

## The Fruit of the Spirit

*"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law"—Gal. 5:22*

JOY and Peace follow Love here, even as they always do. Without Love, joy is fleeting and peace precarious. Any "joy" that is not the result of true spiritual Love is at best a vain and transitory pleasure. Temporary joy, the effect of some present occurrence or circumstance of this present life is of no value, for soon it is over and its impression, if any, is negative upon our permanent peace of mind. It leaves a void, a longing, an empty, sad retrospect.

Conversely, the Joy that is a state of mind resulting from true divine Love fully pursued, and the knowledge of effectual service lovingly performed, is ever fruitful, for it can be enjoyed whenever a few quiet moments afford opportunity for meditation. Time does not dim it but rather enhances it, because it is related to glorious futurity and eternity.

And Peace, too, that is not the fruit of Love, is valueless and vain. The Peace we are taught to seek, disregarding and even avoiding any other, is that which follows the unvarying service of God—the peaceful and comforting assurance that there is, if we are faithful—

“Laid up for us a crown of life.”

Present peace we are not to hope for. It is insidiously disarming, and weakens our hope and prayer for Christ's early return. There is an ever-present danger in snug security, and present satisfaction and gratification, for it robs the glorious promised Peace of that attraction which should spur us on along the weary path to the goal of eventual perfection.

Future Peace must be our goal, as must also be future Joy. For the Joy that was set before him, Christ endured all things, and unless we in our lesser degree do the same, we shall be cast aside and forgotten in that day when "peace on earth" is at last an accomplished fact.

There is but one way to assure for ourselves that strengthening peace of mind which elevates our vision above this life's temporary ills—the Peace that Paul must have known when he said—

"I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith.

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

*What a wonderful way to end this life! All his sufferings and sacrifices and losses and disappointments were now seen in their true and beautiful light as jewels in this crown. This crown of life, we are told by James, the Lord has promised to them that love him.*

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THE next spiritual fruit is Longsuffering and this, too, we see is but a temporary product of love, for Paul tells us that:

"Love suffereth long and is kind."

It is temporary in the sense that the time will at last come when longsuffering will not be needed.

The succeeding two fruits, Gentleness and Goodness, are also dependent upon Love for their performance—

"Love vaunteth not itself; thinketh no evil."

Following these is Faith. In this same chapter we read—

"Faith worketh by Love."

Without Love Faith is dead, as are all virtues in Love's absence. John tells us in his second epistle (v. 6)—

"This is Love, that we walk after His commandments."

That is, Love is working and doing; and James completes the argument with the warning that—

"Faith without works is dead, but by works is Faith made perfect."

Paul closes his beautiful eulogy of Love with this—

"And now abideth Faith, Hope, and Love, these three, but the greatest of these is Love."

This verse is a summary of the whole chapter. The theme is that Love is paramount. On the one hand we read—

"If I have not Love, I am nothing."

And on the other—

"Everyone that loveth is born of God."

Hebrews 11 records the great deeds wrought through Faith, and it was for the Hope of Israel that Paul stood in chains before Agrippa, but he values Love above both Faith and Hope.

Faith requires a promise, some anticipated good, some future benefit. When this is fulfilled, Faith ends in sight and so is lost.

Hope, too, infers future realization—a goal which, when reached, converts Hope into accomplishment so Hope ceases.

*But Love gives all and asks nothing. Love seeks not her own, endures all things, and faileth never. As long as life is present, it cannot perish. It is the foundation and keystone of the Scriptures.*

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THE writings of John are an unequalled epitome of divine expression on this subject. He tells us that God is Love, that He dwells in Love, and that Love is of God.

All the inspired writings testify to this. Even as God in all His works was motivated by Love, so do we find it the keynote of His messages to man.

It is, perhaps, difficult to realize and appreciate, to the extent which we should, the great Love that God has demonstrated. We may not easily regard our all-powerful Author from this point of view. We see Him as great Jehovah—omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent—creating and sustaining all.

But let us dwell on the marvellous extent of the affection He bears His children. Through His Love, in the beginning, He made man in His own glorious likeness, placed him in pleasant and beautiful surroundings, gave him dominion over the whole earth and provided him with all he could reasonably

desire, and more than he proved himself worthy of, for it was not long before he manifested both disobedience and ingratitude.

He fell, but in administering the forewarned punishment, God's Love was again evidenced by tempering the sentence of death with a ray of hope and the assurance of the ultimate extinction of sin.

But man fell again, and so the history follows. God, with Love and patience inconceivable, repeatedly returned to him as repentance was manifested, and led him anew to the way which, if faithfully pursued, would bring him life.

This Divine affection led Noah into the Ark, and called forth Abraham to become a great nation. It guided this same nation, rarely appreciative or obedient, into the promised land, and watched over them there. They were assured of His protection and Love, but it did not inspire them to obedience.

"Because God loved you,"

—Moses was told to tell them—

"He hath brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondmen."

But even before they had reached the land, and while miraculously sustained by food from above, they murmured against their divine Deliverer.

We cannot but marvel at the infinite patience that the Lord revealed—humouring them, comforting them, and ever protecting them, when in a moment, He could have destroyed them all, but did not for the Love He bore their fathers.

*And, continuing on, His Love completely pervades their subsequent history throughout the Old Testament, in which, too, is apparent a continuous and beautiful foreshadowing of the greatest manifestation of that all-embracing Love, the fulfilment of which is reserved for the New—*

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

This is from the writings of the beloved John who also says:

"Herein is love, that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins"

(1 John 4:10).

Although it assumes such magnificent proportions, it is far from a blind, misdirected indulgence as is often the unfortunate case with earthy parents. It is Love administered with an incomprehensible intelligence, chastening when necessary, rebuking when necessary, but always for our ultimate benefit.

It is ever-vigilant, guarding and guiding, but it does not rob the recipient of character. It is true that God is our Refuge and our Strength, but we must remember that—

"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

And it is—

"By much tribulation that we must enter the Kingdom."

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NO less remarkable is the Love that controlled every act of our great High Priest, His perfect Son, who—at the end of a life spent in untiring and unselfish service for his brethren—submitted to crucifixion that these brethren whom he loved might have life and have it more abundantly. Here, too, we find the words of John the deepest and most expressive—

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

"Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us."

Whenever we consider the extremes to which the faithful followers of Christ were led by their love for him and the Father, we are invariably pursued by uneasiness and misgivings as we compare our meagre services with theirs. Christ's requirements of his followers are clearly given in Luke 14:26:

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

"And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

This they gladly and unhesitatingly did, and we find them saying in childlike faith, as he showed them the Father's purpose—

"Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee."

Are we not disquieted by the unfavourable comparison of our sacrifices with theirs? They made God's service the only interest in their lives. They gave up **everything** for it. For it they were reviled, despised, persecuted, scourged, imprisoned, stoned and often put to death.

**What do we do to compare with this, with our many pleasures, peaceful lives, and unmolested worship?**

Consider especially the sufferings of Paul. We are all familiar with them as they are enumerated in 2 Cor. 11:23-27—

*"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.*

*"Of the Jews 5 times received I 40 stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and day I have been in the deep.*

*"In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren,*

*"In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."*

For the Truth's sake, and in the service of God, have any of us ever even once had an experience like this? But Paul's weary existence was FULL of such. And he says—

"I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ"

(Phil. 3:8).

Looking back 20 centuries to the far distant scenes of Biblical history, is it not much too easy to regard the things said, done, and endured in an illusionary and unreal light? We read of them

persecuted and pursued from city to city, but always preaching, without fully realizing the magnitude of their distress.

But if we picture them as men whose love of life and pleasure was just as strong as is ours; and to whom hardships, sacrifices, losses, pain, and weariness were just as difficult to bear as they are for us; men who enjoyed reviling, scorn and contempt to no greater degree than do we; and to whom the world was just as hard and real as it is to us—then the full measure of their love is clear.

It may be argued that these early brethren received greater strength, greater signs, greater guidance and greater revelation than we—but were they really so much more highly favoured?

Which is more comforting—to see Christ disappear in the clouds, and look forward to a persecuted existence of painful waiting, or to have irrefutable assurance that his return is imminent, and our redemption draweth nigh?

Which is more encouraging—to see the Jews scattered and dispersed in God's wrath, or to see them regathered by His guiding love?

Which is more strengthening—to have God's purpose foretold or to see it fulfilled and almost completely consummated?

True, theirs was the comfort of the presence and companionship of Christ, but if our faith is as it should be, his spiritual presence should be as comforting to us; and remember, too, they carried on after he had left them, and were faithful unto death. John confidently wrote—

"There is no fear in love, for perfect love casteth out fear."

Ample proof this is, to be sure, of the vital importance that the disciples attached to the possession of this quality, but it is not necessary to resort to inference to draw such conclusions, for divine command is stronger on no other subject.

*That we must evidence and exercise Love constantly and continuously, is the theme of countless exhortations in the New Testament.*

Consider the reply of Christ, when asked which was the greatest commandment. He told his interrogator, a querulous Pharisee, to love the Lord with all his heart, soul and mind, and his neighbor as himself, for on those two commandments the whole Law rested.

"Love," said Paul, is the one word that fulfils all the law.

Quotations such as these are innumerable and how could it be otherwise when love was the very heart and foundation of the Gospel they preached? Do we wonder why John was particularly cited as the disciple whom Jesus loved? We need not if we consider his character.

No other gospel than his evinces such a deep and loving understanding of the Master, no other epistles are so replete with exhortation and commendation of love, and no other disciple was more wholly animated by the fervour of his affection for the Lord.

What better example could be cited of the fulfilment of Christ's assurance that—

"He that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him."

It was to John, we remember, that Christ made his last, most wonderful manifestation—the visions of the Revelation.

Thus is love established as the primary and paramount virtue, the most nourishing and upbuilding of the fruit of the Spirit.

Though none would doubt, in the face of the foregoing evidence, love's essentiality, there may be diversity as to its interpretation. In fact, the general conception is far from that love idealized by the Scriptures.

There are many that think that love is completely fulfilled if a benevolent and kindly but passive attitude is maintained before all, and who consider their duty to God amply discharged if they worship Him and ascribe to Him all wisdom and power.

True, these are inseparable from love, but this is not what love fundamentally means.

*Love is not merely worship, adoration and awe. It is not that passive quality it is all too often represented as. It involves and necessitates unquestioning obedience, unselfish sacrifice, unswerving devotion and untiring service—*

"This is love, that we walk after His commandments."

The love God requires is pre-eminently **service**—

"By love SERVE one another."

—we read, and this is the true meaning of—

"Love thy neighbor as thyself."

John pleads (1 John 3:18)—

"Let us not love in word, but in deed and truth."

If God merely looked upon us with tender and affectionate regard, and took no further care for us, our plight would indeed be a sorry one. But God, to whom the nations are as a drop in the bucket, has highly favoured and shown us the way of life, and watches over our welfare every moment.

When we think of the millions who live and die in ignorance of these things, we realize how greatly blessed we are. Ours is a very responsible position, for each of us has been chosen from thousands to receive this revelation from God.

And it is a saddening and sobering thought that the handful who are called are "many" when compared to the few who are finally chosen. But John assures us that we may have boldness in the day of judgment if our love is made perfect.

If Christ had been content to preach charity and goodwill, and had not the love which led him to lay down his life for his brethren, our hope would at best be meagre and dim. But Christ's interpretation of love conformed perfectly with God's, —lifetime, selfless service.

It may appear absurd to say that all that is required to be recipients of God's promised glory is love, but not when it is realized what that love entails. It must be of the same purity and exalted holiness as that which the Father Himself has evidenced.

*Such Love is not a natural human attribute. It plays no part in the mind of the flesh. It must be the result of a victory of the spiritual over the carnal.*

Love bestowed upon one who returns it brings no credit or reward to the donor, for, Christ tells us, even sinners do that. But, he continues, "Love your enemies," by which he means—

"Do good to them that hate you."

—not just think or wish good. This to all men, and much more so to the Brotherhood.

As incidents arise to test our character and fitness as vessels for God's glory, the human and natural impulse which immediately presents itself knows nothing of love, but would seek instant vindication and redress.

This must be overcome, even as must be the invariable tendency to interpret doubtful actions in a bad light, for—even assuming that this interpretation be the correct one (as it rarely is)—still our course is clear, and love practised at such a time affords the only reliable proof that our battle with the flesh is a winning one—

"Love covereth a multitude of sins."

The whole scriptural theme is summarized in Paul's words—

"By love serve one another."

—continuously and without respect of persons or thought of thanks or appreciation, remembering that if we love one another, GOD DWELLETH IN US: and that service to the least of these is service to the Lord.

It will not always bring joy as the world conceives joy; it will not always be productive of peace as it is now known, but if this course is truly and faithfully pursued, the quiet, comforting joy of a loving and malice-free heart, and the tranquil, confident peace of a conscience pure before God, will be ours in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting.

Finally, let us remember Paul's admonition to be rooted and grounded in love, that Christ's parting words to his faithful followers may be fulfilled in us—

*"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* —G.V.G.

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