



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## The Fruit of Godliness

In last month's FMS, we provided some preliminary and general principles regarding the subject of fruit in the Bible. There is literal fruit (apples, etc.). There is literal fruit in a broader sense (fruit of the land: any sort of agricultural crop; as well as fruit of the body: children). We noted how men are figuratively referred to as "trees." Finally, there is fruit in a strictly metaphorical and spiritual sense (love, joy, peace, etc.). In the spiritual sense, we distinguished between the fruits of the Spirit versus the gifts of the Spirit.

We left off last month just as we had begun to discuss the topic of "firstfruits." God is the Creator of the earth and all that exists. He therefore owns all the earth. He has, in effect, leased the earth to man. However, our Creator expects a return on His investment in the form of us offering the firstfruits of our labor. God, of course, does not actually need anything in terms of the firstfruits, but our offering the firstfruits is in reality our acknowledgment of and agreement with God's rights of ownership and of His sovereignty over all creation. To refuse to give God the firstfruits is in effect a denial of His ownership and sovereignty.

Giving back to God did not originate in the Mosaic Law, but has been part of man's duties from the beginning. Abel offered. Abraham offered (via Melchizedek). And long before Moses, Jacob promised in Genesis 28:22 that "...of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

Paul uses the figure of the firstfruits to describe the resurrection of the Savior in 1 Corinthians 15. This is a passage which we have studied in great detail in our series on Universal Reconciliation [UR]; specifically, CD or tape lectures # 314 & 315: *God's Plan and Purpose in the Three Resurrections*, \$10 ppd. Or get all 12 lectures—a progressive study—in one album, *Uni-*

*versal Reconciliation*, (specify CD or tape) for \$36 ppd.

**1 Corinthians 15:19** If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

**20** But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

By extension, in Romans 8 our receiving of the Holy Spirit in the earnest portion is referred to by Paul as the firstfruits as well. This is also a passage we have scrutinized in our UR series:

**Romans 8:22** For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

**23** And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.

If we as Christian believers possess this down payment of the Holy Spirit, if we have received and have planted within us the Spirit of God Himself as a firstfruits gift to us, then does it not make sense that we should be showing forth in our character some fruits of the Spirit? That's a reasonable assumption, isn't it?

There are many things said about fruit in the Scripture, but no matter what is said, there is always a dichotomy. *Fruit is either good or bad*. In the book of Jeremiah, baskets of figs were either good or bad. Jesus himself was obviously speaking of men as trees in Matthew 7 when he said:

**Matthew 7:15** Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inward-

ly they are ravening wolves.

**16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?**

**17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.**

**18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.**

**19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.**

**20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.**

This idea of the evil tree being cut down and cast into the fire is to us, of course, not a picture of eternal hellfire, but of God's righteous judgment upon them in the lake of fire, which is for purposes of correction, not eternal torture or ultimate extinction. We have dealt with that extensively in our series on hell (Ten lectures in one album: \$33 ppd. Specify CD or tape.)

Fruit, metaphorically, is the outcome of thoughts, words and actions. It is either good or bad. Notice the contrasting parallelisms here.

**Isaiah 3:10 Say ye to the righteous, that *it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.***

**11 Woe unto the wicked! *it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.***

"Say ye to the righteous" is in parallel contrast to "Woe unto the wicked!" Likewise, "*it shall be well with him:*" contrasts to "*it shall be ill with him.*" So also the results are contrasted: "They shall eat the fruit of their doings" versus "the reward of his hands shall be given him." The good and evil fruit dichotomy is found everywhere. In Jeremiah, we find it relative to the thoughts of the mind:

**Jeremiah 6:19 Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it**

Notice there that the evil is the fruit of their thoughts. Because they would not hearken to the law; therefore the outcome, the results of their carnal minds is evil. Does that not sound like the curses of the law at work? Keep that in mind as we look at....

**Jeremiah 17:10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.**

Here instead of the thoughts, it is the actions, the

deeds, which result in either blessing or curse. It is the law of reaping and sowing; otherwise known as the law of cause and effect.

**Proverbs 25:2 As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.**

We have seen examples of the fruit of *thinking* and the fruit of *doing*. As we look at Proverbs 12, we find an example of the fruit of our *words*, of our speech. Again, notice the parallelism in the contrast between the wicked and the righteous, here translated as the "just."

**Proverbs 12:13 The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.**

**14 A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him**

Did you know that you when you praise God with thanksgiving that you are offering a sacrifice? In the Old Testament, the people offered sacrifices of the fruit of the land, or the fruit of their herds and flocks, as atonement for sin among other reasons. We no longer need offer any sacrifices in connection with our sins for God has provided Himself a Lamb for the sins of all for all time. But we nevertheless offer sacrifices to him because of our gratitude for what he has done for us. One of the sacrifices is the fruit of our lips.

**Hebrews 13:15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.**

As Christians we are to become trees of righteousness bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit. The same would be the fruits of the kingdom. In speaking to the Jewish leadership which rejected His kingship, Jesus said:

**Matthew 21:43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.**

Let us now begin to study one of the specific fruits of the spirit. At the beginning of this study last month, we listed nine fruits of the Spirit given by Paul in Galatians 5. There are many others besides those nine however, and we find one or two additional ones in 1 Timothy 6:11:

**1 Timothy 6:11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godli-**

**ness, faith, love, patience, meekness.**

The fruit of godliness was not listed in Galatians 5, but I want to begin with it because it can have both a general and a specific meaning. When we say someone is a godly person, what do we mean? Do we not mean that he or she is Christ-like, a good and virtuous person, one who has a character and behavior that is pleasing to God?

You see, that is the *general* meaning. Godliness can and often is used as an umbrella term which encompasses the whole range of the other fruits of the spirit. Godliness in this sense includes love, joy, peace, gentleness, patience, etc.

But godliness also has a specific meaning as just one of many fruits. So we will examine it in more depth now in both the general and the specific sense. We all have some idea of what godliness is, but strictly speaking what is godliness?

The word appears 15 times in the New Testament. Ten of those are in Paul's letters to Timothy. Fourteen times it is translated as *godliness* and once as *holiness*; but, surprisingly, the Greek word for godliness has no connection with the Greek word for god which is *theos*. The Greek word translated "godliness" is actually εὐσεβεία (*eusebeia*). The lexicographers say it means: "(1) reverence, respect 2) piety towards God, godliness."

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary it means "the whole of practical piety" (Do you see how godliness is an umbrella term? The dictionary says it is the *whole* of practical piety.) "It supposes knowledge, veneration, affection, dependence, submission, gratitude, and obedience." In 1 Timothy 3:16, it denotes the essence of revealed religion.

**1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: [namely, that...] God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.**

In that verse, godliness seems to encompass almost the entire gospel. Notice that we have seen the word *pious* or *piety* in these definitions, so I want to take a minute to clarify how that is to be understood. In the past couple of decades, it seems as though the meaning of *pious* has changed somewhat.

It now frequently has the connotation of "hypocritically religious, holier-than-thou, Pharisaical, walking around with folded hands and eyes toward

heaven, not out of sincerity, but to be seen by others." But this is not the good meaning, the original meaning, as used in the King James Version. Webster's 1828 dictionary has the meaning we ought to remember when we see this word in these contexts. It reads [emphasis mine—JWB]:

"Godly; reverencing and honoring the Supreme Being in heart and in the practice of the duties he has enjoined; having due veneration and affection for the character of God; and habitually obeying his commands; religious; devoted to the service of God."

Under *piety*, the entry reads: "Piety in principle, is a compound of veneration or reverence of the Supreme Being and love of his character, or veneration accompanied with love; and piety in practice, is the exercise of these affections in obedience to his will and devotion to his service." Remembering this, let's look at the only place where this Greek word is not translated *godliness* but instead it is *holiness*.

**Acts 3:12 And when Peter saw *it*, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness [same Greek word as "godliness, godly"] we had made this man to walk.**

Remember last month how we talked about the gift of healing. Here is Peter absolutely denying that the miraculous healing had anything to do with his own personal spiritual maturity. He made it clear that he and John were merely channels used by God in the healing. As we said, there are ten occurrences of the word *godliness* in Paul's letters to Timothy.

**1 Timothy 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;**

[☺ except for Barack Obama, of course... or Al Gore, or George Bush...or except for the Catholics or Mormons or Baptists, ...or except for those who don't agree with me on all points of doctrine...No, God clearly commands...] ...giving of thanks, be made for all men;

**2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.**

I wonder what kind of theological or bible college training we need in order to attain to godliness and mature Christian character? Certainly, we all understand that spiritual maturity is not simply a function of putting in years of church attendance. *Spiritual* maturity is no more a result of warming a pew than is *emotional* maturity guaranteed by virtue of a person's

chronological age.

I have known people who are in their 60s and 70s who have the maturity of a 20-year-old. That's sad, but we all know it's true. I am sure you know people like that as well. Same with spiritual maturity. It is not automatic. How then do we attain to it? What kind of theological or bible school training must we have? None. We have all we need as a gift from the Father.

**2 Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,**

Observe closely now:....

**3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:**

**4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.**

No, we don't need a high IQ. We don't need to attend seminary or Bible college to be growing in godliness. Every Christian believer has everything he needs for godliness as a gift from the Father. It is apprehended through the knowledge of Christ Jesus. And I love verse 4 where it tells us of the ultimate result of godliness: that we might be partakers of the divine nature! Do we understand that particular exceeding great and precious promise?!—That you, my dear reader, that we will take on the nature of God. For this, the Scriptures confirm in several places.

**1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.**

**1 John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.**

Let's continue reading here:

**2 Peter 1:5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;**

**6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;**

**7 And to godliness [εὐσέβεια eusebeia] broth-**

**erly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.**

**8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Godliness is an attitude of devotion to God. That means that He is the focal point of our life. Everything we *think* and *say* and *do* should be to please Him. Remember that fruit is the outcome of our thoughts, words and actions. It is either good or bad fruit. If then, we have a constant attitude of devotion to God and he is the focal point of all our thoughts, words and actions; then it follows that we will produce good fruit. More on this later.

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