

The Fruit of the Cross

“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.” Matthew 7:19-20

A few years ago, the Lord gave me a vision. I found myself high above the earth looking down on a vast forest. As I descended, I could see all the trees were lush with green leaves. As I drew closer, I could see beneath the canopy of leaves. I suddenly asked the Lord, “Where’s the fruit?” Out of thousands of trees, only a few trees in the entire forest had any fruit. Most of the trees had no fruit. The Lord then gave me the interpretation of the vision. The forest was the church. The leaves were its gifts and ministries and the fruit was the expression of Christ’s life. Although the church was flush with gifts and ministries, it had precious little of Christ’s life.

We often mistake the spiritual gifts described in 1 Corinthians Chapter 12 as the evidence of Christ’s abundant life in the church. However, Jesus said not everyone who ministers spiritual gifts in His Name will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). Although we should desire to use the spiritual gifts as tools to build up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:1), we should also remember the gifts, in themselves, are not an accurate reflection of the spiritual health of the church. If the gifts are not clear evidence of Christ’s life, then what about the fruit of the Spirit? Galatians 5:22-23 describes this fruit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are attributes of God’s divine character. They are the fruit of the Spirit and not human behavioral traits. Therefore, we cannot develop spiritual fruit by our human efforts. We cannot grow in God’s love by trying harder to be kinder and gentler. We cannot get more of God’s patience by determining to be more patient. We cannot overcome pride by trying to be more humble. We cannot overcome lust by resolving to have more self-control. We may think if only we were stronger we could become more holy and

overcome sin. But God’s way of salvation wasn’t to make our “old man” stronger. Instead, His righteous verdict for our old man was execution not reformation. Therefore, our old man of sin was crucified with Christ. He completely destroyed and removed that sin factory, which continuously caused us to sin (Romans 6:6). This was God’s wisdom and power in the cross of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23, 24). By His crucifixion, Jesus Christ exchanged our sinful nature with His divine life (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, when Christ died, we died with Him (1 Corinthians 5:14). Our old sinful nature was spiritually removed (Colossians 2:11) and Christ now lives in us (2 Corinthians 13:5). Now that Christ’s new nature has replaced our old sinful nature, we are freed from sin and no longer have to sin (Romans 6:7). After we are saved, God’s way of spiritual growth is not to make us stronger in our natural self. Instead, God’s divine power is revealed in our weakness as we learn to rely by faith in His Son who lives in us (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Have you ever seen imitation fruit in a store display? Although it looks real, it lacks the fragrance of true fruit. That’s the same way it is with imitation spiritual fruit. Many of us have, by means of our natural personality and strength of will, changed our behavior to create imitation fruit. This can be called “behavioral Christianity” since we have modified our behavior to conform to Christian virtues. However, this is false Christianity. Satan can, through man’s soul-power, imitate almost everything in the church, including the gifts and fruit of the Spirit. However, the one thing the devil cannot counterfeit is the fragrance of Christ’s life (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). The appearance of imitation fruit is no substitute for Christ’s life. We may be gentle, peaceful and disciplined but if these “virtues” spring from our natural personality instead of our living by faith in Christ, they are not true fruit and do not have the aroma of Christ’s life (John 6:63).

If we still think we can bear spiritual fruit by our own doing, then we don’t need the power of the cross of Christ (Galatians 2:20-3:3). When Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:5),” He didn’t mean we couldn’t do anything. By our own initiative and talent, there are many things we could do. Jesus meant we couldn’t produce anything of true spiritual value without His initiative and His power. Although God may use our natural talent, He does not want us to have any confidence in our natural ability to produce spiritual fruit (Philippians 3:3). Our faith must rest in His Son alone to accomplish His work through us. If we rely on our natural talent to do Christian work and produce Christian fruit, we may look healthy and productive to others but Jesus Christ won’t recognize our fruit.

However, if we abide (stay rooted by faith) in spiritual union with Jesus Christ, His fruit will flow naturally from us (Romans 7:4). This is the same way the life of the vine flows through its branches to bear fruit. If we abide in Christ and He abides in us, we will bear fruit that has Christ’s fragrance (John 15:5). How do we abide in Christ? God has already put us in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30). Our response is to fix our eyes on Jesus and His completed work on the cross (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus is not only the author of our faith; He is also the finisher of our faith. If we know in our spirit that we have been crucified in Christ so that Christ might live in us (Galatians 2:20), we will see the futility of our natural efforts to produce fruit. We will then look by faith for Christ to produce His fruit in us that we cannot possibly produce ourselves (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). May God open our eyes to see what His Son has accomplished on the cross so we might bear His lasting fruit with His sweet smelling aroma.

“Abide 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. I 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.” John 15:4-5