

Nurturing the Fruit of the Spirit

In the New Testament, the fruit of the Spirit refers to the evident and intended outcome of inner changes in the attitudes, activities, and associations of believers' lives.

The analogy of inner fruitfulness draws on the organic nature of plant life, which starts as a seed sown into soil, which once planted will germinate through a transformative process that results in fruitfulness – the fruit always looking radically different to the seed sown. Jesus shared a number of parables built around these organic realities of soil, seeds, and harvests.

In our daily Christian living, these changes are produced by the Holy Spirit's activity within the soil of our hearts, that indicate the nurtured development of the character of Christ being reflected in our changing attitudes and behaviours. This will require the ongoing challenge of changes in our thought patterns that govern our attitudes, activities, and associations.

1. Identifying the Fruit of the Spirit – and the Contrasts

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (Gal 5:19-26)

The simplest way to understand what is meant by the fruit of the Spirit is to think about the character of Christ being formed within us through our willing collaboration with the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit within us. It is the character of Christ formed within us over time by the Holy Spirit that produces the authentic witness to the reality of God's presence within our lives and the changes he effects within us.

2. Why is Change Always So Hard?

We have all experienced the situation where a changed circumstance forces us to change the way we have been doing something, and then the time takes to adjust to the new procedure, until it becomes habitual. Herein lies a great insight into the dynamics of **change**.

a) What do most people try to change?

- i) Feelings - Mood alteration
- ii) Behaviour - Behaviour modification

b) Where does this leave most people?

- i) Proud and legalistic
- ii) Frustrated and defeated
- iii) Caught in addictive habit patterns

3. The Master Key To All Deep Change

Understanding the way God has wired us to function –

Thought/Belief → Feelings → Behaviour

A simplified Cognitive Behaviour Therapy overview

Be being transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:2)

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be being transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:2)

- The Holy Spirit gives stronger or weaker evidence of the presence and blessing of God in our lives according to our response to Him:

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
(Gal 6:7-9)

We reap what we sow!!!

As we receive and respond to the Spirit, and learn to be led by the Spirit, we will experience more and more of God's presence, power and blessing:

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
(2Cor 3:17-18)

The question is, what are we choosing to sow into???

It starts with the desire to be accountable to God's Word –

Sow into the Spirit, and allow God's word to read our lives!