

Abundant Life Lesson 7 - Christian Character

Introduction

What are the distinguishing marks of a Christian? If you are saved, then does your outward manner even matter? Jesus said that it did and that the outward manifestation of a person's life gives an unmistakable representation of their inner condition.

Matthew 7:16-20 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

A tree that is corrupt or sickly on the inside, will bring forth sickly fruit, but a healthy tree produces good fruit. In context, Jesus is not talking about the difference between saints and sinners, but how you can tell which "believers" are really allowing God to do a work in their life. He said "you will recognize them by their fruits." Simply having faith toward God, repenting of your sins, being baptized in Jesus' name, and receiving the Holy Ghost is not enough if you do not continue to allow God to change your life. Those steps, which form the initial plan of salvation, take care of the past sin problem, and cause us to be "born again." But after our new birth, we must grow and mature in the kingdom of God. We can easily tell where we are in our spiritual growth process by looking at our "fruit," or our words and deeds.

The Works of the Flesh

Paul used the good fruit/bad fruit analogy in the book of Galatians to reveal specific things that we should avoid and that we should produce. The bad "fruit" are called the "works of the flesh."

Gal 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God

Notice that Paul is writing to the church people in Galatia, and he clearly states that "they which do such things shall NOT inherit the kingdom of God." The Galatian Christians had been "born again" but they still had to cease from bearing "bad fruit." Let's take a brief look at what each of the words mean in the original Greek:

1. Sexual Immorality - any sexual intercourse not between a man and his wife.
2. Impurity - impure motives.
3. Sensuality - open and shameless lust.
4. Idolatry - worshiping or serving anything other than the true God.
5. Sorcery - sorceries, dabbling in the occult, and incantations.
6. Enmity - hostility; placing yourself at odds with other people to purposely cause a

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division.

7. Strife - constant verbal arguing and debating.
8. Jealousy - misplaced zeal; being passionate for the wrong things.
9. Fits of Anger - constant anger; giving in to your temper.
10. Rivalries - self-promoting; putting others down in an attempt to elevate self.
11. Dissensions - division; disunity with the church.
12. Divisions - sticking by your opinion even when it is errant or hurtful to others.
13. Envy – ill will; jealousy mixed with spite.
14. Drunkenness - intoxication; partaking of any substance which causes it.
15. Orgies - literally a late night party of drinking; refers to a "party" lifestyle.

For another list of such "bad fruit" see Romans 1:28-32.

The Fruit of the Spirit

Paul also went on to identify the "good fruit" for the Galatian church. Notice "fruit" is singular and that it is actually one "fruit" with nine parts. We cannot pick and choose which one we prefer, but we must have ALL of the things listed here:

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Let's again look at what each of the words mean in the original Greek:

1. Love – Affection or benevolence. There are three basic words for "love" in the Greek: *agape*, *phileo* (brotherly love; tender affection), and *eros* (sexual love). The scriptures always use "agape" to denote the love shown to us by God becoming flesh and dying for us and that same word is used here.
2. Joy - cheerfulness; calm delight. An outward "fruit" of a true Christian should be a constant calm and happiness even throughout bad days. Because we know that this life is but temporary and that we are living our lives to be ready for eternity, then we can calmly face any calamity!
3. Peace - security and harmony between individuals. Our relationships with others should be more "peaceful" as we begin to obey more of God's Word.
4. Patience - not easily discouraged. We must not only learn to be more patient with others, but also to learn to wait for God's perfect timing.
5. Kindness - usefulness in character. In other words, we must have a willing attitude to work and help and further the kingdom of God.
6. Goodness - manifesting an overall pure and good spirit. When people have been around us, they should not leave feeling "dirty" or "bothered" because of what they have

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seen or heard. They should be able to detect a quiet sincerity and the innocence of the Holy Ghost within our lives.

7. Faithfulness – persuasion; moral conviction. We should hold on to the principles and doctrines of the Word of God and refuse to waver from them. This also refers to being faithful by being reliable, keeping promises, thorough, on time, etc...

8. Gentleness - humility; gentleness of spirit and mildness of response. In other words, we should not allow ourselves to be easily provoked or to instantly react to adverse situations. This is the opposite of a "flare of anger" and revenge.

9. Self-control - not allowing sinful desires to master you. In other words, we must control our attitudes and appetites and reign them into submission to the Word of God no matter what our "flesh" feels like.

Things to Remember About Our Spiritual Fruit

1. God requires that we bring forth good fruit. He is very patient and will take great pains to see that we are productive after we are "born again." However, if we do not bear fruit after His continual efforts to help us, we will be "cut down."

Luke 13:6-9 And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ 8 And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9 Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

In this parable, the owner of the vineyard represents God, the "vinedresser" represents your pastor, and the vine represents you. After a period of time, God expects for us to bear good fruit. If we do not bear "good fruit" after being "planted" in the vineyard of God, then the inside must be corrupt and will be removed from the vineyard. Your outward works do not save you at first, but over a period of time they do reveal the inward condition of your heart.

Matt 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire

2. When you begin to bear "good fruit," God will "prune" us so that we can bear even more fruit.

John 15:2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

If a fruit tree is pruned, and excess branches are removed, then the harvest next year will be more bountiful! Also, the colder the winter, the sweeter the fruit in the springtime.

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Perhaps you feel as if God is putting you through some trials and is working in your life again trying to remove any hindrances and the "excess" in your life. Do not get discouraged, because God is simply preparing you for an even greater harvest of good things! Which brings us to our next point:

3. We can only bear good fruit by "abiding" in God.

John 15:4-5 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

The word "abide" here means "to stay; to endure; to not depart." No matter how cold a trial that we may go through, or how tough life may seem to become, we MUST "abide" with Jesus and trust Him. By doing so we cannot help but be fruitful.

Spiritual Fertilizers

Peter wrote about certain things that we can add to the "soil" of our heart that are guaranteed to produce good fruit.

2 Pet 1:5-8 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You "shall neither be barren nor unfruitful" if you add these seven things to your faith:

1. Virtue – Valor/courage; excellence.
2. Knowledge - understanding of the Word and Ways of God.
3. Self-Control
4. Steadfastness - cheerful or hopeful endurance; constancy.
5. Godliness – piety (reverence toward the things of God).
6. Brotherly affection - love for "brothers and sisters" in the Lord.
7. Love – Greek word - agape; affection or benevolence.

Fruit Inspection Guidelines

Many evil deeds are black and white. It is not hard to learn and identify robbery, drunkenness, lying, or murder as outward actions that should not be found in a Christian. But what about when you have to make a decision to act in a situation where right or wrong is not clearly spelled out within the Word of God? Some things may appear harmless on the surface and yet bring spiritual destruction. Some things may appear questionable and yet really are wholesome. Although situations may vary, God has given

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us some definite guidelines to judge whether or not something is wholesome enough to be partaken of by a Christian. Think of these as "fruit inspection guidelines." When you are confronted with a choice or thing that you are not sure whether it is good or evil, ask yourself these questions about it:

1. Is it something that causes me to "be brought under the power" of something other than God or His Word?

1 Cor 6:12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything

2. Is it glorifying to God?

1 Cor 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

3. Is it profitable and upbuilding to me?

1 Cor 10:23 "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.

Just because you have the opportunity to do something does not mean that it is the right choice.

4. Is it a stumblingblock?

1 Cor 8:9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

5. Is it a weight?

Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

6. Is it what Jesus would do?

1 Jn 2:6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked

If we are truly Christian (Christ like) then we ought to try to be like Him in every way!