

THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 30 The Spirit Fructifying

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Transcript

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Chapter 30

The Spirit Fructifying

In the Song of Solomon Far more is said in Scripture upon this aspect of our many-sided subject than is generally supposed—different figures being used, especially in the Old Testament, to express the graces and virtues which the Spirit imparts to and develops in the elect. A considerable variety of emblems are employed to set them forth. They are frequently referred to as flowers and gardens of them, to beds of spices, and unto trees and orchards. For example, in Solomon's Song we hear Christ saying to His Spouse: "A garden enclosed is My sister, My Spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphor, with spikenard. Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon" (Song. 4:12-15). The figures used in the above passage are very beautiful and call for careful consideration. A "garden" is a piece of ground distinguished and separated from others, for the owner's use and delight; so the Church of Christ is distinguished and separated from all other people by electing, redeeming, and regenerating grace. In a garden is a great variety of plants, herbs, and flowers—so in the Church there are members differing much from each other, yet in all there is that which is delightful to their Lord. In a garden the plants and flowers do not grow up naturally of themselves, they do not spring forth spontaneously from its soil, but have to be set or sown, for nothing but weeds grow up of themselves; so in Christ's Church, those excellencies which are found in its members are not natural to them, but are the direct product of the Spirit's operations, for by nature nothing grows in their hearts but the weeds of sin and corruption. The commentators are not agreed as to whether Christ is speaking to His Spouse in verse 15, or whether She is there heard replying to what He had said in verses 12-14. Personally, we strongly incline to the latter: that Christ having commended His Church as a fruitful garden, She now ascribes it all to Him: "A Fountain of gardens, a Well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." Yet, if we accept the former interpretation, it amounts to much the same thing, for He would there be explaining what it was that made His Garden so fertile. To be healthy and productive a garden must be well watered, otherwise its delicate plants will quickly wilt and wither; the same being true of trees and all vegetation: a plentiful supply of water is indispensable. Consequently, in keeping with the fact that believers are likened unto plants and trees, and their graces to

flowers and fruits, the quickening, renewing, reviving, and fructifying operations of the Spirit are spoken of as "dew," as "showers," as "streams in the desert," etc. Cultivating Christlikeness The Holy Spirit not only imparts life and holiness, but He sustains the same in the soul; He not only communicates heavenly graces, but He cultivates and develops them. "That they might be called Trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified . . . For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Isa. 61:3, 11). Yes, the same One who "planted" those "trees of righteousness" must also "cause them" to "spring forth" to grow and bear fruit. While the tendency of the new nature is ever Godwards, yet it has no power of its own, being entirely dependent upon its Creator and Giver. Hence, that fruit which is borne by the believer is expressly called "the fruit of the Spirit" so that the honor and glory may be ascribed alone unto Him. "From Me is thy fruit found" (Hosea 14:8). "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses" (Isa. 44:3, 4). Just as surely as a drought brings famine, so the absence of the Spirit's working leaves all in a state of spiritual death; but just as heavy rains renew a parched vegetation, so an outpouring of the Spirit brings new life. Then shall it indeed be said, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isa. 35:1), which is expressly interpreted for us by the Spirit in, "For the LORD shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody" (Isa. 51:3). We have purposely added Scripture to Scripture because the spiritual meaning of these passages is commonly unperceived today, when carnal dispensationalists insist on the ignoring of all figures, and the interpreting of everything "literally." "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4: 19)—that which the Apostle did ministerially, the Spirit does efficiently. This is how the Spirit makes the Christian fruitful, or rather, it is how He first fits him to be fruitful: by forming Christ in him! The metaphor is taken from the shaping of the child in its mother's womb, so that as its natural parents communicated the matter of its body, it is then framed and shaped into their likeness, limb for limb, answering to themselves. In like manner, the Spirit communicates to the heart an incorruptible "seed" (1 John 3:9) or spiritual nature, and then conforms the soul unto Christ's image: first to His graces, and then to His example: "That ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you" (1 Pet. 2:9)—which we could not do unless we had first received them. Ah, my reader, this is a solemn thing: we pass among men for genuine Christians, but the only coins which will pass the eye of God are those which bear stamped upon them the image of His Son. In other words, then, the Spirit's fructifying of the believer is the conforming of him unto Christ, first in his heart, and then in his life. By nature we are totally unlike Christ, being born in the image of Adam and dominated by Satan; or, to revert to the figure in the opening paragraph, so far from resembling a beautiful and well-kept garden, we are like a barren desert, where nothing but useless shrubs and poisonous weeds are found. "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down" (Prov. 24:30, 31). That is how we appeared unto the holy eye of God in our unregenerate state! It is only when a miracle of grace has been wrought in our hearts that Christ begins to be formed in us, and that we (in our measure) reproduce His graces; and this is due solely to the sovereign and effectual operations of the Holy Spirit. Fruit of the Spirit (Graces of the Spirit) "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 ... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:17, 18, 20). The fruit they bear is that which

distinguishes the children of God from the children of the Devil. This "fruit" is the temper or disposition wrought in the elect by the Holy Spirit, which is manifested by them, severally, "according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7). The Spirit fructifies the regenerate by conforming them to the image of Christ: first to His graces, and then to His example. The lovely virtues found in them do not issue from the depraved nature of fallen man, but are supernaturally inwrought by God. There are three leading passages in the New Testament on this subject. John 15 names the conditions of fruitfulness: union with Christ, purging by the Father, abiding in Christ, and Christ and His Word abiding in us. Galatians 5 furnishes a description of the fruit itself. 2 Peter 1:5-8 states the order of fruit or the process of its cultivation. "In the figure of the Vine, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned, but in comparing Himself to the Vine and His disciples to the Branches, the Tree corresponds to the Body, and the Life to His Spirit. The diffusion of life is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the fruit by which the Father is glorified is the fruit of the Spirit. Apart from Christ there is neither life nor fruit, but without the Spirit of Christ there can be neither union or abiding. Our Lord does not specify the fruit. What He emphasizes is the fact that it is fruit, and that it is fruit directly from Himself" (S. Chadwick). "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22, 23). These are graces of the Spirit as distinguished from the gifts of the Spirit, enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12, and which will be considered in our next chapter. They are holy and heavenly dispositions with the conduct which results therefrom. The Apostle begins with the principal characteristics of the spiritual mind, and then passes on to its operation and manifestation in personal conduct, social virtues, and practical behavior. A threefold reason may be suggested why these spiritual graces are termed "fruit." First, because all grace is derived from the Spirit as fruit issues from the life of a plant. Second, to denote the pleasantness of grace, for what is more delightful than sweet and wholesome fruit? Third, to signify the advantage redounding to those who have the Spirit; as the owners are enriched by the fruit produced from their gardens and orchards, so believers are enriched by the fruits of holiness. In the use of the singular number, "the fruit (rather than fruits) of the Spirit," emphasis is placed upon the unity of His operations: producing one harmonious whole—in contrast from the products of the flesh, which ever tend to discord and chaos. These virtues are not like so many separate flowers in a bouquet, as the variegated petals of one lovely flower exhibiting different shades and forms. A rainbow is one, yet in it all the primary colors are beautifully blended together. These graces which the Spirit imparts to a renewed soul are distinguishable, but they are inseparable. In some believers one grace predominates more than another—as meekness in Moses, patience in Job, love in John—yet all are present and to some extent active. Galatians 5:22, 23 enumerates nine of the graces communicated by the Spirit. Some have suggested that the last eight are but varied expressions of the first. That "Joy is love exulting, Peace is love in repose, Longsuffering is love on trial, Gentleness is love in society, Goodness is love in action, Faith is love in endurance, Meekness is love at school, and Temperance is love in discipline" (A. T. Pierson). But while love is, admittedly, the greatest of all the graces, yet 1 Corinthians 13:13 shows that it is but one of several. Personally, we prefer the older classification which divided the nine graces into three threes: the first three—love, joy, peace—being Godwards in their exercise; the second three—longsuffering, gentleness goodness—being exercised manwards; and the last three—fidelity, meekness, temperance—being exercised self-ward. "Love": the Apostle begins with that which flows directly from God (Rom. 5:5), and without which there can be no fellowship with Him or pleasing of Him. "Joy" in God, in the knowledge of pardon, in communion with Christ, in the duties of piety, in the hope of Heaven. "Peace": of conscience, rest of heart, tranquillity of mind. "Longsuffering" when provoked and injured by others, exercising a magnanimous forbearance toward the faults and failing of our fellows. "Gentleness" rendered "kindness" in 2 Corinthians 6:6, a gracious benignity, the opposite of a harsh, crabbed, and brutal temper. "Goodness" or beneficence,

seeking to help and benefit others, without expecting any return or reward. "Faith" or more accurately "faithfulness": being trustworthy, honest, keeping your promises. "Meekness" or yieldedness, the opposite of self-will and self-assertiveness. "Temperance" or self-control: being moderate in all things, ruling one's spirit, denying self "In newspaper English, the passage would read something like this: The Fruit of the Spirit is an affectionate, lovable disposition, a radiant spirit and a cheerful temper, a tranquil mind and a quiet manner, a forbearing patience in provoking circumstances and with trying people, a sympathetic insight and tactful helpfulness, generous judgment and a big-souled charity, loyalty and reliability under all circumstances, humility that forgets self in the joy of others, in all things self-mastered and self-controlled, which is the final mark of perfecting. This is the kind of character that is the Fruit of the Spirit. Everything is in the word Fruit. It is not by striving, but by abiding; not by worrying, but by trusting; not of works, but of faith" (S. Chadwick). And, as our passage goes on to say, "Against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:23): that which the Law enjoins the Spirit imparts, so that there is perfect harmony between the Law and the Gospel. But here, too, there is to be a concurrence between the Christian and the Spirit; our responsibility is to cherish and cultivate our graces, and to resist and reject everything which opposes and hinders them. Fruit is neither our invention nor our product, nevertheless it requires our "diligence" as 2 Peter 1:5 plainly indicates. A neglected garden grows weeds in plenty, and then its flowers and fruits are quickly crowded out. The gardener has to be continually alert and active. Turn to and ponder Psalm 1 and see what has to be avoided, and what has to be done, if the believer is to "bring forth his fruit in his season." Re-read John 15 and note the conditions of fruitfulness, and then turn the same into earnest prayer. The Lord, in His grace, make both writer and reader successful horticulturists in the spiritual realm.

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