ and that our _____ have gone.

A radical change has been made by Christ's life in us. We have a new beginning, a new purpose for living, new values, and our character begins to reflect our new status in Christ. What marvelous good news this is! Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we no longer need be governed by our self-centered, sinful natures. The Spirit of Jesus is living in us, redeeming and changing us. He is at work restoring us to reflect His character. However, He doesn't do this work by Himself; growing spiritual fruit requires our cooperation.

Conditions for Growth

The Scripture: John 15:4, 5

"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."

7. In these verses Jesus compares our relationship with Him to that of a _____ to its _____.

8. He promises that if we _____ and He _____, we will _____.

9. He also says that apart from Him, we can do _____.

In other words, Jesus says He must live in us, His words must remain in our hearts, and we must be vitally united with Him if we are to be fruitful. Just as a stalk nourishes an entire plant causing it to sprout leaves and flowers, so we will grow in Jesus' love, His patience, His joy, and His peace as we actively take our spiritual nourishment from Him.

The first two requirements are not hard to understand. When we become Christians, Jesus comes to live in us. If we read, meditate on, and obey the Scriptures, His words live in our hearts. However, Jesus has also said that we must remain in Him. Separated from Him, we will die spiritually. It is essential that we understand this principle: Natural life can produce nothing spiritual; only when we are united to the source of spiritual life can we bear spiritual fruit.

The big question then becomes a practical one: How do we maintain this vital union to Jesus? In the same chapter of John's gospel, our Lord answers this question.

The Scripture: John 15:10-12

"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. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

10. According to these verses, we remain in His love if we obey His command to _____

Jesus gives us a clear picture of what it means to remain in Him. When we choose to love each other with His sacrificial love, we will bear abundant fruit.

The Scripture: Philippians 2:12, 13

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

11. This passage encourages us to _____ our salvation, at the same time knowing that God _____ in us to will and to act according to His good purpose.

Salvation is always a free gift from God - once and for all. There is nothing we can do to earn it or add to it. However, it is also a progressive work to be fully "worked out" in us by our obedience through the help of the Holy Spirit. If we are to be fruitful Christians, we must choose to obey the Lord.

Pruning for Fruitfulness

God, the Master Fruit Grower, cares for us in much the same way as a fruit rancher cares for his trees. Every stage of growth is governed by loving attention. This includes the necessary pruning to strengthen the tree, to control unwanted growth, to increase fruitfulness, and to make it fit in with the master plan for the entire orchard.

No natural tree can prune itself, and neither can we. Our attempts at self-pruning will always be disastrous. We don't see ourselves as the Father does, and so we would prune the wrong branches or do an incomplete job. We need to entrust the job to the Master Pruner who knows His trees, who loves them, and has an eternal plan for them.

The Scripture: John 15:2

"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."

12. This scripture tells us that the Lord prunes those branches (or areas in our lives) that _____ as well as those branches that _____. This is so we will become _____. One method of pruning (or being made clean) is by receiving His _____.

The Scripture: Hebrews 12:10, 11

"Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

13. The idea of discipline (or pruning) isn't always pleasant; it hurts to have our self-centered wills thwarted. Yet this is really an encouraging word. God disciplines (or prunes us) so that we may share in _____. This discipline produces a _____ for those who have been trained by it.

Another Kind of Fruit

The Scripture: Galatians 5:19

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."

14. Paul calls this fruit the acts of _____.

The Scripture: Galatians 6:7b, 8

"A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

15. We see here the natural results of our choices. If we sow to please our sinful natures, we will reap _____, but if we sow to please the Spirit we will reap _____.

If we do not choose to grow the fruit of the Spirit, we will soon produce a crop of fruit from our sinful natures. God wants us to cooperate with Him so we will bear the beautiful fruit of the Spirit, which has eternal value, rather than the bitter, poisonous fruit of the flesh. He has left the choice to us.

Is it your desire to be a fruitful Christian, one whose life and actions reflect the character of our Lord Jesus so you will attract others to Him? If so, why don't you stop right now and pray the following prayer of commitment:

Dear Father,

I want to become a fruitful Christian, and I need Your help. Thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit to help me grow more like Jesus. Continue to fill me daily with Your spirit. Help me to be sensitive to obey Your Word and Your voice. I trust You, Father, to work in my life so that more and more I will reflect the life of Christ and give life and hope to a hungry world.

Amen

The Answers

1. To go and bear fruit
2. Fruit that will last
3. Righteousness/Jesus Christ/God
4. Fruit of the Spirit
5. Love, Joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control
6. New creations/old lives
7. Vine/branches
8. Remain in Him/in us/bear much fruit
9. Nothing
10. Love each other as He has loved us
11. Work out/works
12. Bear no fruit/do bear fruit/more fruitful/word
13. His holiness/harvest of righteousness and peace
14. The sinful nature
15. Destruction/eternal life