

The Fruit of the Spirit

“By Their Fruit . . .”

Lesson #1 for January 2, 2010

Scriptures: Luke 13:7-9; John 11:4; 12:28; 15:1-10; Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Timothy 3:5.

1. This is the first in a series of lessons on the fruit of the Spirit. What do you think of when someone mentions “the fruit of the Spirit”? Do you see the fruit of the Spirit in the members of your church? In yourself? If not, why not?
2. What does it mean “to abide in Christ”? Numerous verses in the New Testament focus our attention on the fact that we are to abide in Christ. If we have that life-changing relationship with Christ, we should grow to be more like Him, and our lives should be radically different from those of the world. Are they?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. How does beholding Jesus transform our lives? Are we any more than just spectators? How does the Holy Spirit actually “work” in us? Have you seen evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in your life? What kind of changes do you expect to see in the life of someone in whom the Holy Spirit is at work? Do you think that you could tell if a person has the Holy Spirit working in his/her life?
4. There are some Christians who are always asking others if they “have received the Holy Spirit.” Often, those are people of the “Pentecostal bent” who think that unless one speaks in “strange tongues,” he has not yet fully experienced the Holy Spirit. While we would never want to disparage anyone else’s religious experience, we need to recognize that the primary work of the Holy Spirit has been in giving us the Scriptures. So, the fruit of the Spirit should be borne out in those who are particularly close to God’s inspired Word. If that is true, then those who have the Holy Spirit active in their lives should be particularly close to the Bible, and their lives should be Bible-based.
5. Jesus Himself warned us about people who pretend to be very holy and even seem to work miracles but who are, in fact, far away from God’s plan for their lives. (Matthew 7:21-23; Revelation 16:14) Don’t these verses suggest that this type of problem will be particularly common in the last days? Paul also wrote about those who profess to be godly people but deny the power of the gospel. (2 Timothy 3:5) How would one deny the power of the gospel? What did Paul have in mind? In what way would their lives be transformed?
6. In our lesson for this week, we will focus on the parable given by Jesus in John 15:1-10. (Compare Luke 6:43,44) Two things should be clear from these verses: 1) Real Christians will behave like Christians, and 2) It is much easier to make a profession of Christianity than it is to actually live a Christ-like life.
7. What is the purpose of the fruit of the Spirit? Is it a mark of identification of a true Christian? Or does it make it possible for us to better serve the church and to minister to our communities? The Bible seems to suggest in a number of places that it is not possible to judge a person by his “outward appearance.” (1Samuel 16:7) But, does Galatians 5:22,23 suggest that we might be able to? Are we actually being changed by our daily experience with God? Is it visible? (Matthew 5:16) The real issue is a person’s motive. As

he was beginning his rebellion in heaven, did Lucifer realize that his motives were evil? Or did he convince himself that he was doing a “good” thing? He claimed that he was trying to “improve” things for the angels!

8. What is the difference between being good and doing good? Perhaps, we should first ask the question, “What is meant by *good*?” Could a person do good things and not be a good person? There are a lot of people who do good things for very selfish reasons. Or could a person be good and not do good things? (Matthew 7:21-23)
9. The parable of the vine focuses on the fact that the branch must be in permanent, intimate connection with the vine in order to bear fruit. How does that actually happen in human lives? How is that related to the law of the mind which Ellen White spoke about in some detail saying, “By beholding we become changed”? (*Great Controversy*, p. 555) Are these two ideas connected or not? How does it affect a person if he has that kind of relationship?
10. What is it that prevents us from abiding in Christ as we should? What keeps us from beholding Him in a radical, life-changing way? It is obvious to those who have a knowledge of nature that a branch which is broken off from the vine cannot prosper or grow. So, what are the signs that a Christian is in constant communion with God? The *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* suggests that the tools by which we maintain that relationship include prayer, meditation, witnessing to others, studying God’s word, thinking, and memorizing Scripture. Do most Christians find those things easy to do? Or, are they too time-consuming and bothersome? This series of lessons is “where the rubber meets the road.” The fact that we are not yet in the kingdom of God is good evidence that as a group, we are not living that kind of life yet! Where exactly are we falling short?
11. We like to measure the growth of our children over the years. Is there an accurate way we can measure spiritual growth? Is that perilously close to judging—which we are not supposed to do? But what about measuring ourselves? If we measure ourselves, and if we are honest, we can have a good idea about our motives. So, can we measure growth? How can we do that? By definition, growth takes time. And in order for growth to take place, there must be adequate nourishment or nutrition provided from the vine to the branch or from the parent to the child if we expect proper growth.
12. One of the secrets that has been suggested is that we must look away from ourselves and look to Jesus. What exactly does that mean? Is that easy to do? Why? Or, why not? Can we do that while we are at work? While we are driving? Can we get some important clues about growth by looking at the way children grow? We expect them to grow physically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually. How do they grow in each of those areas? They grow socially and intellectually by observing adults around them. It is an excellent illustration of the basic principle that “by beholding we become changed.” (*Great Controversy*, p. 555; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 91 and p. 459) Does that apply to spiritual growth as well? If we are supposed to behold Jesus, wouldn’t it be helpful to have more information than just those four short gospels?
13. Read John 15:1,5. Can we tell if we are bearing “much fruit.” (Compare Psalm 80:8ff; Isaiah 5:1ff; Ezekiel 19:10ff; Matthew 21:33ff) These passages compare Israel’s spiritual growth to the growth of a plant. Notice that Jesus referred to Himself as the true Vine. Is

there any reason to suspect we could be deceived regarding the identity of the Vine to which we are attached? (Matthew 24:24; Revelation 13:1-8) Could we be attaching ourselves to the wrong vine? Will it be obvious that we are bearing bad fruit? We know that the Devil loves to force people to do what he wants them to do. God never uses force. Would that be a clue?

14. It is obviously easy to say that we really need to remain connected to the Vine. But, how many people are actually doing that? What are the barriers that prevent us from doing that? What is your daily experience? And, do we need to practice developing the fruit of the Spirit? Or, do we just look to Jesus, and those traits naturally develop in us?
15. Read Galatians 5:22,23. There, the fruit (singular) of the Spirit is described as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. Do we need to set our sights on developing each of those characteristics before we can be described as receiving the fruit of the Spirit? Or, does God do that for us if we just give Him a chance? Benjamin Franklin is famous for an article he wrote on these different fruits. After working for some time on humility, he gave up when he realized that he was “proud” of his humility!
16. The Bible describes situations in which vines do not produce good crops. (See Isaiah 5) There may be bad fruit or even no fruit at all. (Compare Matthew 21:20-22; Mark 11:12-14,20-24; Jude 12; Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11; Psalm 8:1) Why does that sometimes happen?
17. If we can figure out how to abide in the vine, we will actually bear fruit to God’s glory. Do you know any human beings who are bearing fruit to God’s glory? How could God be glorified by the way we live our lives? (John 15:8; Matthew 5:16)
18. Perhaps the most difficult thing that Christians need to learn to do is to set self aside and focus on others and on God. The difference between the ruling spirit in this world—which is one of selfishness—and the ruling Spirit in the new earth—where everyone is motivated by love for others—could hardly be more distinct.
19. What did Jesus say was the driving force behind His life and death here on planet Earth? (John 11:4; 12:28-33) How many times have you heard Christians or Christian groups discussing how they can bring glory to God’s name? Sometimes, when “thinking about how they can bring glory to God’s name,” they are actually looking for the greatest benefit for themselves! Do we need to examine our own hearts and lives to determine what our true motives are?
20. There are two stories in the Gospels which talk about fig trees and bearing fruit. On one occasion Jesus talked about the owner of an orchard who discovered that a certain fig tree was not bearing fruit. He suggested to the gardener that it should be removed. But the gardener said, “Wait, let me fertilize it and work around it, and let’s give it another chance for another year to see what will happen.” (See Luke 13:6-9; compare Matthew 3:10; 7:19)
21. The second story is found in Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14,20-24. During His final week in Jerusalem, Jesus passed by a fig tree early one morning. He saw it full of leaves. In its state of development with many leaves, it should have had ripe figs on it. But, there were none. Jesus immediately “cursed” the tree. On returning the next morning, the

disciples discovered that the tree was completely dead. What does that suggest to us about “trees” that do not bear fruit? Clearly, God expects us to bear some kind of fruit in our lives.

22. Almost 300 years ago, Jonathan Edwards—living in the northeastern portion of the United States—preached a very famous sermon entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” The picture of God that he painted and the descriptions he gave are terrible. But, many people have a view of God and His final destruction of the wicked which is very much like that.
23. Read John 15:1-10 again. It is very clear from this parable that those who fully abide in Christ will produce an abundance of fruit. What is the fruit that they will bear? Is it the fruit of the Spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5:22,23? Or, does it mean we will bring others to Christ? Are those two types of “fruit” related? Will we need to have those types of fruit in order to live in heaven? Those who do not abide in Christ will produce no fruit and they will be cut off and cast into the fire. What are we supposed to learn from this parable? We know from other sources that God wants to save everyone. But, He cannot save everyone because there are many people who—like Lucifer—would just start the great controversy all over again if they were admitted into heaven and lived forever.
24. One of the very important things that happens to grapevines each year is the pruning which comes after the harvest. Great skill is needed in doing that pruning correctly. There must be a balance between allowing the vine to grow and producing fruit. What does this pruning process represent in our human experience?

God brings men into trying places, to see if they will trust in a power out of and above themselves. He sees not as man sees. He often has to break up human connections and change the order which man has mapped out, which is perfect in his estimation. What man thinks is for his spiritual and temporal interests may be altogether at variance with the experience he must have in order to be a follower of Christ. His idea of his own value may be far out of the way.—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 266; *RH*, October 23, 1900 par. 6}

25. Are we taking the necessary steps to remain attached to the vine and to let our fruit grow? Is our relationship to God closer every day? Are there ways in which we can help each other along the narrow road? How do we give the Holy Spirit opportunity to work in our lives and transform us?
26. What does all of this tell us about God? Is He making things too hard to understand? We have heard many sermons on these ideas. Why aren't we all clearly showing the fruits of the Spirit? Is it our natural selfishness which makes it hard for us to accept a transformation in our lives? Are there obvious, or even easy, answers to these problems?

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