

The Fruit of the Spirit
The Fruit of the Spirit: The Essence of Christian Character

Lesson #13 for March 27, 2010

Scriptures: Matthew 6:33; John 15:8; Romans 3:20-26; 14:17; 1 Timothy 6:10,11; 1 John 2:15.

1. This lesson provides a kind of summary to our series on the fruit of the Spirit. In our busy world today, is it really possible to make the kingdom of God first in our lives? Does that take priority over family, job, home, responsibilities for children, etc.? (Matthew 6:33)
2. We have been studying the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We are trying to understand the impact the Holy Spirit will have on our lives if we allow Him to dwell there. John 15:8 suggests that we will bear much fruit. Is it referring to the characteristics that we have been studying? Or is it talking about bringing other people to the gospel? Or both? Read 1 Timothy 6:10,11. Money seems to be an all-absorbing passion for so many people. God tells us that our passion should be righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. What kind of life would that lead to? Do these things put food on your table and a roof over your head?
3. In the times of the New Testament, the disciples dropped everything and followed Jesus. (Matthew 4:18-22) Today, are we expected to keep doing our jobs, take care of our families, be responsible members of society, and still do all the things that the disciples did to spread the gospel? Does God expect some of us to drop everything and spread the gospel?
4. Read Matthew 6:33. If we placed God's kingdom first in our lives, what would it mean to say that God will add all these things (food, drink, clothing) to us? In context, it says that God will provide our food, drink, and even our clothing. How would God do that in the 21st century? Is this verse suggesting that one day we will be in heaven where God will provide everything? Or is it talking about right now? (Compare Mark 10:29-31) Is this suggesting that the church is our "family"?
5. Read Exodus 34:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18. These verses suggest that God's glory is His character. Furthermore, God says He can change us from glory to glory. Does that mean that God can help us with our characters? How does that transforming process actually work?
6. **It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell.** It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, p. 555.
7. By believing in Christ, the fallen race he has redeemed may obtain that faith which works by love and purifies the soul from all defilement. Then Christlike attributes appear: **for by beholding Christ men become changed into the same image from glory to glory, from character to character.** Good fruit is produced. The character is fashioned after the divine similitude, and integrity, uprightness, and true benevolence are manifested toward the sinful race.—Ellen G. White, *MS 42*, 1900; *My Life Today*, p. 54.
8. Notice what the results will be if we truly focus our attention on God and His kingdom on a day-by-day basis. Even now? Are our lives full of integrity, uprightness, and true benevolence?
9. Think about the things for which you pray. What percentage of your prayers involve asking God for something? Doesn't God already know what our needs are? Should we be praying instead

for this transforming, Spirit-filling experience? How often do we ask God for a change in character? How will our characters be changed if we constantly fill our minds with the things of this world? How much time do we spend watching television or movies?

10. What would a true Christian life be like in the 21st century if we focused on becoming more like God? Could a small group of Christians who really did just that turn the world upside down as the disciples did in their day? If Jesus said to you right now, "Follow Me," what would you do? Won't Satan do that, too? How will we know who is asking us to follow?
11. We are told to seek righteousness. What is righteousness? Did the Pharisees believe they were seeking righteousness? Ellen White suggested that in some respects, righteousness is right doing. Is righteousness more about who we are, or about what we do?

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. **The essence of all righteousness [98] is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* p. 97,98.

Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* p. 312

12. Could you explain righteousness to a young person so as not to seem to take all the fun out of life? Could you make it sound exciting? Why do so many people think that sin is fun? Does sin produce at least a temporary happiness? Are the "pleasures" that accompany or are produced by sin always temporary? (Hebrews 11:25) People in our day want health and wealth right now!
13. How does Satan manage to make sin "fun"? Is righteousness fun? Young people are excited about the idea of love. Love is talked about nonstop in movies, on blogs, on Facebook, etc. Remember that love was the first part of the group of characteristics described in Galatians 5:22,23. The biblical form of love, of course, is *agape* love. Is there anything exciting about *agape* love? Does it have anything to do with the love that our world is so busy talking about?
14. In this series of lessons, we have been focusing on the writings of Paul. Peter also gave a list of characteristics which he recommended. (2 Peter 1:5-7) Peter's list includes faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, Christian affection, and love. How do these compare with the lists from Paul? Could you make that list exciting for young people?
15. Read Romans 5:3-5. Do you boast of your troubles? What is the role of hope in our experience?
16. Could you explain any of these traits or characteristics on the Christian ladder in such a way as to make them interesting and exciting to a young person? Think about the childhood and youth of Jesus. Did He do things that were fun? Should fun ever be a goal for Christians? Or was the entire life of Jesus boring, hard work? Why was His childhood known as "Days of Conflict"?
17. Even as a child, Jesus learned to commune with His Father. What do you think those sessions were like? Did they bring joy and peace to His heart? What would it be like to commune with God like that? Do any of us have that kind of experience?
18. Jesus is our only completely reliable example. As you look at His life and compare your own, is it easy to get discouraged? Does God really expect us to become like Him?
19. Think of some specific examples from the life of Christ. Even after 40 days of fasting, He stood firm against Satan's temptations. (Matthew 4:1-11) Pleading with God in the Garden of

Gethsemane, He nevertheless, recognizing what was in front of Him, was willing to go through with it and die even if it meant eternal separation from His Father. (Mark 14:35,36; DA 753:1,2) Through the mockery of a trial, multiple beatings, and abuse of every imaginable kind, He remained peaceful and did not retaliate. (John 18:1-11) Even when they were nailing Him to the cross, He forgave them. (Luke 23:33,34) Is that kind of behavior even possible for an ordinary human being? How did Huss and Jerome sing as they were being burned at the stake?

20. Was Jesus so in touch with His Father and so certain about the ultimate results of His life that He could survive despite the temporary persecution, pain, hunger, etc.? Can you think of any others in the Bible who went through some of the same kind of difficulties? What about Paul? He called himself a slave! The fire that burned inside of him gave him no choice!
21. In order to accomplish all of this, Jesus had to take time to spend with His Father. Today, in our setting, that would mean Bible study, prayer, meditation, and witnessing. But we do not seem to have time. Do we believe that we are really busier than Jesus was? Is it possible in our busy, distracted world to constantly keep God in our thoughts? For most Christians the biggest challenge to all of that is dealing with the attractions of the world.
22. At times the longings of the soul go out for holiness and heaven; but there [52] is no time to turn aside from the din of the world to listen to the majestic and authoritative utterances of the Spirit of God. The things of eternity are made subordinate, the things of the world supreme. It is impossible for the seed of the word to bring forth fruit; for the life of the soul is given to nourish the thorns of worldliness.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 51,52.
23. Read 2 Corinthians 5:20. Paul was challenging us to be “prophets” or “ambassadors” for God. Are we true living ambassadors for the kingdom of God? When people look at us, are they excited about the possibilities? Do they praise God? Do our lives attract others? Do they want to be more like us? If everyone in the Seventh-day Adventist Church had the same kind of Christian experience and did the same kind of witnessing that you do, what would be the result?
24. Read Romans 3:20-27. Some translations of these verses seem to suggest that God does everything on our behalf. Are these verses referring to how God makes us righteous? Or are they referring to God's righteousness?

Romans 3:21,22 (NASB, 1995): But now apart from the Law **the righteousness of God** has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even **the righteousness of God** through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.

(GNB): ²¹ But now **God's way of putting people right with himself** has been revealed. It has nothing to do with law, even though the Law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it. ²² **God puts people right** through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all.

25. This difference in translation continues down through Romans 3:27. Notice that it says three times that God's righteousness must be demonstrated before it mentions once that He puts us right. How does God “put us right with Himself”? Do we need to learn the truth about God in the context of the great controversy before we can truly be put or set right? Wasn't that Satan's original question? How does God credit us with righteousness? Read Genesis 15:6. How was righteousness credited to Abraham? Did it transform his life? Was Abraham's life a true “Christ-like” life? How well did Abraham understand God? How did that affect his life?
26. If we engage with the world to try to influence them for God, what is the risk that they will influence us to become like the world instead? Do we have a daily appointment with God?
27. How can we be sure that our love for the world is not greater than our love for God? (James 4:4)

What was James suggesting? What does it mean to be a friend of the world?

28. Read Romans 6:18. What will be our relationship to the world if we are “set free from sin and become slaves of righteousness.” (GNB) Have we ever experienced that even in a small way?
29. If you could talk to your guardian angel and ask him to score your life for a week, would the conclusion be that you are a slave of righteousness or a friend of the world?
30. So, what can we do to improve and maintain a correct relationship with the Holy Spirit? How do we “behold” Jesus Christ? The first order of business, of course, would have to be Bible study. (2 Timothy 3:16,17; Psalm 119:105) If we study our Bibles and fully come to recognize the great truths about God that are spelled out there and we want to become like Him, it will change us.
31. But this is not a one-sided conversation. We also must open our hearts to God through prayer.

Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be [255] substituted, and the health of the soul be preserved. Prayer brings the heart into immediate contact with the Well-spring of life, and strengthens the sinew and muscle of the religious experience. Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God. The spiritual faculties lose their vitality, the religious experience lacks health and vigor.—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 254,255.

32. As already suggested, we must strive to fill our minds with the right kind of thoughts. (Philippians 4:8) The mind gradually adapts itself to the things on which it dwells.
33. This new relationship with God will become more and more meaningful as we seek to tell others about it. Christian witnessing is essential if we are going to be true Christians. Many things which may seem confusing to us will be clarified as we seek to explain them in our own words to others. In some cases, we will be forced to go back and study the issue in more detail. The very first missionary to the Gentiles—a former demoniac—was sent by Jesus to witness to his friends and family. (Mark 5:18-20) Superficially, he would seem to have been the poorest kind of missionary. He had only known Christ for a few hours! But when Christ returned to that territory, thousands came out to hear Him because of the witness of that former demoniac.
34. Jesus began His ministry by spending 40 days in the wilderness without eating. Is that something that Christians should consider doing in our day? Is that required in order to have a true Christian experience? How can we spend time with the Holy Spirit even while we work and play and eat and sleep?
35. God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. **The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 60.
36. Can you spell out your version of the gospel in 50 words or less? If you were put in charge of directing the church's program of outreach to finish the gospel, what would you do? From a personal standpoint, do you need to work on the character building or the witnessing or both?

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