



The Greater Scriptural Meaning of Fruit

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

Galatians 5:22-23

Every Christian even moderately familiar with Scripture will go to these verses for the definition of "spiritual fruit". But notice the true context, that what is specifically being identified is "*fruit of the Spirit*". These are qualities which prove whether or not someone is a **Spirit**-filled Christian and is first qualified by a contrasting longer list of "*deeds of the flesh*". (Gal. 5:19-21) However, this is not the sole checklist of attributes associated with spiritual fruit. These particular qualities are essential for determining who or what is authentically Spirit-filled, but far from all that Scripture calls "*fruit*" which will be present in a true Christian life or endeavor. In fact, if this is the only basis for our assessment of "spiritual fruit", we are very likely to be wrong or less than complete; we need to employ **all** that God's Word stipulates this concept embodies.

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, **the fruit of lips** that give thanks to His name.*

Hebrews 13:15

For instance, the writer of Hebrews says that there should not merely exist a visible attitude of "*praise to God*", but that it should be a genuine act of worship characterized by someone who engages "*continually [to] offer up a sacrifice*" and "*give thanks to His name*". This cannot possibly be fulfilled by simply singing a few songs once a week at the Sunday morning service but requires a lifestyle that permeates each day of the week. The biblical definition of "*praise*" is acknowledging God above all else (especially self), but in this case also involves an attitude of thanks which assigns God as in control of all things. When present in a believer, we are increasingly transforming more and more into the image of Christ because we have been willing to give up more and more of our fleshly desires in exchange for the spiritual. We are to first and foremost acknowledge Him.

But this puts a fine point on the definition of "spiritual fruit". Even if we find the nicest unsaved person in the world who appears to possess all the qualities of "*the fruit of the Spirit*" in Galatians, they will fail this test. These additional qualifications in Scripture of the many aspects of authentic spiritual fruit restrict its scope to addressing spiritual qualities, at the center of which is one's faith (or not) in Christ. In fact, apart from a life dedicated wholly and exclusively to Christ, bearing spiritual fruit is an impossibility.

*²Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears **fruit**, He prunes it so that it may bear more **fruit**. ³You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear **fruit** of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.*

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*⁵I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much **fruit**, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.*

*⁷If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much **fruit**, and so prove to be My disciples.*

John 15:2-8

Jesus specifically taught that a person's speech betrays their internal spiritual state, especially when it is rooted in the deeds of the flesh.

¹⁸And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) ²⁰And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²²deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. ²³All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

Mark 7:18-23

Even the unsaved recognize this phenomenon and refer to it as a "Freudian slip" to identify obvious revelations betrayed by a person's speech. But when listening carefully to what, exactly, someone is saying, it almost always uncovers their true inner condition even when they are trying to disguise or hide it. Personally, I don't think most Christians realize how often modern social media is revealing the shortcomings of their inner spiritual character, exposing more of their true self than they realize. Many seem to see no inherent contradiction in acting differently in cyberspace than in person.

Jesus will further illustrate the concept of spiritual fruit by expanding the metaphor to the entire tree.

*⁴³For there is no good tree which **produces bad fruit**, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which **produces good fruit**. ⁴⁴For **each tree is known by its own fruit**. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. ⁴⁵The good man out of the **good treasure** of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the **evil treasure** brings forth what is evil; for **his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart**.*

Luke 6:43-45

Whereas the previous teaching focused on "that which proceeds out of the man" — that is, things not readily available to the naked eye until the mouth exposes what is in the heart, here the illustration fixates on what can be easily observed to even the most casual of observers. One does not need to be an agricultural expert to see the difference between an apple tree and a tumbleweed. It is an extension of His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that one's true treasure in this life results in building such wealth exclusively according to God's Word and ways for the next life.

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*¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹for **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

Matthew 6:19-21

In other words, we can tell from an examination of both the internal and external in order to determine the true spiritual state as they both reveal themselves openly; we don't have to be mind readers or receive a special revelation from the Lord. This doesn't mean when we accurately discern the truth about someone or something that we are automatically licensed to act in place of God, but rather that we can properly apply that insight so as to seek how to prayerfully proceed according to God's Word in each case. And, of course, this is an excellent framework for self-examination to assess our own measure of true devotion to Christ.

*⁹For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, **bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.***

Colossians 1:9-10

Here the definition of spiritual fruit is not just expanded to “*every good work*” but in respect to one's “*knowledge of God*”. This combination is presented in the context of those who “*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord*” in order to “*please Him*”. It does not take place by luck, or chance, or genetic predisposition, but our concerted effort.

It is interesting how often Scripture connects internal change— in this case “*knowledge*”, to visible, external change such as one's “*good work*”. Or as James explains it...

But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

James 2:18

This is best understood in the old-time adage, “Christians don't do works to **get** saved but because they **are** saved”. Such external spiritual fruit is visible to even the casual bystander because of one's actions or deeds. And in the process, there is the benefit of becoming internally “*filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*”. Notice that the benefit is not just purely “*knowledge of God*”, but to understand “*His will*”. Perhaps this explains why so many struggle to know God's will because they are failing to “*walk in a manner*” which is consistently “*bearing fruit in every good work*”.

***The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
And he who is wise wins souls.***

Proverbs 11:30

Not only is one's personal salvation an aspect of spiritual fruit, but that of the others we lead to the Lord! Here we see that the end result of someone bearing good spiritual fruit is achieving the biblical standing of someone who is “*righteous*”.

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*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so **that I may obtain some fruit among you also**, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.*

Romans 1:13

And the process does not end with evangelizing but extends to discipling. Our Christian focus and activities are on bringing Christ both into the world at large outside the Church as well as to continue to do so within.

When combining all the attributes of good fruit and a good tree presented to this point, we can see that righteousness is actually attainable. It is visible in one's behavior, in one's speech, in one's actions, and in being a catalyst for bringing the unsaved to faith in Christ and discipling the saved. Yes, the lofty concept of righteousness is attainable when we lay hold of the steps Scripture specifies will accomplish this seemingly impossible feat. In fact, the association of spiritual fruit with biblical righteousness seems to be that aspect most often addressed in the New Testament.

*⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹having been filled with the **fruit of righteousness** which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

Philippians 1:9-11

*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful **fruit of righteousness**.*

Hebrews 12:11

*¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and **good fruits**, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the seed whose **fruit is righteousness** is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

James 3:17-18

There was an egregious teaching propagated in the book of a fallen, formerly good teacher that if someone who believes in Jesus does not bear spiritual fruit, that they will still get into heaven through an invented "second chance" in the Millennial Reign. He even went so far as to state that fruit bearers (my term) are "overachievers" and non-bearing Christians are the "overtaken" (his terms). Jesus stipulated that our very calling requires we follow through by producing spiritual fruit in **this** life, and that it is part of the minimum requirements for His true followers.

*"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and **appointed you** that you would **go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain**, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*

John 15:16

Then there is the aspect of "fruit of the Light".

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

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*⁷Therefore do not be partakers with them; ⁸for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light ⁹(for **the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth**), ¹⁰trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*

Ephesians 5:6-10

The contrast between the “*children of Light*” and the “*sons of disobedience*” is how their behavior and approach is chiefly characterized (or not) by “*goodness and righteousness and truth*”. Their goal is not to please themselves but “*trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord*”.

Jude goes even further where deception by false teachers is attempted through “*empty words*” to identify the fact that such personalities will be found to be incapable of producing spiritual fruit in their personal lives.

*¹²These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; **autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted**; ¹³wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.*

Jude 12-13

Notice that they not only fail the test of metaphorical fruit but as the whole tree itself. They don't merely lack spiritual fruit, they are incapable of producing such because, as a tree, they are spiritually dead inside and out; they are “*doubly dead*”. Their end is to be “*uprooted*”, an impossible condition for the whole tree much less the potential for bearing fruit.

But just in case we do not understand that spiritual fruit is not an additional nicety or some kind of bonus for good behavior, we are warned about the consequences of ***not*** living the kind of life which properly produces biblically qualified spiritual fruit.

*⁶And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and **he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any**. ⁷And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come **looking for fruit** on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’*

*⁸“And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; ⁹and **if it bears fruit** next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”*

Luke 13:6-9

This first and foremost applied to Israel at the time Jesus spoke it. He had been literally ministering to Israel for 3 years and was warning those who steadfastly rejected him who clung to their own notion of religion that He would not relent forever in delaying the inevitable consequences for unbelief. But it has obvious application to every believer of every historical age of the Church that belief must be followed through and proven by becoming a productive fruit tree. To be otherwise will facilitate the worst of consequences.

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It is explained in the *Parable of the Sower* that without the eventual appearance of spiritual fruit, the Word of God implanted in us does not produce the desired results.

14"The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and **bring no fruit to maturity.** *15*But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and **bear fruit with perseverance.**

Luke 8:14-15

Notice that "mature" spiritual fruit is not some lucky pick of the draw or a spiritual gift, but an effort which requires "*perseverance*" on our part. It is not a one-time phenomenon, but a protracted life-long effort which will require work and consistent effort to accomplish

This was John the Baptist's message from the beginning, that salvation is not a one-time act on our part, but the beginning of a radical change in our lifestyle, especially in regard to permanently turning away from sin.

8"Therefore **bear fruit in keeping with repentance;** *9*and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. *10*The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore **every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

Matthew 3:8-10

The proof of salvation is provided in the longer follow-on process of bearing the "*fruit of repentance*", otherwise it will not gain us anything.

To be sure, we have just begun to examine all that Scripture has to say on this topic, and a more thorough follow-through would not only examine all instances of "fruit" as found in God's Word, but the related topics of trees, vineyards, and vines, to name a few. In this short examination, we have greatly expanded the definition of what comprises "spiritual fruit":

- The fruit of the Spirit
- The fruit of the lips
- The fruit of Christ the Vine
- The fruit of a good vs. bad tree
- The fruit of good works
- The fruit of the righteous/righteousness
- The fruit of evangelizing/discipling
- The fruit of our calling
- The fruit of repentance
- The fruit of the Word implanted in us

These many aspects combine to provide us with the understanding that a fruitful Christian is wholly dedicated from the heart, mind, and soul; nothing is held back from being given over to His Word and ways.

When we are told in the course of a sermon or conversation that rather than judge we are to be "fruit inspectors", it is usually presented in the limited context of applying the

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list of the *“fruit of the Spirit”* in Galatians 5:22-23; that is but a small subset of the overall checklist. It involves both our internal and external behavior, our very calling and works in Christ, and the complete spiritual character both in the deepest recesses of our heart and how it is ultimately displayed openly. And if we are to declare that someone or something produces authentic spiritual fruit, it requires a much more complete examination of the heart, mind, and soul.

But nowhere is it more applicable than when we apply these standards to our self so we will be properly prepared to meet our Master. In reality, this is the proof of how well we are submitting to the biblical process of sanctification.

In Him,

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