

## **FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**

### **“Gentleness and Self Control”**

**Years ago we got to know the elderly Chinese couple who lived across the street from us in Palo Alto. One summer they visited China, having come to the U. S. almost 50 years earlier without ever returning to their homeland. When they got back from their trip we asked them about it. They told of their experience trying to get on a bus in Beijing. They had the correct bus stop, they waited patiently, but when the bus arrived they were quickly pushed aside by the crowd that jostled its way onto the bus. After three such experiences in the space of an hour our friends were exasperated. The bus came again, but this time the bus driver shouted at them over the crowd shoving its way to the door. He yelled: “Are you Americans?” They shouted back, “Yes!” He instructed them to walk back ½ block and wait. The next time the bus came he stopped for our two friends, then drove the half block to the crowded bus stop. Our neighbors laughed when they told this story, commenting on how different it is in America.**

**We’re pretty fortunate to live in a place where people are mostly polite and courteous. Yet we have seen our share of riots, mayhem in the streets, evil acts and tragedies. Just recently we heard of another act of evil, this time in Texas. We live in a world of broken-fallen from grace-alienated from God-kind of people. They bear selfish and bitter fruit in their lives tainting all around them.**

**The world is full of pushing and shoving people. The world is full of people afraid that giving a little will mean losing a lot. No doubt there are times when you or I have been less than Christ-like in our relations; maybe our pushing and shoving is more subtle. What makes this all the more disconcerting is that many people are enmeshed in lives that are out of control – out of control in the use of their bodies, their minds, their time, and/or their finances. Into this world steps the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness and Self-control. Let’s recall that after preaching and teaching for 3 years Jesus, the gentle spiritual giant, entered Jerusalem in triumph, positioned to lead a nation, then almost immediately He was accused of blasphemy before the Jewish authorities and sedition before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. He was flogged then crucified. Through it all he remained calm and in control. Living in the Spirit, Jesus was able to exhibit gentleness and self-control in the most dire circumstances. The Holy Spirit empowers us to do likewise.**

### **Gentleness**

**Do not confuse gentleness with weakness. A man may be gentle without losing his strength. Indeed strength of character is so often shown in a gentle**

approach to others and various situations. This does not mean we become doormats for the evils around us. Jesus' example is before us: *"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father"* John 10:17-18.

The Greek word found in the Bible for gentleness is *πραΰτης* which means a surrender to God's will and way in your life. The O.T. prophets knew this: *"As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right,"* Jer. 26:14. It means to stop fighting against God, although it does not mean weakness. There is power and strength found in submitting to God's will. I have read somewhere that Gen. Dwight Eisenhower had a plaque on his desk with the Latin words: *"Suaviter in Modo, Fortiter in Re,"* meaning, "mild in manner, powerful in action." *πραυτεες* – gentleness is strength of character revealed in mildness of manner and responsibility with power. *πραΰτης* includes these three characteristics.

**1. Obedience.** The foundation of godly gentleness is found in obedience – the word we love to hate. After His resurrection Jesus gave this command to Peter (John 21:15-19): *"feed my sheep."* Later on we see, in Acts 2:14-36, Peter's obedience to Christ gave him the courage to preach Christ's resurrection and power *"... God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified."* *πραΰτης* is riding the wind of God's will and setting off toward a distant place of closeness with God. Do you resist God's directions and will in your living?

**2. Humility.** The Apostle Paul wrote to his protégé Titus telling him (Titus 3:1-2): *"Remind the people ... to show true humility toward all men."* That kind of consistent humility only comes when we humble ourselves before God. This entails a correct estimation of ourselves, which results from a correct estimation of our God. That's why continual Bible study is so helpful.

Humility does not mean self-hatred or abasement. Neither does it mean false humility – which is another form of pride. Matt. 2:1-12 shows an example of genuine humility: visiting the stable of Jesus' birth the Magi (though men of means themselves) bowed down and worshipped Christ.

**3. Teachable Spirit.** In Acts chapter 18 we read of Paul's trip to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. They met Apollos who was a good teacher of Jesus, yet he lacked some information. He was willing to learn from Paul and so Apollos became a great teacher. Remember: we cannot teach what we do not know and we cannot teach others to obey what we do not obey. A good teacher is one who is teachable.

One sign of teachability is obeying what you've learned. James 1:22 *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."* Are you acting on what you learn from the Bible, from sermons, from prayer? Even

difficult circumstances can be an invitation to study God's word. If we miss this we will most likely take that class again! Proverbs reminds us: *"Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life"* Proverbs 4:13. If you look at the responsibilities God has given you at home, at work, at church you'll discover someone is learning from you each day. Being teachable means that we can teach what is right. *"... the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."* 2 Timothy 2:24-26. The ultimate teacher is one who has been filled with the power of the H.S. and knows how to use it. The Sword of the Spirit is intended to injure Satan, not the Body of Christ.

## **Self-Control**

Anyone who has self-control is a mighty warrior. Anyone who lacks self-control is an accident waiting to happen or a slave in chains. When we live out of pride, selfish-ambition, and a grasp for power over others, there is never a convenient time to confront the issue of self-control. But without self-control self-defeat is in store.

Only through the self-control developed by the H. S. can we ever fulfill Jesus' promise: "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" John 8:32. The Greek for self-control is ἐγκράτεια, which means continence, temperance, restraining passions and appetites. The opposite of this would be excess, self-indulgence, unrestrained passion. Wouldn't it be great if salvation and self-control were simultaneous? But it's not. Believers continue to struggle with self-control, but thanks be to God we have help.

Paul says, *"... I will not be mastered by anything"* 1 Cor. 6:12. (Mastered – exousiaso meaning to be ruled by, or under the authority of, or in bondage to.) The key to self-control is refusal to allow our enemies (the flesh, the world, Satan) to rule over us or hold us captive. Christ, through his atonement on the cross, has given us the victory over all these things, and only we can re-extend authority to one of these enemies; they can rule us only when they are invited. Any out of control area of our lives, no matter how big or how small, is an invitation to the enemy to take advantage of us. Where in your life could you use more self-control?

**1. Money and Possessions.** We live in a culture that seems to have one major goal – to have more. We have more than enough to live complicated lives, but not enough to be contented. Money, position, possessions – is it all a chasing after wind?

**When we're in the midst of scarcity our natural inclination is to become apprehensive that we won't have enough... and diminishes our desire to share. Worse still, a scarcity mentality keeps us from sharing the abundance God has already given us. When we're preoccupied with scarcity we tend to overlook the resources all around us. You know all those mini-storage units around town – they're in every town. I've read that the self-storage business in the U.S. is a 23 billion dollar industry – that's more than the entertainment industry! Many people use storage units when they're moving. But do some of us have too much stuff? When we are influenced, even mildly by a scarcity mentality we lock away even what we have. *“One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed”* Proverbs 11:24-25.**

**One of the greatest paradoxes and mysteries of the human experience is this: If you really want to find your life, you give it away (it applies to our possessions as well). Ultimately, it is God who gives wealth and possessions. Only God can enable us to enjoy them. May God keep us in that place where we never have so much riches that we forget our dependence on Him, nor such poverty that we are tempted to steal and dishonor His name.**

**2. The Mind.** What we feed our minds has a very strong impact on what happens to us in life, and what sort of person we become. You know the old saying, “Garbage in, garbage out.” Think about all the input you have from TV, internet, video games, books, or even just unhealthy conversations (i.e. gossip). Philippians 4:8 says, *“... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”* With our minds: good things in, good things out.

**3. The Mouth.** Two things regarding our mouth need self-control: the ability to taste, and the ability to talk; what we put in our mouths and what we send out of our mouths.

**a. Controlling what enters the mouth.** It is not God's will for us to be mastered by anything other than Him. He wants us to be free from the obsession of eating too much and from the obsession of not eating enough.

**b. Controlling what exits the mouth.** This is the nitty-gritty of self-control: what we say with our mouths. Here's God's intention for our tongues: *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”* Ephesians 4:29.

**Living in the Spirit brings it all together. The Holy Spirit is given to believers, who have accepted Jesus forgiveness of sins on the cross and received him as Lord. The Holy Spirit enables us to live with self-control.**

## **Spirit Power**

God has willed for you to live a life of righteousness, to follow a plan and purpose he has designed for you, and He expects to see you in heaven. Being a disciple of Christ is about what we do sure, but even more so it's about who we are. What kind of people are we? Christianity isn't just about our salvation – getting us into Heaven. It is about our sanctification as well – getting Heaven into us.

Our aim here is to foster genuine Christian character among ourselves at church, so that when we go into our neighborhoods we are good examples of our faith in Christ. Remember what it says? *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!...”* 2 Cor. 5:17. Redeemed by Christ we become new creations, His disciples, commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is a spiritual conversion. It is the work of the Holy Spirit transforming our character from the fallen, sinful nature into the redeemed and restored (and spiritual) nature that God desires in us. It's really the only nature that truly brings joy to our lives.

There is really no place in Heaven for those who lack the fruit of the Spirit in their lives – they would only make it a miserable place for everyone else. It is true, as Jesus said, that we must be born again ... born of the Spirit. That is the door to Heaven. In a very real sense we must take Heaven with us to enter.

God's own Son has extended His Word to give you direction, and the Holy Spirit teaches you his Word and empowers you to obey it. *“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness...”* 2 Peter 1:5-7. The Holy Spirit provides a way for human beings to perform divine tasks. Without the Holy Spirit we would live in constant frustration, knowing the right to do, but never having the energy to do it. Ask God Daily for Holy Spirit power.

We can't just leave things as they are. Will we allow the Spirit to produce among us good fruit, or will we be left by the wayside another piece of our culture's rotting fruit – past its season. *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness,”* 2 Peter 1:3-4. Step by step, choosing each day to be with Him, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, can grow in us. It's the fruit of a Spirit-led life, fresh in all seasons.

***“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit,”***  
**Galatians 5:25.**