

The Fruit Of The Spirit Is ... Four Wonderful Things

First, it's singular. It's "fruit," not "fruits." It's an important difference. As fruit of the apple tree is at once colorful, shiny, firm, juicy, sweet, nutritious, edible, seed-bearing, and durable; so the fruit of the Spirit is at once love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To be a child of Satan, we need only practice one of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). To be a child of God, however, we must put on and continually grow in *all* aspects of THE fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Second, it requires more than not doing wrong. Pleasing God requires *two* things—not doing wrong *and* doing right. We can do the former without the latter. For example, to please God we must not get drunk. Does this mean we can get tipsy? No! Not getting drunk is only half the battle. To please God we must also exercise self-control and drinking clearly impairs self-control even if we stop short of drunkenness. Consider Leviticus 10:8-11; Proverbs 31:4-5. Again, to please God we must not hate. Does this mean we can be indifferent? No! Not hating is only half the battle. To please God we must also love and love precludes indifference as much as hatred. I don't think some people understand this principle. Otherwise, they wouldn't defend the indefensible. Not doing wrong is the silver rule. To be golden, we must also do what's right and that's much more than not doing wrong.

Third, it condenses the complete Spirit led life into nine words we must fully understand.

Love, agape in Greek, is the motivation or driving force of the Spirit led life. "Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). "If I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). We love when we want and do what's truly best. Since God is love and knows what's truly best, we *agape* when we treat Him, others, and ourselves as He commands. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15); "We love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments" (1 John 5:2).

Joy is the way the Spirit led life effects emotions. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Admittedly, sorrow has its place, but joy is "*the distinguishing atmosphere of the Christian life*. We may put it this way—whatever be the ingredients of the Christian life, and in whatever proportions they are mixed together, joy is one of them." "In the Christian life joy always remains a constant ... It has been said that 'Rejoice!' is the standing-orders of the Christian ... Every virtue and all knowledge is to be irradiated with joy; even the patience and the endurance which might well be bleak and grim are to be lit with joy ..." "There is no virtue in the Christian life which is not made radiant with joy; there is no circumstance and no occasion which is not illumined with joy. A joyless life is not a Christian life, for joy is the one constant in the recipe for Christian living" (Barclay).

Peace is the way the Spirit led life effects relationships. *Peace* describes the state of a relationship between two or more parties. In the Spirit led life, there is peace with God (Romans 5:1); as much as depends on it, peace with other people (Proverbs 16:7); and peace within (Philippians 4:6-7). Biblical peace is much more than an absence of conflict. It describes healthy, secure, intimate, satisfying, growing relationships. Peace following love and joy isn't accidental. Love nurtures relationships and relationships are the source of real joy in life.

Longsuffering is the way the Spirit led life reacts when it suffers. It doesn't blow up, complain, get even, or give up. Rather, it stays calm, looks for the good in the bad, lets things go, and stays optimistic.

Kindness is the way the Spirit led life reacts to the suffering of other people. It sees it, is touched by it, wants to ease it, and does so whenever possible.

Goodness is what the Spirit led life does because it's driven by love, seeking joy and peace, and reacting to suffering. To paraphrase Hamilton, "Goodness is love in action, love with its hand to the plow, love with the burden on its back, love following the footsteps of Him who went about continually doing good."

Faithfulness is one reason why the Spirit led life does what love demands. It believes God knows best, submits to His direction, and realizes that outcomes depend directly on us.

Gentleness is how the Spirit led life goes about doing what love demands. It understands that *how* we say or do is just as important as *what* we say or do.

Self-control is another reason why the Spirit led life does what love demands. It makes no excuses. It understands that God is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20), that we can do all things through Him who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

Fourth, it's limitless. "Increase and abound in love" (1 Thessalonians 3:12); "Joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8); "Peace be multiplied" (2 Peter 1:2); etc. One blessing of the Spirit led life is that it just keeps on getting "richer, fuller, deeper ... sweeter as the years go by."

If we'll bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, the Spirit will bless us immeasurably. The fruit of the Spirit is ... wonderful. Isn't it?