

FRUIT-BEARING CHRISTIANS

Gal. 5:22-23; John 15:1-16

Introduction:

Over the past few months we spent many weeks going through the book of Galatians. In chapter 5 Paul outlined the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. We mentioned the fruit of the Spirit only briefly at the time, but I think that it would be worth our time to focus on these traits for the next few weeks.

However, before we begin to look at the specific character traits Paul lists in his catalogue of the fruit of the Spirit, I think we would do well to think about the whole concept of fruit-bearing.

I am reminded of what the Word says about us as believers in Christ. - John 15 :16 – “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide (remain)...”

We are to be fruit-bearing believers. This is an important concern of Jesus. It is interesting to note in John 13-16 - Jesus final hours with his disciples before crucifixion, He discussed the Holy Spirit. He talked however, not about the gifts of the Spirit but about fruit.

What are some factors about fruit?

I. Fruit is a naturally occurring event

Where there is life and vigor there is fruit. When you plant seeds, they grow up and produce more seeds, or fruit.

→ Illust. - Orange trees in Yuma at our hotel - no one had to go and hang those oranges on the trees. They just grow there naturally.

In the spiritual realm it works the same way. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is life. And where there is Spirit-life, there is Spirit-fruit.

Look at what Jesus said in John 15:1, 4, 5 – read verses. If we have that abiding relationship with Jesus, and we are connected to the tree where there is life, fruit bearing takes place.

Fruit occurs because God produces it. It is one of the laws of nature. It occurs naturally. You expect it.

II. Fruit is determined by the source of strength

If you look at an apple tree what sort of fruit would you expect to find on it? ... an orange tree? ... a grape vine? ... a thorn bush?

You see, the life comes from the roots, through the stem into the branch. The type of tree, the source will determine the fruit.

Again a spiritual analogy. Look at Galatians 5:16-24

Flesh ← → Spirit

If we are connected to worldly roots we will produce worldly fruit - v.19-21. The result - death.

But the Spirit produces other fruit. The interesting thing is that this fruit is really the thing that most people are looking for in life. They just don't know where to get it.

→ Illust - “Life at its Best” Gal. 5:22-26

Quite a number of years ago, an extensive survey was conducted in the United States by a leading polling agency. Questionnaires were distributed to people of various ages and occupations. The key question was this: What are you looking for most in life? When the results were compiled, the analysts were surprised. Most of them had expected answers that would suggest materialistic goals, but the top three things that people wanted in life were love, joy, and peace—the first three fruits of the Spirit!

I don't know if those results would still hold true today, but I have a feeling it wouldn't be far off. The problem is many people are looking for the fruit without being connected to the source. They are looking for the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, but they don't have and don't want the Spirit. But the fruit of the Spirit is only produced by the Spirit.

III. Fruit cannot be faked, or imitated.

There is a contrast here between gifts and fruit. Gifts are related to what we do, fruit is the result of what we are.

Paul says...v.25 - “Walk (Keep in step) with the Spirit.”

We are called to live in such a way that we encourage the growth of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. If we lack these elements of Christian character, then all of our service for God really is of no profit.

Paul implies that it's possible to employ a gift through carnal efforts. A carnal, immature believer, may get away with preaching like a prophet. He is simply putting on a counterfeit gift or using natural ability.

But what can't be faked is true Christian character - that is the fruit of the Spirit.

James 3:17. - "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." Good fruit comes from God.

What matters most is Christian character. And there is no way to imitate that. We may try to imitate it and even get away with it for a while. But only true character will stand in the face of God's scrutiny.

IV. Good fruit must be cultivated.

John 15 – There are three important things suggested in this chapter—weeding, pruning, abiding,

Fruit comes naturally. But we know what happens if an orchard or a garden is not tended and cultivated. It is not long before it will be overrun by grass and weeds.

- Weeding - removing the undesirable things which prevent production of fruit. "Every branch in me that does not produce fruit, he takes away..."
- Pruning - cutting out the unproductive parts, cutting back the excess so the energy goes into producing fruit. "...every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."
- Abiding - staying close to the vine. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."

Discuss these three in spiritual terms.

→ Illust. "Dead leaves or Fresh Fruit?" John 15:1-5

A science teacher once brought a branch into his lecture room. He explained that the previous summer he had broken this bough when the tree

was in full leaf. He had been careful not to sever it completely from the trunk, so that the sap could still flow into it. The winter season came, and most of the old foliage fell off the tree. Spring followed, and with it the usual rising of the sap. But on this one particular branch many old leaves remained. And even now they were still firmly attached, though the branch had been fully severed for some time. Sufficient nourishment had reached it to keep it alive and produce some fruit, but not enough to throw off all the dead remnants of the previous season.

What a picture of some of us! We have new life in Christ and have been born again. But because of disobedience and failure to let Christ's words dwell in us richly, the full flow of His transforming life is hindered. There may be some limited fruitfulness, but fleshly traits still remain. Alexander Maclaren said, "We are not to be content with a little fruit; a poor shriveled bunch of grapes that are more like marbles than grapes, here and there, upon the half-nourished stem. The abiding in Him will produce a character rich in manifold graces."

Conclusion

Fruit - the most important thing in our lives. We are to be fruit-bearing Christians. And if that is to happen we must cultivate our relationship to Christ. Then we will develop the fruit of righteousness, a godly Christian character.

→ "To Be or to Do?" by Donald Cole (Moody Monthly Sept/83, p.17)

As believers, if you and I exercise a gift, it's likely our effectiveness will someday diminish. In my life, for instance, I've enjoyed numerous opportunities to teach and preach. But what happens now that I'm growing old? Will God be through with me before I go home? Young and old, as we look to the future, we find this comforting encouragement from God's Word:

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him'" (Psalm 92:12-15).

Even in old age, gifted or not, we can bear fruit. Nothing is sweeter than Christ-like character in aging people. But that character is grown, not conferred in response to a prayer or two. The young man who prayed he would not be an evil old man was well advised to start now in becoming what he would be in old age. Righteous in his

youth, he would be righteous in his final days, still "fresh and green."

At the end of your life and mine, gifts or talents will seem to have mattered little. What matters is fruit - the godly character of a Christian who wanted very much to be like Jesus.

What kind of fruit are you producing? When it comes to fruit, what we are is far more important than what we do. It is fruit that will last. Our character will go with us into eternity. Our character is what will leave a legacy for those who come after us.