

The Fruit of the Spirit: The Important Part of Christian Character¹



SABBATH—MARCH 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 6:33; John 15:8; Romans 3:20–26; Romans 14:17; 1 Timothy 6:11; 1 John 2:15.

MEMORY VERSE: “God has chosen to make known to them the glorious riches of that mystery [secret]. He has made it known among those who aren’t [are not] Jews. And here is what it is. Christ is in you. He is your hope of glory”² (Colossians 1:27, NlrV).

MOSES ASKED GOD TO SHOW HIM HIS GLORY. Then the Lord showed him His character as merciful, gracious (kind), long-suffering (patient), and very good and truthful (Exodus 34:6). “Our faces are not covered with a veil. We all display [show] the Lord’s glory. We are being changed to become more like him so that we have more and more glory. And the glory comes from the Lord, who is the Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NlrV).

“By believing in Christ, the sinners whom He has saved may receive faith. That faith works by love and makes the soul pure from all sins. Then Christlike character appears. When we behold [witness; experience] Christ, we become changed to appear more and more like Him, from glory to glory, from character to character. Good fruit is made. The character is developed more and more like God’s. Honesty, purity of character, and true kindness are shown.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, page 54.

1. character—who someone is; all that a person does, feels, and thinks are what he or she is made of.

2. glory—great beauty, power, and royal perfection.

SUNDAY—MARCH 21

SEEK (SEARCH FOR) FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD (Matthew 16:26)

So often our prayers are more about what we can get than what we should become. Think about your own prayers, or about the prayers that you hear others pray. There may be good reasons for your prayers. But what group do most of them fall under: what can I get, or what can I become? How do the two verses given below help us to understand why we do this?

“ ‘But put God’s kingdom first. Do what he wants you to do. Then all of these things will also be given to you’ ” (Matthew 6:33, NIV). What does Jesus mean when He tells us to search for the kingdom of God “first”? Why seek (search for) that first? Read Matthew 16:26.

How does Romans 14:17 help us understand what the kingdom of God is?

Notice that righteousness (living a holy life through Jesus), peace, and joy are the fruit of the Spirit. So, we should seek first the fruit of the Spirit before anything else. In the end, we can have everything the world offers. But what does that mean if we do not have righteousness, peace, and joy?

Suppose someone were to ask, “But does this mean Jesus is not interested in how well I do?” How would you answer this question with Christ’s command to seek the fruit of

the Spirit first?

A mother said, “Pastor, please pray for my boy. He is out of the faith, and he has lost his job. Pray that he will find work.” Was this mother seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness for her son? Remember the most important thing for the Christian life is not to get but to become. What should the mother’s prayer for her boy have been?



We should seek first the fruit of the Spirit before anything else.

What do you think about your prayers and about your life in general: getting what you want for yourself or becoming what God wants you to become? What does your answer tell you?

MONDAY—MARCH 22

OTHER FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (Galatians 5:22, 23)

Galatians 5:22, 23 and Ephesians 5:9 are not the only verses that list

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the fruit that are part of the Christian character. Many of the fruit are mentioned again in 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:10; and 2 Peter 1:5–7. But several more good points are added, such as godliness, purity, and knowledge. First Corinthians 13:4–8 also tells of love and lists many of its traits³ using the word “not.” Love “does not want what belongs to others. It does not brag. It is not proud. It is not rude. It does not look out for its own interests. It does not easily become angry. It does not keep track of other people’s wrongs” (NirV).

It should be clear by now that there is not only one checklist in the Bible when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit. There are many different parts and shades of Christian character. What the apostles⁴ do in each case is to list those that are especially for the needs of their readers. What led Paul to write the list in Galatians was what he knew about the special needs of his readers.

The fruit of “godliness” is named in 1 Timothy 6:11. In the original language, the word *godliness* meant reverence,⁵ respect, and purity (being pure), toward God. Romans 5:4, 5 names “hope.” What part does hope play in the Christian character? When all is said and done, our Christian faith offers us nothing if not hope.

Second Peter 1:5–7 is a list of good character points. Among them is “virtue” (a pure heart) which is not named in the list in Galatians 5:22, 23. Virtue

is connected with goodness, modesty,⁶ and purity. Why is this a very important part of the Christian life? How is this connected with the seventh commandment?

Second Peter 1:5, 6 adds “knowledge” to the list. The word *gnosis* (*gno’-sis*) means general knowledge and understanding. These are fruit of the Spirit-filled life. But what part would knowledge play? How would knowledge be connected with the gift of judging moral⁷ issues?

Peter did not call his list in 2 Peter 1:5–7 the fruit of the Spirit. But it is what they really are. This is because they show what kind of people we should be as followers of Jesus.

How well are these good points shown in your own life? If you are discouraged by what you find, what is your one hope? What is the only place you can escape to? And what can you find there?



Peter did not call his list the fruit of the Spirit. But it is what they are. They show what kind of people we should be as followers of Jesus.

3. traits—qualities or features, such as being honest and faithful, that make you who you are.

4. apostles—the disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven.

5. reverence—deep respect for God.

6. modesty—not being or acting showy; having a humble heart.

7. moral—having to do with knowing what is right or wrong.

TUESDAY—MARCH 23

**PERSEVERANCE
(STUBBORNNESS) IN FAITH
(Romans 3:20–26)**

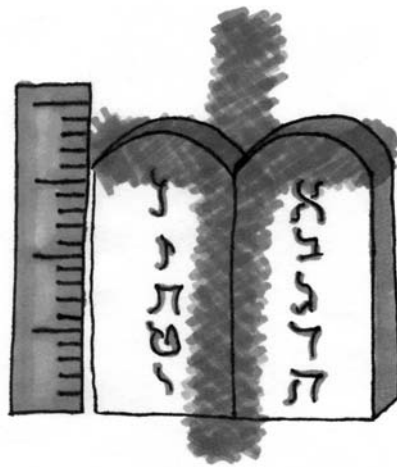
Yesterday’s discussion question brought up the question of how well we are doing in helping the fruit grow. We have been given the wonderful job of helping it grow for the honor and glory of God. No doubt, as a person considers all these good points, it would be easy to get discouraged. After all, should we not be producing more fruit than we do?

That is a good question! We should all seriously think about this question. “Put yourselves to the test and judge yourselves, to find out whether you are living in faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5, TEV). We need to test ourselves to find out how we are living and what kind of witness⁸ we present to the world.

At the same time, we can face a danger. As Christians, we have the example of Jesus. He was the only sinless human being (person) who ever lived. As we compare⁹ ourselves to Him, how easy it could be to get discouraged. How easy to see His sinlessness and perfection as compared with our sinfulness and weaknesses. We do have a perfect law to obey and a perfect Savior to follow. As we all know, we often fail to measure up to that law and to that Savior. How easy it can be to get discouraged after falling and not experiencing the kind of

growth we would like to make. We even think about giving up. We think, *Why bother? I just cannot do it.*

But this is where we need to understand fully what salvation by faith¹⁰ is about. This is where we need to understand where our salvation lies, and this is where we need to understand what Jesus did for us on the cross.



When we fail to measure up to the law, we need to remember that our salvation lies in what Jesus did on the cross.

What does Romans 3:20–26 tell us about salvation? Why is this truth so important to hold to when we feel discouraged about how little fruit we grow?

No matter how seriously we try to live the Christian life and fight the battle against sin and self, we need to remember God’s acceptance of us is found in Jesus and His righteousness. He worked that righteousness out for us, and He

8. witness—when the Christian life is an example for God.

9. compare—to show how two or more things are the same.

10. salvation by faith—we are saved by faith in Jesus.

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also credits it to us by faith. Then we will never give up. Why should we? Our salvation remains safe, not in ourselves but in Jesus.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 24

THE CHALLENGE OF THE WORLD (1 John 2:15)

What is 1 John 2:15 saying? Does it mean that God does not love those who love the world? Or does it mean that those who love the world do not love God? Explain.

“At times the desires of the soul go out for holiness and heaven. But we must make the time to turn aside from the noise of the world to listen to the leadings of the Spirit of God. If we do not, then we make the things of eternity¹¹ less important and the things of the world more important. In this way it is impossible for the seed of the word to bring forth fruit, because the life of the soul is more determined to encourage the thorns of worldliness to grow.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*,¹² page 51.

We must realize the dangers of legalism.¹³ Israel of the Bible always backslid when it tried to make itself

more and more like the nations around it. First John 2:15 warns that love of the world makes impossible a heartfelt love for God. How careful we need to be as a church in making sure that we do our missionary work¹⁴ in the world. But we should not be influenced by¹⁵ it and swept into it, all in the name of the Lord!



We must make time to turn from the noise of the world to listen to the leadings of the Spirit of God.

How can a person know when his or her love for the world has become greater than his or her love for God? What signs should we look for?

The danger of loving the world more than God takes on new meaning in James 4:4. Why would James use the word-picture of adultery¹⁶ for church members who become lost

11. eternity—forever; for all time; life without end.

12. *Object Lessons*—lessons that use an object or a thing to teach a spiritual (holy) truth. Most often the object comes from nature, such as a flower, animal, tree, or seashell. But the object used to teach the lesson might be man-made instead.

13. legalism—the practice of believing that one can earn salvation (the act of being saved) by obeying the law.

14. missionary work—having to do with the special duty or work that a church sends a person or group out to do.

15. influenced by—to be affected by the power of another person or thing.

16. adultery—breaking the marriage vows by having sex with a person who is not one’s spouse; not being faithful.

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in the world? Notice, too, what John says in 1 John 2:15: it is God, or it is the world!

What parts of the world do you struggle with the most? What things tempt you? How can you learn to fight the fight of faith and not get swept up in something that cannot satisfy and will destroy you in the end?

THURSDAY—MARCH 25

HOW TO GROW THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (John 15:8)

We cannot make a seed grow. But there are things we can do that will encourage growth until it gives fruit. It is the same way in the Spirit-filled life. The work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer is a part of the great mystery¹⁷ of life itself. But the Bible has given us clear instruction on how to encourage that growth. In this way we may fulfill Jesus' desire that we bring forth much fruit to the glory of the Father (John 15:8).

Below are some ways to encourage the growth of the fruit of the Spirit:

Through study of the Word of God. What does 2 Timothy 3:16 explain that the Bible is profitable (helpful) for? As a result, how will Bible study help our lives? (Read verse 17; read also Psalm 119:105.)

Through prayer. "Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. Prayer protects the

health of the soul. Prayer gets the heart in close touch with God. Prayer also strengthens the sinew [tendon] and muscle of the religious experience. If you fail to pray regularly, you lose your hold on God. The spiritual connection becomes weak, and the religious experience loses health and strength."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel¹⁸ Workers*, pages 254, 255.

Through the right kind of thoughts. "Finally, my brothers and sisters, always think about what is true. Think about what is noble, right, and pure. Think about what is lovely and worthy of respect. If anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about those kinds of things" (Philemon 4:8, NIV). How can we learn to keep our minds on noble and pure thoughts?

Through our Christian witness. The man Jesus healed of demons asked to go with Him. Jesus did not let him. Instead, Jesus asked him to return to where he lived and tell what the Lord had done for him (Mark 5:18–20). How does sharing our faith help the fruit of the Spirit grow in our lives?

The fruit of the Spirit is not going to happen on its own. Your own choices will determine your future. What changes do you need to make in your lifestyle, in your friendships, in anything and everything you do that can better encourage your spiritual growth?

17. mystery—anything that cannot be fully understood or explained.

18. *Gospel*—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

FRIDAY—MARCH 26

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “God asks us to fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to think about His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of salvation.¹⁹ Then clearer and still clearer will be our understanding of truth. Higher and holier is our desire for a pure heart and clear thought. The soul in the pure atmosphere [air] of holy thought will be changed by a close relationship with God through the study of the Holy Bible.

“ ‘And bring forth fruit.’ Those who have heard the word and kept it will bring forth fruit through obedience. The Word of God [the Bible], received into the soul, will be shown in good works. Its results will be found in a Christlike character and life. Christ said of Himself, ‘My God, I have come to do what you want. Your law is in My heart.’ Psalm 40:8, NIV. ‘I can do nothing by myself. I judge only as I hear. And my judging is fair. I do not try to please myself. I try only to please the One who sent me.’ John 5:30, NIV. And the Bible says, ‘Those who claim to belong to him must live just as Jesus did.’ 1 John 2:6, NIV.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 60.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 It is our responsibility (duty) as a church to spread the three angels’ messages²⁰ to the world. But we often struggle to find ways to make ourselves and our message meaningful to the culture²¹ around us. What dangers do we face when we do that? History shows that more often than not, the church ends up getting converted (changed) to the ways of the world. And the world does not get converted to the ways of the church. What about us as Seventh-day Adventists? Do we fool ourselves in thinking that this is not happening to us, or that it cannot happen to us? Do we see proof of this already happening? And, if so, what can we do?
- 2 In the twenty-first century, in your own culture, what are some of the greatest challenges to growing the fruit of the Spirit? What parts of the culture must you faithfully fight against?
- 3 Why is the Cross so important to the whole question of the fruit of the Spirit and character growth? What does the Cross offer us that is a must for character growth? After all, without the Cross, what good would be the purpose of bearing this fruit?
- 4 Why do our character development and good works bring glory to God? What is that all about?

19. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

20. three angels’ messages—Read Revelation 14:6–12. The three angels’ messages are recognized as the Seventh-day Adventist message for today’s world.

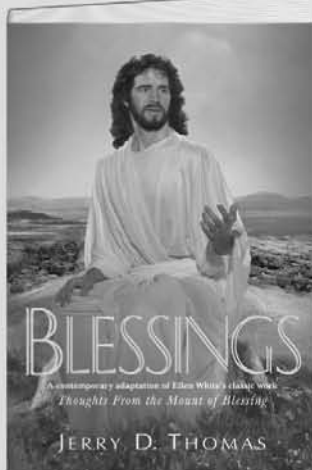
21. culture—the way that people live, dress, think, eat, and get along with one another.

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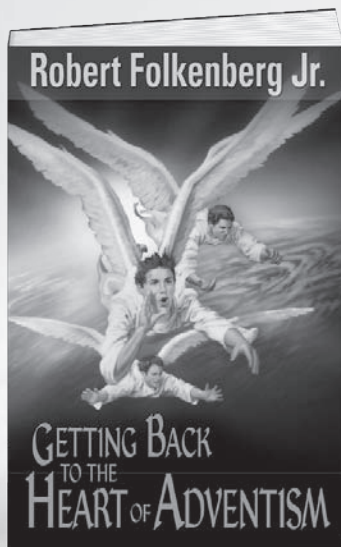
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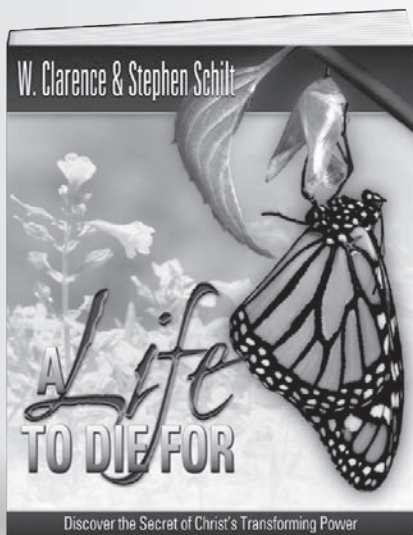
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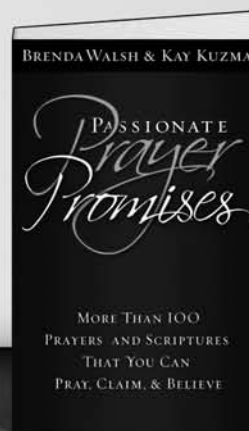
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