



FEED MY SHEEP

PUBLISHED BY DR. JAMES W. BRUGGEMAN
STONE KINGDOM MINISTRIES
P. O. Box 5695
ASHEVILLE, NC 28813 U.S.A.
www.stonekingdom.org

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Fruits of the Spirit

The fruits of the spirit are mentioned in a number of places in the New Testament, but the most complete list is in Galatians. We are going to lay some preliminary groundwork about fruits of the Spirit in this issue.

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

The fruits of the spirit concern the development of Christian character, growing into spiritual maturity, the gradual putting on of the mind of Christ, and the pursuit and practice of holiness and godliness. All of this comprises the path of sanctification. In the metaphor of the tabernacle in the wilderness, the development of the fruits of the spirit in our character is the process of progressing through the Holy Place and preparing to enter the Holy of Holies. Our resurrection into sinless immortality correlates to the Holy of Holies, where our spiritual marriage will bring forth the birth of each of us as a fully-manifested son of God. Newer Christians sometimes confuse the *fruits* of the spirit with the *gifts* of the spirit. Just for quick reference, let us refresh our memories with Paul's list of the gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

11 But all these worketh that one and the self-

same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

All Christians have ministries of one sort or another. Just because one is not doing full time ministry work as a profession does not mean one does not have a ministry. As different parts of the body of Christ, we should all be ministering to one another in diverse ways. Many years ago I heard a teacher give this distinction, and I thought it was worth repeating. A person's ministry is what God does *through* a person. A person's maturity is what God does *to* a person.

A person can be used mightily of God in a great evangelistic and TV ministry and "save" lots of people, or have a great healing ministry, or preaching or teaching ministry, etc. And yet years later that person can stumble and fall and people will say, "What happened? I thought he was such a great man. He had a tremendous ministry; how could he/she do such a thing?" Does this mean that all the great work done through that ministry is invalid and of no account? No, but it does mean that while God did great things *through* that person's *ministry*, God did not actually do much *to* that person for his own *maturity*. And now here is where this ties in with the gifts of the spirit and the fruits of the spirit.

The gifts of the spirit are what God does *through* a person in order to minister to *others*. The fruits of the spirit are what God does *to* a person for his *own maturity*. The gifts of the spirit do not necessarily do anything to effect maturity in a person's character. In fact, many of the gifts can be a hindrance, an impediment, an obstacle to overcome in the

path to maturity. I read recently about a man with a healing ministry whose wife was beset with all sorts of physical problems but God has not healed her over the course of many, many years. Do you suppose God has a good purpose in that couple's tribulation? It may be the means God uses to bring a level of maturity to the husband and the wife.

But just because God performs many bona fide healings through a particular person does not necessarily mean that the person with the healing ministry is a great spiritual giant. His spiritual maturity does not necessarily equal the magnitude of his gift. One can easily see that a person who has a great ministry—whether of healing or preaching or evangelizing or whatever—one can see that that old demon of carnal pride can conceivably be a great temptation and an obstacle to spiritual maturity. So the gifts of the spirit are for *others'* benefit; they do not necessarily and automatically engender spiritual growth in the one with the ministry of the gift.

But... the fruits of the spirit are what God does *to* a person for his *own* maturity, ...which will of course in time ultimately bless and minister to others as well. It is nice to have gifts with which we can bless others, but it is not selfish to desire the fruits of the spirit for our own spiritual growth. God wants us to have both.

Since the word "fruit" is used in our subject, it behooves us to examine how the Bible uses the term "fruit." This will be part of the preliminary "spadework," if you will, concerning bringing forth fruit. The Bible uses the word "fruit" in at least three ways: First, there is fruit in the sense of the food group with which we are all acquainted, primarily, the produce of trees and vines, etc. Second, "fruit" is used in a broader sense referring to any type of produce whether from the fields, the orchards, the vineyards, or from any type of plant. And third, there is the extensive metaphorical use of the word fruit to mean the result of any action, moral or physical, including offspring from sexual relations, as in the term, the fruit of the womb.

Fruit in Scripture is one of the prominent images of abundance, blessing, prosperity and happiness. But even before that it is indicative of God's own creativity and richness. At the very creation, God said:

Gen. 1:11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

The psalmist uses the word figuratively:

Psalm 104:13 He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.

Through one metaphor or another, the Promised Land was portrayed as a fruitful land. When the 12 spies returned, they gave their report of what they had found.

Numbers 13:26 And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.

27 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

The fruit of Canaanland, both literal and figurative, was the evidence of the goodness and desirability of the land. The blessings upon Israel for obedience to God's covenant was always tied to fruitfulness in all its aspects: literal fruit of the land and of animals and of the fruit of the womb as well as being a metaphor for general prosperity and abundance. For example,

Leviticus 25:18 Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety.

19 And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety.

In this next passage we find a promise of blessing, put in terms of children as fruit.

Psalm 128: 3 Thy wife *shall be* as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

When Nehemiah makes a prayer of confession, he rehearses Israel's history and recounts how God had blessed them.

Nehemiah 9:24 So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would.

25 And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness.

God places a special value on fruit trees. In studying the history of warfare, we come across the term “a scorched earth policy.” In our War between the States, General Sherman employed this atrocious tactic from Atlanta to Savannah. He ordered everything in sight to be burned up, including many peach trees, I would suppose, Georgia being the peach state. But the principle set forth in God’s law forbids such a policy.

Deuteronomy 20:19 When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man’s life) to employ them in the siege:

20 Only the trees which thou knowest that they *be* not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued.

In the past issues of *Feed My Sheep*, we have written about the circumcision of the heart. Here, in Deuteronomy 30, Moses is given to prophesy about Israel’s disobedience, their scattering into captivity and their eventual restoration which would be under the New Covenant.

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the LORD [YHWH] thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

7 And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.

8 And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day.

9 And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers:

Trees are a symbol or a type of men. After all, since we speak of people bringing forth fruit and fruit grows on trees (usually), then it stands to reason that men are like trees, or trees stand for men. There are any number of Scriptures which verify this. Here are several examples. The first is the parable of the trees in Judges 9.

Judges 9:8 The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the

olive tree, **Reign thou over us.**

It’s a rather lengthy story which you can read at your leisure. I would point you next to Jesus’ healing of the blind man in Mark 8.

Mark 8:23 And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.

24 And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.

We also find this metaphor.

Isaiah 61:3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they [people] might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Psalms 1 is very clear about the man-wood connection. If we are trees, then our humanity is likened to wood. You might also remember that symbolism from the studies of the tabernacle. We are the shittim wood, the acacia wood, which was the only kind of wood used in the construction of the tabernacle.

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3 And he [i.e., a man] shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

This passage might remind us of another in Rev. 22. Jesus was both fully man and fully God. Thus, He also could be likened to a tree, could he not? What tree would he be? The tree of life?

Revelation 22:1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Jesus said: I am the vine; ye are the branches. Or in terms of a tree, he is the trunk or stock and we are the branches. Certainly, one of the ways to see this is

that the twelve tribes of Israel are they which bear twelve kinds of fruit which provides spiritual food for all the families of the earth. We referred earlier to the law of warfare which forbade the felling of fruit trees. Here is another law concerning fruit trees.

Leviticus 19: 23 And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of.

24 But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal.

25 And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the LORD your God.

Many commentaries refer to laws like this as ceremonial laws, as if they had no practical value, and they almost unanimously cast these laws aside as having no validity since the coming of Messiah. We beg to differ on both counts. This law has not been abrogated and it does indeed have practical value, every bit as much as the seventh year land sabbath is a blessing for man in terms of good agricultural practice. It rejuvenates the land. There are many possible reasons why God said to count the fruit of a tree as uncircumcised for the first three years.

I think this applies to vineyards as well. In the first three years, it is putting its energy into growth of the trunk or vine so it will have strength to bear an abundance of fruit when it reaches maturity. If the fruit is plucked the first several years, the tree or vine will be putting its strength into the fruit and thus the trunk will be denied that energy and strength. Thereafter, it will never produce the amount and quality of fruit that it could have, had God's simple law been obeyed.

But in the fourth year the harvest is essentially the firstfruits, since this is the first year that the fruit can be harvested. But the law says that the entire harvest is to be dedicated to God. Probably the most convenient and sensible way to do that in our modern era is for the fruit owner to sell the produce and tithe the proceeds. The point is, and this provides a segue into the topic of firstfruits, that the owner of the fruit must not consume the fruit himself, or spend the money on himself if he sells the fruit. The firstfruits of everything belong to God. Why? Because God owns all creation. He in effect is leasing out the earth to man and as the owner of the earth, God demands a return on his investment. He demands the firstfruits: the firstfruits of the land, the firstfruits of our offspring, the firstfruits of our animal offspring, the firstfruits of

all our labor.

This discussion could easily lead into a study on tithing and giving, but we will save that for some other time. Just know that tithing is not merely helping support the ministries that feed you spiritual food. Tithing is the offering of the firstfruits of our labor as an acknowledgment of God's rights of ownership and of his sovereignty over all creation. To refuse to give Him the firstfruits is in effect a denial of His ownership and sovereignty. It is a slap in the face to the Creator. Let us be cheerful givers. Amen.

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