

From Mediocrity to Magnificence: A Meditation on the Fruits of the Holy Spirit
Charles Pope • September 15, 2010

What do you expect from your relationship to Jesus Christ? I have come to discover that many do not expect all that much. In effect they hope that faith can kind of help them “muddle through” life and offer them a few consolations that, perhaps things will be better someday, and in heaven. Others see the moral life described in the scriptures more as a duty than a description of the person being transformed by Jesus Christ. And because they see it as a list of duties, rather than the result of grace, they tend to resent it, consider it unrealistic, or just feel overwhelmed by it. Very few expect to be able to radically live this moral life and experience it happen in their life.

But I ask you, is this the best that the death of the Son of God can do for us? Did Jesus die on the cross so I could suffer boredom, have a tepid and distracted prayer life, and be morally mediocre? Did Jesus die to offer me a life filled with resentments, disappointments, or moral weakness? Where is the joy, where is the victory over sin, where is the vigor of hope and the intensity of love? Where is the progress, the clarity, and the experience of God changing my life?

Scripture describes the Christian life as consisting in joy, victory, confidence, hope, love, self-mastery and so forth. This is the normal Christian life. Consider just a few passages in this regard and understand that passages like these are describing what is to be the normal Christian life. They are not giving us things to do but describing what happens to the Christian who is being transformed by Jesus Christ:

1. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor 5:17)*
2. *I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you,*

being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.(Eph 3:14-21)

3. *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.....count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master...But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6:6-7,12-18).*
4. *Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2)*
5. *But you know that Jesus appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning....No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:5-6; 9)*

Now do not dismiss these texts or diminish their radical meaning. They are describing the normal Christian life. That is, they are describing what a Christian ought routinely to expect from their relationship with Jesus Christ. Certain words and phrases jump out: New creation, old is gone, his glorious riches, strength, power, grasp, wide, long, high, deep, surpassing,

filled, fullness, immeasurably more, sin done away with, no longer slaves, brought from death to life, righteousness, obey, set free, wholehearted, cannot go on sinning, born of God. Look at these words and phrases! They are not tepid. They are strong and vigorous descriptions of what happens to person justified and being transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ. THIS is the Christian life.

One other way the Church and the Scriptures have traditionally described the Life of the Christian is through the setting forth of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. They are found in Galatians 5:22-23: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

But know this, they are not for you to achieve, they are for you to receive. They are fruits of the SPIRIT, not fruits of you. The Christian moral life is a gift to the believer, not an imposition *on* the believer. These fruits describe what begins to happen to the Christian who is being transformed by the indwelling Holy Spirit and the grace of Jesus Christ. These describe the normal, the “to be expected” Christian life.

Don't accept mediocrity. Expect great things in Christ Jesus. Remember this is the Blood of Jesus Christ we are talking about here and there is power, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb.

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit: (The analysis of the Greek is from William Barclay in his Daily Study Bible)

1. Love – ἀγάπη (agape)– to love with a God-like love, unconditionally, and vigorously, not counting the cost, not being based on mere reciprocity. It is wanting only what is good for the other. This sort of love is distinct from other forms of love in Greek such as *eros* (passionate love), *philia* (warm love most common in the family or among close friends, brotherly love), and *storge* (the love of affection usually for family members). *Agape* love is

far above these and is, of necessity, a work of God so as to come to its fullest expression. Hence it is rightly called a fruit of the Holy Spirit

2. Joy – χαρά (Chara) – The joy referred to here is more than a passing worldly joy. It is deeper than an emotional experience. It is rooted in God and comes from him. Since it does not have the world for its origin, but rather comes from God, it is more serene and stable than worldly joy which is merely emotional and lasts only for a time. For example, note the following uses elsewhere in Scripture and see how it is always connected, not to the world, but to the faith and to God:

- a. Ps 30:11 – *You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy,*
- b. Romans 14:17 – *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*
- c. Romans 15:13 – *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*
- d. Phil 1:25 – *Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith.*

3. Peace – εἰρήνη (eirene) – This is normally used in the Greek Bible to translate the Hebrew word *shalom*. This sort of peace is more than an absence of conflict. Rather, it is the presence in the human person and their relationships of everything that should be there. It is a kind of equilibrium that comes from trusting in God and the experience that everything is alright, that everything is in the hands of God. On account of this experience the human person does not obsessively seek to control people and things and is more content to allow things to unfold, rather than to control and manipulate the outcomes of life. In this sense, they become more peaceful toward others.

4. Patience – μακροθυμία (makrothumia) – Generally, the Greek world applied this word to a man who could avenge himself but did not. This word

is often used in the Greek Scriptures in reference to God and his attitude to us. In the human person this fruit of the Spirit causes us to be more willing to suffer the difficulties of life and of other people. We are less needful to avenge wrongs and slights and are more able to endure the imperfections of people and this world. By this fruit we can forebear the crosses, miseries and difficulties of life in this world.

5. Kindness – χρηστότης (Chrestotos)– In Greek, old wine was called “chrestos” which meant that it was mellow or smooth. Christ used this word in referring to his yoke that which was easy (Matt 11:30). That is to say it did not chafe, it was well fitting and accommodated to the wearer. So kindness here refers to an attitude that goes beyond mere justice or what is required to a something wider and more accommodating.

6. Goodness – ἀγαθωσύνη (agathosune) – This word is more difficult to define, in that it rarely occurs in secular Greek. It’s biblical use seems generally to mean doing what is right and best for others in every circumstance. This might at times include rebuking or disciplining. At other times it would include encouraging or reassuring. The key point in the word seems to be what is good or best for the person. Here are some other instances where the word is used in the New Testament and one will notice that it places goodness in the context of instruction, truth and faith. Hence, goodness here can have different applications than just being a “nice guy.”

a. Rom 15:14 – *I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.*

b. Eph 5:9 – *For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.*

c. 2 Thess 1:11 – *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power.*

7. Fidelity – πίστις (pistis) This is the common Greek word for being trustworthy, being faithful and reliable. In the Bible the word is more commonly used in a nominative form simply to mean “faith,” that is, the act of believing in God. By extension it can mean the quality of being faithful. The connection between the two concepts can include the fact that if one believes in God they will tend to be more trustworthy and reliable since their faith imbues them with a sense that God is watching and they are accountable. Further, they are trustworthy because true faith makes them more inclined to respect others and the commitments they make to them. As fruit of the Spirit fidelity comes as a result of the Spirit’s promptings that we live up to our commitments.

8. Gentleness – πραΰτης (praotes) – There are different ways that this word is used in the New Testament. Basically, it means to be submissive to God and to be humble enough to be taught by God. Toward others it means to be considerate. Another common way of translating this word in English is “meekness.” Aristotle defined meekness (πραΰτης) as the mean between being too angry and not being angry enough. There is a place and a need for anger. Not all anger is sinful. It is right to be angry over injustice, for example. The meek person has authority over their anger. They are able to summon its energy but control its extremes. The Greek word here was also used to describe an animal that had been tamed. Hence meekness refers to us having tamed our anger.

9. Self-control – ἐγκράτεια (egkrateia) – This fruit is sometimes called “continence.” This fruit or virtue was understood in Greek of one who had mastered their love and desire of pleasure. There is a place in life for pleasures and desires. Without them we would perish. Since the fall of man however, our desires are often inordinate and excessive. There is need for the virtue of self-mastery that moderates and regulates them.