

Character Development: The Fruits of the Spirit Bible Study Notes

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

Galatians 5:22-25

Says Jesus, *"by their fruits shall you know them"*, **Matthew 7:20**, & again He says, *"a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit"*, **Matthew 7:18**. What potent words given to us by the Messiah; words of warning but also words of wisdom.

If we profess to walk in Christ, then we must live as He did and walk as He did. He has set us an example through His written Word which we are to use as a guide as to how we should live our lives. Our constant battle, with the help of the Comforter, *the Holy Spirit*, is to use all that is within us to emulate Christ's character and this character can be seen in these fruits.

"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." **1st John 2:6**

"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." **1st Peter 2:21**

The fruits of the Spirit can all be seen in Christ's life and ministry here on earth and by studying His Word diligently as we are called to, we can learn how to develop this character by the grace of God. Character development is key, for we must be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

Jesus is returning for a spotless and blameless bride, *His Church*, and despite what is preached in the popular churches today, **NO** sin can enter through the gates of Heaven, **NO** spot or defect upon our characters will be able to stand before the Lord, *the consuming fire*, **Deuteronomy 4:24, Isaiah 33:14**. Therefore, as self-professed followers of Christ, we must analyse our own lives and question whether we are *'walking as He did'* for He tells us that *"every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (at His 2nd Coming)."*

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." **Ephesians 5:25-27**

1. LOVE

The original Greek word used here is *'AGAPE'* which means *affection, benevolence, or charity*. This is not the same as a sensual, emotional type of love that one would give a spouse for example, in Greek called *'PHILEO'*.

Love is the leader of the *'band'* of graces and the greatest gift of all. It is this love for mankind that God gave His only begotten Son as a perfect sacrifice for our sins, to redeem us and reconcile us back to Him, **John 3:16**.

It (love) is God's will to us concerning our attitude toward one another:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." **John 13:34-35**

"To godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." **2nd Peter 1:7-8**

Jesus is the perfect expression of love; it is a true representation of His character:

"For the love of Christ compels us..." **2nd Corinthians 5:14**

Perfect love for Christ is seen in keeping all of His commandments. We do not obey His commandments to be saved, for we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, on the contrary, we obey all of His commandments because we love Him.

"If you love Me, keep My commandments." **John 14:15**

If we claim to be followers of Christ yet we hate another person, then we are truly still in darkness and are deceiving ourselves, thus being blinded by satan:

"He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now... he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." **1st John 2:9,11**

Love is the bond of perfection; it is the premier characteristic of the new creation in Christ:

"But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." **Colossians 3:14**

Ask yourselves, "how do I measure up?" after reading the above, myself included. Where do we stand? Are we loving our neighbours as ourselves? Are we keeping *all* of the commandments of God?

Let us examine ourselves and our characters.

2. JOY

The Greek word used here when written by the Apostle Paul is 'CHAIRO', meaning *cheerfulness, being glad or to rejoice*.

As believers, we are to rejoice ever before the Lord. Some of the reasons we are to be joyful, and rejoicing are:

The power of Jesus:

"And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him." **Luke 13:17**

Jesus' presence with us:

"When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." **John 20:20**

Our sufferings in Christ:

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." **James 1:2-4**

Of hearing the good news:

"Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." **Acts 13:48**

Our Salvation:

"Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing." **Acts 8:39**

In persecution, trials, and afflictions:

"Blessed are you when men hate you and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets." **Luke 6:22-23**

God has bestowed many blessings upon our lives for which we must give thanks and be joyful. We should *'come before the Lord with joyful songs'* and *'make a joyful shout unto the Lord'*. It shows our appreciation to Him for His goodness towards us.

3. PEACE

The original Greek word used here in the text is 'EIRENE' which translates literally as peace. *A state of quiet or tranquillity, applicable to temperance, society, or individuals.*

Peace is promised to those who love and by implication obey God's Law:

"Great peace have those who love your Law and nothing causes them to stumble" **Psalm 119:165**

God has called us to live in peace by following His example, for He is the Prince of Peace:

"...but God has called us to peace." **1st Corinthians 7:15**

"...And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." **Isaiah 9:6**

Peace describes the harmonious relationship between God and man through the gospel:

"The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—" **Acts 10:36**

"And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near." **Ephesians 2:17**

Peace gives a sense of rest and contentment:

"And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your affliction." **Mark 5:34**

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." **John 14:27**

Let us pray to God that we may have a peaceful character that we may live a life that is pleasing to Him.

4. LONGSUFFERING

From the Greek 'MAKROTHUMIA' meaning *forbearance, fortitude of the mind, extreme patience*. It means to be of a long spirit, not to lose heart, to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles. To be longsuffering, slow to anger, slow to punish, to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others and to be mild and slow to avenge.

"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all." **1st Thessalonians 5:14**

"Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." **James 5:7**

"Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?" **Luke 18:6-7**

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love..." **Ephesians 4:1-2**

One who possesses this level of forbearance has the power to avenge but refrains from doing so.

Observe how God is merciful & gracious towards us, longsuffering and abundant in goodness:

"And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth..." **Exodus 34:6**

Ever since our first parents, Adam & Eve sinned, we have all been cursed with a sinful nature. Says the psalmist, *'surely I was sinful from birth, from the time my mother conceived me'* and again he says, *'all have become corrupt, there is no one who does good, not even one.'* **Psalms 51:5, Psalms 14:3**

However, despite this, God's love for His children does not fail. He is not slow concerning His promises as some understanding slowness, instead He is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish but that all should come to repentance for He takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. **2nd Peter 3:9, Ezekiel 33:11**

Observe God's nature and His love for us in His longsuffering. We fall away, make mistakes, we turn to our own devices, but like the prodigal son, He welcomes us back with outstretched arms.

God is calling His people to also possess this same level of forbearance, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to our neighbour and the stranger among us.

Notice Jesus' response to Peter in **Matthew 18:21-22**, we should always find it in our hearts to be longsuffering, forgiving others in the same way that Jesus forgives us of our sins when we confess them to Him.

"...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" **Colossians 3:13**

This ability to be longsuffering comes only by abiding in Christ and allowing Him to help us and to work within us, for in our own strength we can do nothing good, for *'there is no one who does good, not even one.'*

5. KINDNESS & GENTLENESS

The original word used here by Paul in **Galatians 5:22-25** for *kindness* is 'CHRESTOTES', which means *gentleness, kindness, goodness or excellence in character.*

This word refers to the virtue of a person that penetrates the whole nature, that mellows anything harsh and austere. It is that virtue that is gentle, charming, and calm, suited to the company of all good people, attracting their friendship, delightful in encouragement and moderate in manners.

"Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off." **Romans 11:22**

"...and raised us up together and made us sit together in the Heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." **Ephesians 2:6-7**

God's loving kindness is offered to His people, who need redemption from sin, enemies, and troubles.

"Therefore, know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments..." **Deuteronomy 7:9**

It signifies goodness in actions and deeds, full of grace, tenderness, and compassion. Therefore, we should be mindful of our temper & outburst of wrath.

Says the psalmist, ***"Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm...But the meek shall inherit the earth..."*** **Psalm 37:8,11**

Observe the gentleness & meekness of Christ when He was beaten and maligned by the Roman guards and the members of the Sanhedrin. In the midst of His persecution, He remained as meek as a lamb, gentle, full of grace and tenderness because all of what was written about Him in the Old Testament Scriptures had to come to pass. If He hadn't endured and died for our sins, we would have been eternally lost for *'the wages of sin is death.'*; transgression of God's Law requires death, **1st John 3:4**. Christ took our place and bore the sins of the world on His shoulders.

*"Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." **Mark 14:48-49***

*"Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands." **Mark 14:65***

The Apostle Paul tells us, *"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth... Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering." **Colossians 3:8,12***

Let us go to God in prayer seeking help in developing a gentle and kind spirit that we may follow His example and live a life that is pleasing to Him.

6. GOODNESS

From the original Greek word 'AGATHOSUNE' meaning *goodness, virtue, or beneficence*. This represents a zeal for goodness and truth.

Goodness ('agathosune') here includes the sterner qualities by which doing 'good' to others is not necessarily by gentle means; yet the sterner element in the ideal character which acts in a manner for benefit of others. Christ illustrates this quality in cleansing the temple and in denouncing the scribes and Pharisees, **Matthew 23:13-29**

*"Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of thieves." **Matthew 21:12-13***

Notice other texts on goodness:

*"Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness..." **Romans 15:14***

*"Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord." **Ephesians 5:9-10***

Let us be zealous for God, *'sighing and crying'* for the abominations that are done in this world. Lifting up our voices to blow the trumpet of warning to a dying world in these last days of this earth's history.

7. FAITH (fulness)

From the Greek 'PISTIS' meaning *credence, faith or belief*. It is the conviction of the truth of anything or belief; it is a conviction of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things.

It is related to God the Father with the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ. It is related also to Jesus with a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God.

***"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* Hebrews 11:1**

Without faith we cannot please God or find favour in His eyes:

***"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."* Hebrews 11:6**

We need a faith that works, that is, does good and righteous deeds:

***"Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works...For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."* James 2:18,26**

From Abel to Enoch through to Noah, the Patriarchs and Moses and the Judges, their faiths were all severely tested, yet they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus and His promises to them.

They all walked with God and followed His commands & statutes, by faith.

***"And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us."* Hebrews 11:39-40**

Notice what John tells us in the Book of Revelation concerning God's faithful remnant of believers in the last days. There will be many who profess to be of Christ, but Jesus shall say at His Great Day, *"depart from Me, you workers of iniquity."*

God's faithful remnant shall stand fast and faithful throughout the time of great trouble that shall come upon the world.

***"Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."* Revelation 14:12**

"But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'" Luke 13:27

Let us stand fast in our faith in Christ, *'for without faith it is impossible to please Him'*, however, we must also be aware of the fact that believing in Jesus is not enough, *'for even the demons believe and tremble.'* We must have a faith that works by doing righteous deeds, glorifying God in our actions. We must let our light shine before others that they may see our good works and thus glorify our Father in Heaven.

"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" James 2:19

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."
Matthew 5:16

8. SELF CONTROL/ TEMPERANCE

From the original Greek word 'EGKRATEIA', meaning *temperance or self-control*. It is the virtue of one who gains control over his desires and passions, especially in appetite. It describes temperance in eating and drinking as opposed to gluttony and drunkenness and other fleshly indulgences.

We must exhibit restraint to our desires by the help of the Holy Spirit, for in our own strength we can do no good. The various powers bestowed by God upon man are capable of abuse, therefore, the right use demands the controlling power of the will under the operation of the Holy Spirit.

In **Daniel 1:8-14**, we see how Daniel & the three Hebrew boys were able to stand up to the King, *Nebuchadnezzar*, by rejecting his offer of choice food and wine. As much as they were surrounded daily with large banquets of food and wine, they decided not to defile their *'body temples'* but to remain on a simple plant-based diet. This in itself required immense self-control to gain victory over the lust of the eyes thus exhibiting temperance and control of their appetite.

Notice the account of Noah's lack of temperance in **Genesis**. Let us learn from this example left for us in God's Word.

"And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk and became uncovered in his tent." **Genesis 9:20-21**

Again, notice the below admonishes for temperance in our lives:

"Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." **Ephesians 5:17-18**

"Wine is a mocker; strong drink is a brawler and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." **Proverbs 20:1**

"Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way. Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags." **Proverbs 23:19-21**

Let us pray to God that He will give us a spirit of temperance that we may gain control over appetite, gluttony and drunkenness, should we face these challenges in our lives.

Conclusion:

We as self-professed followers of Christ must live by the Spirit, in step by His guidance and teachings. We must walk in the way of the Spirit lest we gratify the desires of the flesh.

As we are a new creation in Christ, let us be transformed by the renewal of our minds, putting away our old sinful ways; let us turn from our wickedness for all who profess the name of Christ must turn from their wicked ways. By the grace of God, let us renew our minds in Christ & allow the Holy Spirit to bear the fruits of the Spirit within our lives, circumcising our hearts, that we may be changed into His glorious character. For those who bear the fruits of the flesh shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is our example, he possessed each of the fruits of the Spirit and it is only by beholding Him and keeping our eyes fixed upon Him that we can also hope to develop these characteristics in our Christian lives. There is nothing we can do in our own strength for we are helpless without Jesus. Character development is needed now more so than ever in these days as Jesus is coming back for a spotless bride without wrinkle and blemish.

We must all ask ourselves, where do we measure up.

***"The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
They have all turned aside,
They have together become corrupt.
There is none who does good,
No, not one.
Psalm 14:2-3***