

Series: The Fruit of the Spirit

Title: “Of the Spirit”

Text: Ephesians 1:13-14

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It is important to note that the fruit of the Spirit is indeed “of the Spirit.” The virtues Paul listed in Galatians 5:22 do not come from human ingenuity, man-centered moralism, or mechanical religious activity. The Spirit of God is the one responsible for producing the fruit of the Spirit. Man and woman’s responsibility is to simply “walk in the Spirit.”

“If it is to be, it’s up to me.”

Sadly many Christians miss these realities in their fervent pursuit of a more godly life. They rightly understand that salvation is of grace, but they are blind to the need for grace in other realms of Christian experience. Christ is rightfully regarded as their only merit for salvation, but when it comes to spiritual growth and Christian living, many have an “if it is to be, it is up to me” type of approach. In the end, such a perspective leads to one of two unhealthy places — pride or despair. Those who achieve a level of holy living in their own strength have a tendency to become puffed up over their success. Those who fail usually throw their hands up in despair.

To see the fruit of the Spirit become a reality, we must understand His role in our lives. Spirit. He is all too often the forgotten Person of the Trinity. Scripture, however, attests that He has had a special place in God’s plan since the beginning of time. The creation narrative in Genesis tells us, “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Just two verses into Scripture, and with only approximately thirty words having been read, we are made aware that the Holy Spirit has a powerful part in the Lord’s purposes and plans for humanity!

In Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit came upon people of God for temporary seasons in order to perform a significant work. Now He comes to dwell permanently in the lives of God’s children. Consider the examples of Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14), and David (1 Samuel 16:13). The Bible says, “In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14). To see the fruit of the Spirit produced in their lives, Christians must first understand their relationship to the Holy Spirit.

“What do you think of the Holy Spirit?”

When I was a young believer and in college, I worked at a fast food restaurant for a couple of years. One of my co-workers was a very zealous Christian. I had never met anyone like her. The church she attended had some rather unique views on the Holy Spirit. I’ll never forget my first interaction with her. She found out I was a Christian and she excitedly asked, “What do you think about the Holy Spirit?” I didn’t know what to

say. I stood in silence at first. Eventually I stammered out a few Christian cliches I had heard.

My experience was consistent with that of many Christians. I had little understanding of the role of the Spirit in my life. The reason many believers never see the fruit of the Spirit is that they don't understand the work of the Spirit. If the fruit of the Spirit is indeed "of the Spirit," it stands to reason that we should understand how the Spirit works in our lives. Let's begin our study, by examining three works of the Spirit in the life of a believer.

REGENERATION

To understand the way in which the Spirit produces Christ's character in us, one must first have a basic grasp of something Jesus called being "born again." The third chapter of John records an incident in which a curious spiritual seeker sought counsel from Jesus. The man's name was Nicodemus. He visited Jesus after night fall, quite likely out of a desire to keep anonymity. Associating with the roughshod, Johnny-come-lately religious renegade from Nazareth could have quite possibly hurt his reputation.

Upon meeting Jesus, Nicodemus offered salutations and religious greetings that were customary for the day. Our Lord saw through the tapestry of dead, dry religion and said, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The man was confused. Jesus' words made little sense. How could one be "born again?" Nicodemus inquired, "How can anyone be born when he is old...Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?" (John 4:4). Jesus replied, "Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again" (John 3:6-7).

To produce the character of God, one must have life from God. Mere humanity can never what God desires. A new birth is necessary. One must have the Holy Spirit living within his or her heart. Apart from His indwelling reality, one will never be able to experience or exhibit the fruit of the Spirit.

Theologians use a big word to refer to the activity of which I speak. They call it "regeneration." One has defined the concept as "a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us."¹ Being a Christian involves being a new creation in Christ. The Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Christian life isn't just about having sins forgiven and going to heaven when you die. Sure, it does indeed involve those things, but it involves so much more!

Spiritual Birthday

I'll never forget an experience I once had in college that helped me understand the reality of regeneration. During the summer in between my junior and senior year, I travelled with a ministry that hosted outreach events in different parts of the United States. On one given week, I served in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Ministry that week took place within a city context near New York City.

¹ Grudem, ?.

One evening I was tasked with sharing a gospel message with a crowd of students. A local pastor addressed the group when I had finished speaking. Having served in the city for a number of years, he had a way of speaking directly and clearly to those in his context. He sharply addressed the young people who had gathered and said something like this — “Listen up! Here’s how life works. To know God, you must have two birthdays. You had a physical birthday when you were born. You need a spiritual birthday as well!”

The preacher’s metaphor helped me grasp the nature of a profound biblical context. At one point, I was like Nicodemus. The idea of being born again seemed like a paradox. I was well acclimated with church and religion, but the Spirit-filled life was an enigma to me. Religious rules and observances seemed important, but I was completely unaware of my need for spiritual life. Being what God wanted me to be and producing the fruit of the Spirit seemed like impossible tasks, endeavors tantamount to solving a Rubik Cube. It wasn’t until that summer night in New Jersey that I began to see things clearly — the Christian life is only possible when one has a second birthday!

Dead Man Walking

In 1995, a film entitled “Dead Man Walking” was released. It was based on a 1993 non-fiction book written by Sister Helen Prejean. The title of both the film and the book was derived from a popular exclamation that was once used in the prison system of the United States. When a death row inmate was ushered through a prison, it was formerly customary for guards to yell, “Dead man walking!” The announcement simultaneously evoked shame on the condemned criminal while warning other prisoners to be on guard against the presence of a dangerous man.

In a spiritual sense, all who are outside of Christ are like dead men or women walking. They are little more than empty shells of humanity. They have flesh, blood, and soul, but they do not have the Spirit of God. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient” (Ephesians 2:1-2). Non-Christian people ultimately have no ability to live in accordance with the ways of the Lord. They are prisoners to the ways of the world. In and of themselves, they have no ability to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

The Spirit Comes at Salvation

At regeneration, a great change takes place. The human heart becomes a habitation for the Holy Spirit. Some believe they need a second work of grace in order to experience such indwelling. However, the New Testament consistently reveals otherwise. When Paul confronted the Galatians about their works-based approach to the Christian life, he asked, “I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard?” (Galatians 3:2). The anticipated answer to Paul’s rhetorical question was, “The Spirit!”

Paul wanted the Galatians to remember that they had received the Spirit of God at salvation. At the moment they placed their faith in the finished work of Christ at the cross, the Third Person of the Trinity invaded their souls. His presence gave them the power they needed to produce real spiritual fruit. They didn’t need to look to religion,

rules, rituals, or regulations. They only needed to learn to live according to the new life they had received.

SANCTIFICATION

Salvation could be likened to the starting line of the Christian life. After the initial event of the new birth, there is so much more to be experienced. Regeneration is indeed a momentous occasion, but it is not the end sum of all things. It is the starting point for so much more. Unfortunately, many professing believers fail to grasp this reality.

My family loves to play board games. Classics like Rummikub, Uno, Skipbo, and Scrabble are some of our favorites. Recently my children have developed a liking for Monopoly, the board game that allows players to act like real estate moguls and developers. They take delight in building their assets, but they probably take greater delight in hampering their siblings' cash flow. When they collect a big fine or watch another land in jai, they usually squeal with delight.

I'm not real good at the game. Usually I don't have the patience that is required to play. In addition, I don't seem to be the luckiest. It seems I often find myself hoping I will draw the card I need to get me out of a tight predicament. One of my most cherished cards is the "Get Out of Jail Free" card. There have been many times that particular card has rescued me from pending bankruptcy.

My experiences with Monopoly remind me of the perspective many have of salvation. Their perspective can be compared to the Monopoly "Get Out of Jail Free" card. They regard themselves as having been rescued from Satan, sin, hell, and death because of their trust in Christ; however, they don't have much of a vision for what God wants to do with their life. Though they are rightfully grateful of God's promises concerning the hereafter, they don't have a clear conception of God's purposes for the here and now.

Set Apart

What's missing in the lives of many Christians is an understanding of something the Bible calls sanctification. While the word may seem like a big, churchy term to some, the concept related to it is simply concerned the spiritual growth and development of God's people. Paul summarized the Lord's heart on this matter by saying, "For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Pay special attention to Paul's the way in which Paul used the words "keep away." Those two words shed light on what's involved with this thing called sanctification.

The word sanctification strictly means "set apart." For the the first century Thessalonians, sanctification involved staying away from the sexually depraved practices that were so rampant in their culture. It also involved living holy lives of purity. Once believers are born again, they are "set apart" from the world and they are set apart unto the Lord. They are called to live new types of lives that bring God glory. Their lifestyles are not to be marked and marred by the works of mere humanity. Instead, spiritual fruit that comes from the Spirit of God should bud and blossom freely.

Living Works of Art

An interesting verse is found in Ephesians that speaks volumes concerning God's intent for our sanctification experience. It is found immediately after one of the most famous verses in all of the New Testament on salvation. In Ephesians 2:8, Paul said, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift." Many Christians are well-familiar with that verse, but they aren't as familiar with what followed it.

Two verses after Paul's grand pronouncement of the way in which the grace of God brings salvation, he said, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). Within a span of just a few verses, the apostle masterfully summarized two of the foremost aspects of the Christian life — salvation and sanctification. He depicted the grace of God as prompting the former and producing the latter. His focus on sanctification is seen through his emphasis on good works. His intent was to say that though good works never earn salvation, they will be an evidence of it.

Sanctification should be seen in the lives of genuine believers. Spiritual fruit should grow where the root of the Holy Spirit is present. Paul emphasized this reality by speak of believers as the Lord's "workmanship." In the original language of the text, the apostle used a Greek noun that is the word form which we get our word "poetry." The word picture informs of God's beautiful intent in sanctification. Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, He wants our lives to be masterpieces of grace that exhibit His virtue to a spiritually lost world.

Work Out What God Has Worked In

Some of my ancestors on my mom's side of the family worked in the coal industry. To this day, she has in her possession an old, non-electric, wick head lantern that one used for illumination when he descended into the depths of the earth. Though valuable resources were buried beneath the earth's surface, workers had to mine them out. The work was undoubtedly hard and tedious, but it brought a reward.

Paul used a word picture in Philippians 2:12-13 that compared the process of sanctification to mining. He said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose." Notice that Paul said, "work out your own salvation," not "work for your salvation." He knew well that no one could earn his or her salvation through good works. To claim such to be true would be a contradiction of his words in Ephesians 2:8-9.

While one cannot work for his or her salvation, one can work out his or her salvation. What's involved in such activity? Paul's words in Philippians 2:13 are instructive. Consider the way in which he said "it is God who is working in you." Of what was the apostle speaking? In what way was God "working in" the Philippians. The answer rests in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Paul wanted his readers to remember that they were inhabited by the Holy Spirit. They were not saved by good works, but they were indeed saved for good works. The secret to growing in such good works was to mine out what had been mined into them. At salvation, the Holy Spirit of God had inhabited their souls. To grow in sanctification, they needed to learn to work in concert with that Spirit.

Many believers live blind to all of these realities. They are adequately aware that salvation involves an indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but they fail to see the Spirit's role in sanctification. They assume that they are saved by grace, but they mistakenly believe that spiritual growth accomplished through self effort and mere, man-centered behavior modification techniques. If you want to be a fruitful Christian who experiences and exhibits the fruit of the Spirit, you must come to grips with the fact that it is the Spirit who accomplishes God's work of sanctification in your life. In regard to both salvation and sanctification, the words of Jesus are true — "The Spirit is the one who gives life. The flesh doesn't help at all" (John 6:63).

GLORIFICATION

The work of the spirit in the life of a believer carries on far beyond salvation and sanctification. It has eternal implications. One is saved by the Spirit's new birth and sanctified by the Spirit's progressive work, but one also has hope of a future resurrection from the dead because of the Spirit's work. Theologians and Bible teachers through the years have often referred to this aspect of salvation as "glorification."

The Presence of Sin Forever Removed

One has defined "glorification" as "the final dimension of Christian salvation, which includes eternal life in heaven and the eternal glorifying of God."² This aspect of the Spirit's work has unique implication in the believer's life. When you think of it, each stage of the Spirit's work does something special in regard to the presence of sin. At salvation, the penalty of sin is erased. At sanctification, the power of sin is proven obsolete. At glorification, the final stage of Christian salvation, the presence of sin is obliterated forever.

Glorification is that aspect of Christian salvation that will return humanity to its original intent. It includes the end time resurrection of the dead, the giving of new and perfect bodies to God's people, and the establishment of a permanent residence the New Heaven and the New Earth (Revelation 21:1). While still on Earth, believers wait eagerly for this aspect of salvation. All along, they recognize that the Spirit has indeed saved them, and that he is gradually sanctifying them, but they look forward to the day in which sin will be completely eradicated and all things will be made new.

Several passages of Scripture highlight the truth of this event. In Romans 8:30, Paul clearly identified it as a pivotal part of God's work of redemption. He said, "... those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified." Notice from the apostle's words that glorification is a certain promise for those who are saved. There is no such thing as a person being justified (declared not guilty of his or her sins) who does not experience the blessing of glorification. In God's eyes, to be justified is to be as good glorified! If the Spirit has saved you, He will one day render you completely perfect and He will give you a place in Christ's new kingdom.

² McKim, Donald M. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 114.

The Power of the Resurrection

The resurrection of the dead is key aspect of Christian glorification. Scripture ties it to the work Christ did on our behalf. Our hope of glorification is rooted and grounded in His victory over death. The Bible says, “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you” (Romans 8:11). Jesus’ substitutionary work on our behalf has made glorification possible. He lived for us, died for us, and was raised for us. His Spirit now lives within our souls. That very same Spirit gives witness to our souls that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16), and He will one day resurrect our dead bodies to live perfect lives in God’s paradise forever. Salvation, sanctification, and glorification are all parts of the Spirit’s wonderful work in our lives.

Struggling for Perfection

Many believers get tripped up on this very aspect of the Spirit’s work in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit isn’t strong in their lives because they don’t see the Scriptural distinctions between salvation, sanctification, and resurrection. Many fail to grasp the way in which the penalty and power of sin has been broken in their lives. Others mistakingly expect perfection in this life. They stumble throughout their Christian experience, intermittently exhibiting virtues like love and patience, but stumbling over and over again.

I can relate to such struggle. For years in my Christian experience, I was fuzzy regarding what it meant “to be led by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:18). I believed that Christ had done something powerful in relation to sin in my life, but I was regularly overcome by defeat and discouragement. Part of my problem was that I wasn’t aware that sin was still present within me. I expected perfection in this life, not realizing that such perfection would not be a reality until glorification. When I stumbled into sin, I gave into despair. I felt as if I must not have been saved, as if I didn’t really have God’s Spirit.

One particular verse of Scripture was used to help me. James 3:2 flatly says, “...we all stumble in many ways.” The verse following that verse proclaims, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is mature, able also to control the whole body” (James 3:3). James meant to remind his readers that no one is perfect. During this lifetime, we will struggle with the flesh. Sure, we can obey God, and we can live in victory over the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit can and should grow in our lives; however, we must always remember that perfection won’t be realized until glorification.

No Perfection until the Resurrection

I recall an experience with a new believer in one church I pastored. The convert was a young mother who happened to be a school teacher. After becoming a Christian, she eagerly jumped headlong into her new faith. She wanted to grow and understand God’s Word. After a season, she experienced a degree of bewilderment. It struck her as strange that she still struggled with sin.

On one particular Sunday, I preached a sermon from 1 John 3:2. That passage says, “Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him

as he is.” Afterwards, the new Christian came up to me with her Bible and a sermon note-taking journal in hand. She appeared excited. As she approached, she said, “Patrick, that helped me so much! I get it now! There is not perfection until the resurrection!”

I hope that story helps you as you aim to see the fruit of the Spirit become a reality in your life. We are indeed called to “be perfect” in our Christian experience (Matthew 5:48). Such perfection, however, is built on the work of Christ on our behalf. We experience positional perfection before God at the new birth, but we won’t experience practical perfection until the end of time.

In your pursuit of the fruit of the Spirit, keep these things in mind. Don’t beat yourself up too bad when you fail. Confess your sin, repent, and trust in Christ. But don’t give up. Never believe the lie that there is something wrong with you and that the Spirit is just unable to produce His fruit in your life. Always remember that there is no perfection until the resurrection! Keep pressing on, remembering, “Though a righteous person falls seven times, he will get up, but the wicked will stumble into ruin” (Proverbs 24:16).