

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

New Testament Lesson #163

In the early years of the church, a Christian named Paul traveled in the countries of the Mediterranean area, preaching about Jesus, and encouraging people to become followers of Jesus. In many places, Paul started Christian churches.

After he left those areas, Paul wrote letters to the people of the churches. Some of these letters now appear in the New Testament as books of the Bible. The book of Galatians is a letter Paul sent to the churches of the Roman province of Galatia.

Some time after Paul had been in Galatia, other people came teaching an incorrect version of Christianity, so Paul wrote to the members of the churches to correct this mistaken teaching. The incorrect teachings said that Christians had to live by certain Jewish laws. Paul said that Christians were free from those laws but should live by the Spirit of God.

People need the Spirit of God to help them live as God wants them to. When people don't live by God's Spirit, the desire to do wrong things can lead to sinful behavior such as being jealous, hating others, refusing to cooperate and other things like this. Paul said that people who live like that will not be received into God's kingdom.

But Christians are people who have "crucified" (put to death) these natural desires. When people live by the Spirit of God, they behave toward one another with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These things are called the "fruit of the Spirit." When people live this way, they are keeping "in step with the Spirit."

POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- The phrase "fruit of the Spirit" only appears in the Bible in this passage of Galatians. But the idea of "being fruitful" is very common in the Bible. As an example, in John chapter 15, Jesus spoke of himself as the vine and that those who followed him are the branches. As branches of Christ, we bring glory to God by "bearing much fruit." He said we should love one another as he loved us. Love is one of the things that Paul said make up the "fruit of the Spirit."
- Among the very first recorded words God spoke to Adam and Eve was His blessing to "be fruitful" (Genesis 1:28). This same blessing was spoken to Noah and his sons after the flood when they and their wives left the ark (Genesis 9:1). Is it possible that this same blessing applies to Jesus Christ and his bride (the body of believers) as it relates to the fruit of the Spirit?
- One of the curses instituted by God after Adam and Eve sinned is that the earth would produce thorns and thistles. After this, Adam (mankind) would have to work hard to produce fruit to eat. This is similar to our nature. Through sin, we produce "thorns and thistles." It is only by working hard to apply Jesus' teachings in our lives that we are able to weed out sin and produce the fruit of the Spirit.

- In his letter to the Galatians, Paul makes many references to the Law of Moses. While the Law of Moses is often portrayed in a negative light, its underlying message is the same message Jesus taught. As Paul said in Galatians 5:14, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" What we often focus on regarding the law is what we're not allowed to do, such as "do not steal." But the focus of Jesus' teachings is on what we should do, such as give to those who are in need. We are able to be fruitful when we "do" rather than when we "don't."

The Fruit of the Spirit

- I. Paul traveled in the countries of the Mediterranean area, preaching about Jesus.
 - A. He encouraged people to become followers of Jesus.
 - B. He started Christian churches.
- II. Later, Paul wrote letters to the churches, which now appear in the New Testament. Galatians is a letter Paul sent to the churches of the Roman province of Galatia.
- III. Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia.
 - A. Other people had taught an incorrect version of Christianity, saying Christians had to live by certain Jewish laws.
 - B. Paul said Christians were free from those laws but should live by the Spirit of God.
- IV. Without the Spirit of God, people give in to the desire to do wrong things, such as being jealous, hating others, refusing to cooperate with others and doing many other sinful behaviors.
 - A. People who live like that will not be received into God's kingdom.
- V. But Christians are people who have put aside these bad things.
 - A. When people live by the Spirit of God, they behave toward one another with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
 - B. These things are called "fruit of the Spirit."
 - C. When people live this way, they are keeping "in step with the Spirit."

ANSWER KEY:

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." John 15:8 (NIV)

