

LESSON 13

*March 20–26

The Fruit of the Spirit: The Essence of Christian Character



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt. 6:33, John 15:8, Rom. 3:20–26, 14:17, 1 Tim. 6:11, 1 John 2:15.

Memory Text: “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (*Colossians 1:27, NKJV*).

When Moses asked God to show him His glory, it was then that the Lord revealed to him His character as merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth (*Exod. 34:6*). And so when “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image from glory [character] to glory [character], even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (*2 Cor. 3:18*).

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 54.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 27.

Seek First the Kingdom of God

So often our prayers are more about what we can get as opposed to what we should become. Think about your own prayers, or about the prayers that you hear others pray. No matter how legitimate the concerns are, what category do most of them fall under: What can I get, or what can I become? How do we understand this tendency in light of what Jesus says to us below?

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). What does Jesus mean when He tells us to seek “first” the kingdom of God? Why seek that first? See Matt. 16:26.

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

Notice that righteousness, peace, and joy are the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, 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 don’t have righteousness, peace, and joy?

If someone were to ask, “But does this mean that Jesus isn’t interested in my physical or financial well-being?” How would you answer in the light of Christ’s command to put the fruit of the Spirit before physical or material needs?

A concerned 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 concerned mother seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness for her son? Keeping in mind that the priority of the Christian life is not to get but to become, what should her request for her boy have been?

What are your main concerns as revealed not just by your prayers but by your life in general: getting what you want for yourself or becoming what God wants you to become? What does your answer tell you about your priorities?

Other Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22, 23 and Ephesians 5:9 are not the only texts that list the fruit that constitute the essence of Christian character. Many of the fruit are repeated in 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 3:10, and 2 Peter 1:5–7, where qualities are added, such as godliness, virtue, and knowledge. It is interesting to note that 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 echoes the qualities of love and states many of them using the negative word *not*: “does not envy; . . . does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity” (*NKJV*).

It should be clear by now that there is not one official checklist when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit. There are many different aspects and nuances of Christian character. What the apostles do in each case is to list those that are especially applicable to their readers. What led Paul to the enumeration in Galatians was doubtless his pastoral knowledge of the particular needs of the congregation to which he was writing.

The fruit of “godliness” is mentioned in 1 Timothy 6:11. In the original language, the word *godliness* means “reverence, respect, and piety toward God.” Romans 5:4, 5 mentions the quality of “hope.” What role 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 qualities, among them “virtue,” which is not mentioned in the list in Galatians 5:22, 23. Virtue is associated with moral goodness as are modesty and purity. Why is this quality indispensable in the Christian life? How does this quality relate to the seventh commandment?

Second Peter 1:5, 6 adds “knowledge” to the list. Though the word that is used, *gnosis*, signifies general knowledge and understanding as fruit of the Spirit-filled life, what role would knowledge play? How would knowledge relate to, for instance, the gift of discernment?

Peter did not call his list in 2 Peter 1:5–7 the fruit of the Spirit, but essentially that’s what the qualities listed are, because they reveal what kind of people we should be as followers of Jesus.

**How well are these characteristics manifested in your own life?
If you are discouraged by what you see, what's your one hope?
What's the only place you can flee to, and what can you find
there?**

Perseverance in Faith

Yesterday's discussion question brought up the question of how well we are doing in cultivating the fruit that is our privilege to bear for the honor and glory of God. No doubt, as one looks at all these qualities of character and then compares oneself to them, it would be easy to get discouraged. After all, shouldn't we be bearing more fruit than we are?

That's a fair question, one that we should all seriously think about. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (*2 Cor. 13:5*). We need to take stock of ourselves, of how we are living and of what kind of witness we present to the world.

At the same time, too, we can face a danger. As Christians, we have the example of Jesus, the only sinless human being who ever lived. As we compare ourselves to Him, how easy it could be to get discouraged. How easy to see His sinlessness and perfection in contrast to our sinfulness and weaknesses. We do have a perfect standard to follow, a perfect law to obey, and a perfect Savior to emulate. As we all know, we often fall far short of that standard, of that law, and of that Savior. How easy it can be, too, after falling and failing, after not seeing the kind of growth we would like, to get discouraged, even to the point of giving up, thinking, "Why bother? I just can't do it."

Here, though, is where we need to understand fully what salvation by faith is about. Here is where we need to understand where our salvation lies, and here is where we need to understand what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

Read Romans 3:20–26. What message is there for us about salvation? Why is this truth so important to cling to, especially when we feel discouraged about the state of our own fruit?

No matter how earnestly we seek to live the Christian life and fight the battle against sin and self, as long as we keep before us, every day, every moment, the reality that our acceptance with God is found in Jesus and His righteousness, which He worked out for us and which He credits to us by faith, we will never give up. Why should we? Our salvation remains secure, not in ourselves but in Jesus.

The Challenge of the World

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, NKJV). What is this text saying? Does it mean that God doesn’t love those who love the world, or that those who love the world don’t love God? Explain.

“At times the longings of the soul go out for holiness and heaven; but there 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*, p. 51.

While we must be aware of the dangers of legalism, ancient Israel always backslid when it tried to contemporize itself and become 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, in our attempts to reach the world, we don’t become enamored by it and swept into it, all in the name of the Lord!

How can a person know when his or her love for the world has superseded 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: “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (NKJV). Why would James use the metaphor of adultery for church members who are swept up with the world? Notice, too, how in 1 John 2:15 John leaves no room for compromise. It’s either God, or it’s the world.

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

How to Grow the Fruit of the Spirit

(John 15:8)

Although we cannot make a seed grow, there are definitely things we can do that will facilitate growth until it bears fruit. So it is in the Spirit-filled life. While the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer is a part of the great mystery of life itself, Scripture has given us definite instruction on how to encourage that growth so that we may fulfill Jesus' desire that we bring forth much fruit to the glory of the Father (*John 15:8*).

What follows 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 declare that the Scripture is profitable for? As a result, what will be accomplished in our lives? (*See vs. 17; see also Ps. 119:105.*)

Through prayer. “Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be 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.

Through the right kind of thoughts. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (*Phil. 4:8*). How can we learn to keep our mind on elevated thoughts?

Through our Christian witness. The man that Jesus healed of demons requested to go with Him. Jesus denied his request and rather 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 contribute to the growth of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives?

The fruit of the Spirit isn't going to happen on its own. Your own choices will determine your destiny. What changes do you need to make in your lifestyle, in your associations, in anything and everything you do that can better allow for your spiritual growth?

Further Study: “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 the Scriptures.

“ ‘And bring forth fruit.’ Those who, having heard the word, keep it, will bring forth fruit in obedience. The word of God, received into the soul, will be manifest in good works. Its results will be seen in a Christlike character and life. Christ said of Himself, ‘I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.’ Ps. 40:8. ‘I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me.’ John 5:30. And the Scripture says, ‘He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.’ 1 John 2:6.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 60.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a church, with a mission to spread the three angels’ messages to the world, we often struggle to find ways to make ourselves and our message relevant to the culture around us. What inherent dangers do we face when we do that? History shows that more often than not, the church through the centuries ends up getting converted to the ways of the world, as opposed to the world getting converted to the ways of the church. What about us, as Adventists? Do we fool ourselves into thinking that this isn’t happening to us, or that it can’t happen to us? Do we see evidence 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 specific aspects of the culture must you unflinchingly fight against?
- ③ Why is the Cross so central to the whole question of the fruit of the Spirit and character development? What does the Cross offer us that’s indispensable in character development? After all, without the Cross, what would even be the purpose of bearing this fruit?
- ④ Why do our character development and good works bring glory to God? What’s that all about?

In Difficult Times: Part 2

by RICHARD LASU

We were trying to plant a church in Kajo Keji, southern Sudan, but Satan was angry. A few days after we started work, our landlord threw us out. Soldiers patrolled the streets, and it was dangerous to be out. But we didn't know where to go.

We knelt and placed our lives in God's hands. Then we started walking. We reached a home behind a large fence. I knocked, and a security guard answered. The man knew we were pastors and told the owner, who invited us to sleep in his sitting room. The next morning this man told us he was a soldier and was being transferred to another area. He invited us to stay in his house and care for it for as long as we needed it.

Nearby we found a big mango tree. We cleared the debris from under it and started holding worship services there. Two days later the woman who had befriended us found us and asked for Bible studies.

One Sabbath we were worshiping with five other people when a soldier came saying he had a warrant to arrest our former landlord's wife. I asked the soldiers to wait until our worship was over, but he refused, saying he must take her immediately. Finally he agreed to allow us to pray with her before he took her away.

Just as the soldier and the woman disappeared around a curve, a plane flew over and dropped bombs on the town center. The soldier fled the scene, and the woman returned to worship with us. Our prayer service turned into a praise service.

Within a few months 30 people were worshiping with us, and 11 people were preparing for baptism. Other churches in the area weren't happy about our work and tried to break up our new congregation. But we fasted and prayed, and God worked on our behalf. The woman who had befriended us became a leader in the church.

It isn't easy to plant a church among opposition. But God blessed our efforts. The war in southern Sudan has disrupted the lives of millions of people, but peace has come, and the people are returning to their villages. The church in Kajo Keji is growing again.

Your mission offerings help advance the work in difficult places around the world. Thank you!

RICHARD LASU pastors several church groups and works with Adventist World Radio in Arua, Uganda.

Next quarter's Bible study guide will look at the wonderful truths God has given to the Adventist health movement. The Lord revealed these principles because He loves us and wants what is in our best interest. This quarter's lesson on healthful living written by the General Conference Health and Temperance Ministries Department was produced with the goal of helping us to achieve as healthful a lifestyle as possible until the Lord provides "the redemption of our bodies" (*Rom. 8:23, NIV*).

Lesson 1—Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow!

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Our God of Love (*2 Tim. 1:9*)

MONDAY: God of Grace (*Eph. 2:8, 9*)

TUESDAY: A Love Relationship (*Matt. 22:37, 38*)

WEDNESDAY: Praising the Lord (*Rev. 21:4*)

THURSDAY: A "Reasonable Service" (*Rom. 12:1*)

Memory Text—*Psalm 103:1, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The same God who created the universe is the One who in the Person of Jesus bore the sins of all humanity. With this truth before us, how could we not offer God our very best praise and worship?

Lesson 2—The Power of Choice

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Reality of Freedom (*Gen. 2:16, 17*)

MONDAY: The Consequences: Guilt and Fear (*Gen. 3:7–13*)

TUESDAY: Choices: Good and Bad (*Heb. 11:8–10*)

WEDNESDAY: Choice and the Next Generation (*Deut. 30:10–19*)

THURSDAY: Choice and Chance (*Ps. 87:5, 6*)

Memory Text—*Daniel 1:8*

Sabbath Gem: God gave us the power of choice. With those choices, however, come consequences.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired

The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.