

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit

If you have been a keen reader of your *Made for Manhood* lessons, you will have noticed that we have referred to the *fruit of the Holy Spirit* from time to time. We did so in “Treating Ladies Properly” when pointing out that true beauty involves bearing the Spirit’s fruit. We discussed peace as part of the Spirit’s fruit in “A Lesson on Peace.” In our study entitled “Being a Good Steward,” we expressed the importance of responsibly bearing fruit. And in “Made for Fatherhood,” we discussed how vital it is for a father to demonstrate good fruit if he hopes to raise his children well. In each of these lessons, we indicated that we would discuss the fruit of the Holy Spirit in greater depth in a future lesson. We are now delivering on our word....

What is “The Fruit”?

As you may recall, the term “fruit of the Holy Spirit” comes from a passage in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Commonly, the passage is quoted in part as such: “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (5:22).

If you are the kind of fellow who gets easily befuddled when common language is used figuratively, you may be wondering why words like “love” and “joy” are described as fruit. After all, love and joy are not usually for sale in the fruit and produce

section of your grocery store. And you may have picked apples or cherries directly from a tree, but you haven't likely heard of a peace or patience tree.

However, the fruit of the Spirit is not something that you can literally taste, see, or otherwise perceive with your senses. Rather, it is comprised of various virtues. A virtue, as you may recall, is an admirable trait associated with one's character. And like apples or oranges, the Spirit's fruit grows, beginning with something relatively small which blooms and ending with something beautiful and ripe to be used by others.

Did you know that the various types of fruit that can be literally eaten, like grapes or strawberries, first had their beginnings as flowers? And the flowers, in order to thrive, first had to be part of a branch. Of course, the various branches of the plant had to first grow from a central branch. This is true for all kinds of fruit-bearing plants. Well, the same is true for *spiritual fruit*.

Jesus explained all of this in an easy-to-understand passage in the gospel of John. In doing so, He referred to a type of fruit that grows on vines. Most likely He referred to grapes, which can be eaten whole, made into jellies, or pressed to make juice or fine wines. The passage says,

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every 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.... "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. If 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.... "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

John 15:1, 2, 4-8

So you can see that the fruit we are talking about in this lesson is spiritual fruit. It manifests itself in the form of various virtues, like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We will refer back to this particular passage a little later in our lesson, but first we need to clarify an important detail...

Fruit or Fruits?

If you are the kind of fellow who naturally counts things, you may have noticed that there are nine types of fruit listed in Galatians 5:22. Does this mean that there are only nine kinds of fruit that come from the Spirit? What about wit, humor, contentment, discretion, bravery, and the host of other virtues that, by all accounts, come from God? Are these not also kinds of fruits that the Spirit bears? You bet they are!

So why, then, are there only nine listed? Are the nine listed the most important ones? What about the others? Actually, this line of questioning might cause us to end up missing the whole point of the matter. Truth be told, the writer of Galatians describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit as being *singular*. Read it again if you missed this important detail in your first analysis: "...the *fruit* of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."

So then, there is one kind of fruit that the Spirit produces, and that is the cumulation of the various virtues that are manifested in a Christian's personality. Does this seem abstract? If so, think of several different kinds of literal fruits, perfectly blended together so that a singular fruit is produced, such that this singular fruit is yummier and more satisfying than any one of the fruits from which it was comprised. This is the Spirit's wonderful way—He is able to take all of your virtues and produce from it your personality, which is the glorious expression of who you are!

A Primer on the Spirit

It's quite likely that you already have a pretty good handle on who the Holy Spirit is and what He is all about. But just to be sure, it's probably a good idea to provide a short primer:

Suffice it to say, the Spirit is far more important than the fruit that He bears. After all, "Apart from Me you can do nothing."

The Spirit is the very essence of God and of His Son, Jesus. He is the "Spirit of Life" (Rom. 8:2) and the one who "gives life" (2 Cor. 3:2). He is "holy" as only God is holy (Eph. 1:13, Isaiah 57:15). The Holy Spirit can speak (Acts 28:25-27), and be grieved and lied to (Eph. 4:30, Acts 5:3-4). Moreover, He literally *lives in* those who believe in Jesus' holy name (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21,22).

So you can see that the Holy Spirit is not merely some kind of impersonal, "active force" as the foolish cult members who go door-to-door might claim. On the contrary, the Spirit is very personal, for He has the very personality of God.

It should not surprise you, then, that the Holy Spirit has a *divine role* in all Christians' lives. Before Jesus died, He told His disciples that it was actually to their benefit that He would be leaving them, for in doing so He would also send to them the Holy Spirit:

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged....But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...." John 16:7-9, 13

After Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven, He sent the “Helper” as He promised, and the church was in fact baptized into the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8, 2:1-4). Prior to this time, only kings and priests were able to go into the tabernacle to encounter God, but now God’s Holy Spirit resides with power in anyone for the simple asking and receiving of the same by faith!

There is much more that can be taught about the person of the Holy Spirit, and in fact entire books are written on the matter. Some of these books are terrific at enlightening the truth of the gospel. Others are not fit for the fire, for the devil’s grease does not burn well. But if you can embrace what we have presented here, you will be nine tenths or more of the way to a mature understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Virtue Described

As we observed, there are nine manifestations of the Spirit’s fruit listed in the passage of Galatians that we initially read. And as we discussed, these are only some of the many which are grown by the Spirit. In truth, there are scores of them. That being said, it is useful to discuss the ones that are cited in the passage. We will list them again here, just for good measure: “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”

Love

We suppose that most of our readers are the quick witted types who catch on fairly easily. After all, such is the hope of a Teleo Scout and for that matter, all mature Christians. However, we realize that not everyone fits this description, and so we offer clarification for the dull of mind:

When we talk about love in terms of the Spirit’s fruit, we are not talking about the love that one may have for *things*. The

Spirit does not bless a Christian with a supernatural ability to love his baseball card collection, his canoe, or even his paintball gun. No man needs the Spirit's help to love such things. In fact, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, a man is actually more likely to magnify his love for things. Egad that one should ever need to receive this correction!

On the contrary, the Spirit blesses a Christian with a measure of love *for people*. This measure of love, voluntarily submitted to God for nurturing and cultivation, grows into virtue. Virtue then becomes a nourishing fruit that God can use to bring liberation and joy into the lives of others. Make love for people your life's aim, and you will be a blessed man indeed.

If you are the type of boy who loves ice cream cones more than he does his own siblings, or the kind of boy who prefers the company of plastic army men over his parents or friends, then we fear for you. But we will not dwell too much on presenting a rebuke here. Most likely this does not describe you, and so we will move on...

Suffice it to say, love is the royal expression of all virtues. We stated previously that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is kind of like blending several different kinds of literal fruits together to produce a singular fruit which is superior in the sum of its parts. Well, love is the quintessential fruit in such a blend. Without love, the rest of the concoction would instantly spoil.

You may think we are overstating the importance of love when we say that the fruit of the Holy Spirit would go bad without it. But we are not overstating the matter. In fact, without love, everything spoils in such a way that it fumigates its immediate area with a toxic gas fit only for the devil to breathe.

The toxic gas produced in the absence of love is odorless and colorless to most people; it takes a discerning nose and eye to sense it for what it really is. Normally, this gas does not kill

instantly. Rather, it puts its victims into a subtle state of stupor whereby they are numb to the reality of their condition. At best, a victim may survive but will never thrive. At worst, he will be so full of himself that he will become worthless for even worldly good. Without intervention, all victims will die in their stupefied states. The only antidote to cure a victim from irreversible harm is a healthy dose of...you guessed it...heavenly love.

You were indeed made to be a lover of people. Do you recall in a previous lesson when we told you that you “wield a great and wonderful strength”? We hope that you did not think we were referring to the elasticity of your trouser straps. “Young men...you are strong,” says the great apostle John! And in case you need reminding, this strength comes from the love manifest in you by Jesus Christ, if you indeed equate yourself with His calling.

We emphasize that the qualities of love do not include emotional feelings so much as they include commitment and resolve. We stated such in “Made for Marriage,” and we do so again here. Oh, young man, that you would remember this truth above else!

Perhaps these Scriptures will help solidify in you a proper frame of mind:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you... John 13:34

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16

“Love bears all things, believes all things, upholds all

things...” says the great thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The world’s largest crane or excavator cannot uphold all things, but love can! We implore you to be a lover of your fellow man. If you have never done so, pray this simple prayer with sincerity: “Dear Lord, help me to love my fellow man with all that I have. I offer myself to You for this very cause....”

Patience

Have you ever wondered where the phrase “patience is a virtue” comes from? Patience is indeed a virtue, and we hope to help explain why it is so, along with a few of the benefits from having it.

For one, patience is the kind of thing that will reduce the stress load that one might otherwise carry. Who wants to walk around stressed most of the time? Not me! And neither should you.

Now we are not talking about the feeling that might be generated when you and a friend are attempting to mow several large lawns in one day. It’s natural and useful for you to feel a certain amount of anxiety when you are cutting turf in this fashion. But how might you act when things don’t go according to your timetable?

Suppose you run out of gas and your partner has to bike a half mile to fetch more fuel. Might you get stressed and irritable, wishing your friend could fly? We hope not, but this is how an impatient man may behave.

Or suppose you are waiting at a fast food counter, having already ordered and paid for your meal. What might you do if you were to see that others who were behind you have already been served and are now seated, while you are still waiting? Might you pitch a fit? We hope not, but more than one man has unraveled a counter girl’s pigtails simply because

he was impatient.

In the grand scheme of things, an impatient temperament does not help to get anything done faster or better. No act of road rage ever made a wider lane. No tapping of a foot ever made paint dry faster. And no amount of pacing ever made the sun set sooner. More importantly, no amount of impatience ever procured an answered prayer before its intended time.

An impatient man will think himself the victim, for the earth spins at never the right speed. How futile and silly such a man appears, one moment braced against a mountain's wall to slow the great, blue marble's roll, the next running frantically across the plains like a gerbil in an exercise wheel, affecting no other spin but his own.

Patience is universally useful. For one thing, a patient man can be trusted by others. Why should an impatient man expect others to have faith in him, knowing that his exposed nerves might short circuit the moment something touched him off? However, a patient man communicates to others that he is safe, and they will be more prone to trust and believe in him.

Consider the farmer, who, not knowing if it shall rain or shine, puts his hand to the plow, fertilizes the soil, plants his seed, and patiently waits for the results. Is he not many times more commendable than the man who shouts at the sky, demanding rain one day, sun the next?

Consider also the great Farmer, the Vinedresser, the Husbandman of the vineyard. Is He not supremely patient with us, His branches? Of course He is. Let us be patient then likewise, so that we may bear much fruit for His glory!

Kindness

Of all the manifestations of the Spirit, kindness must be

ranked as one of the easiest to employ. How difficult is it, really, to provide a kind word, or to perform an act of charitable service? It is easy indeed, and so kindness should flow from us as easily as water flows down a mountain stream.

A word of kindness is like a seed, which dropped by chance, produces in time a wildflower worthy of its place in heaven's bouquet. A kind word is not only a precursor to life, it is life itself, for the Scriptures are clear that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Prov. 18:21).

Listen intently to those who speak, so that when it is time to respond you might let them know that *they have been heard*, and thus they will be enabled to properly engage throughout the course of further conversation. How might you do this? For one thing, you might study those who do this naturally. We promise you that no one will fault you for copying him. You will find, in your study of such people, that they commonly repeat what was spoken, or that they ask questions to get clarification. Talking with people in this manner is a true act of kindness.

Of course, kindness also involves giving compliments. Be lavish in your praise for others. It is doubtful that you will need to back off from doing this too much. It has been said that one of the driving motivations within humans is the need to feel appreciated. If this is so, how awful it is to withhold appreciation from someone when it is due, especially when it costs nothing to give it. When someone does something worthy of your appreciation, then let your kindness flow! At the bare minimum, offer your thanks, but it may be more appropriate to put into words what you are thankful for.

However, avoid flattery, which is giving someone a compliment that is either undeserved or not heartfelt. If you start sounding sappy and insincere, we hope that a good friend will let you know it! The Bible does not have anything kind to

say about flattery.

You should know that words of kindness must not always include complimentary language. Suppose you were caught unawares with your zipper down or your shoes untied. Would it not be a kind gesture if someone told you of your shortcoming in a discreet manner? Of course it would. But too many people are afraid of offending others when telling them the truth for their own good. However, kindness should never be used as a license to be tongue-tied when someone is in a serious predicament.

Kindness is not confined to the realm of words. Offering your seat to another, paying someone else's expense, or cleaning a hunting buddy's quota of game birds are just a few of the many acts of charity you can offer your fellow man. A caution regarding acts of charity, however: don't reserve your good deeds for only those who might somehow repay you. On the contrary, include your acts of kindness toward those who may never repay you, and even for the undeserving. Such is the way of our Lord.

Goodness

We might say that God is everything the devil is not, but in doing so we fall far short of fully describing God. The same is true for goodness. Goodness is everything badness is not, but a simple contrast in this regard might leave goodness shortchanged.

To do good means to have a good heart. Do you want to do well? If so, you are more than halfway to meeting your end, for as a vinedresser plans to cultivate his yard, so do good intentions precede benevolence. Beware, however, for as the saying goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." A man of goodness follows through with his intentions, but to him following through is not an afterthought. Rather, intentions and doing are one in the same.

Goodness and godliness go hand-in-hand. In fact, doing good is what Jesus is all about. While on earth, He spoke good news, made the lame to walk, and the blind to see. You, too, can carry on His good work. There are many good men already doing so, and you are slated to join them!

A man with a good heart is easy to recognize. Such a man professes Christ in both word and deed. He is rarely in a hurry. He smiles often, and his listening ear precedes his good word. He is the kind of man that might be taken advantage of, if his good heart were not guarded well. Pity the fool who attempts such advantage, for heaven will pay him appropriate recompense. The Lord watches over a good heart with special interest, like a winemaker who guards a special variety of grapes of great worth.

A man with a good heart is well spoken of, more so than others but not by all, for a good man knows the futility of attempting universal approval. When spoken of unfavorably, a goodhearted man may be pained, but only momentarily, for there is a self-comforting quality in goodness, although a good man may be too humble to recognize it in these terms.

A goodhearted man, advanced in age, is the pinnacle object of admiration of every boy who longs for a godly grandfather. Ah, to sit on the lap of such a man, to hear tales of war and peace, to learn at his side in the woodshop and afield, to be inspired, and to do great things as this man did.... Do you have a grandfather that emulates godliness? If so, we implore you to make it your life's aim to one day be like him. If not, we encourage you to become such a man for the sake of your progeny and for the many other lives you will touch along the way.

Goodness, a supreme virtue, nonetheless cannot stand alone. Acts of charity and benevolence, apart from God, are useful only in temporal terms. For as the Scripture states, many do-gooders will cite their good works before Christ at Judgment, at which

time He will state to certain men, “I never knew you....”

Faithfulness

Essentially, faithfulness is remaining committed to a cause. For example, a farmer must persevere throughout the entire sowing and reaping process; he can't give up simply because he gets tired or is worried about the seasonal forecast. Even if his plough ox is rustled or his wagon breaks an axle, he will need to remain faithful to his cause, especially if he has already begun his endeavor.

Likewise, a vinedresser must be faithful throughout the entire course of overseeing his vineyard. He must be constantly aware of the condition of his soil and his vines. If foxes or raccoons are frequenting his vineyard, he must set traps or hire bounty hunters to rid of them. He must plan his harvest carefully, for the amount of sugar found in his clusters is contingent upon careful timing. The pressed juices must be stored just-so in order to achieve his desired effect. In short, he must be a faithful student and administrator of his craft.

In these examples, the stewards were committed to a cause that they had already begun. Failure on their part to carry out some or all of their duties would seriously affect the outcome of their efforts. But does this mean that you must always be faithful, even in “lost causes”? This is a very good question, for which there is no universal answer. You may, in fact, endeavor upon a cause and find that you wish you hadn't. In this scenario, you must be faithful in the grand scheme of things. It may be that bailing out is the best thing to do for the overall good. A good rule of thumb is to determine if you would be putting anyone out by your actions. Remember the Golden Rule, and do your best to abide by it.

A discussion on faithfulness would not be complete without pointing out the importance of keeping your word. A person's

word is usually the first thing heard and processed by others before any action is carried out. So if you say you are going to do something, then be good on your word.

Do you hope to have much responsibility some day? Regardless of whether or not you want to become an ice cream truck driver, a dog catcher, an astronaut, or a brain surgeon, you will need to start practicing responsibility now. You should know that Jesus taught, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10). So you can do your part of helping the Spirit’s fruit to grow by being faithful with small things. This means you should be consistently putting your bike away before you ask for your dad’s car keys, and gladly eating what was provided at lunch before requesting New York strip sirloin for dinner.

Faithfulness as it pertains to the Spirit’s fruit goes far beyond being a good steward of things. In terms of commitment toward a cause, the Spirit’s fruit demonstrates your willingness and ability to *keep the faith*. The Scriptures indicate that this is not something to take for granted, nor something you should consider lightly. The apostle Paul proudly stated near the end of his life, “...the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:6-7).

When you are old and gray, will you be able to say, as Paul did, that you kept the faith? We trust that you will. But understand this: your faith *must be your own*! Perhaps it already is, and if so, we join in heaven’s applause. Yet many a young man’s faith was started by the imparting of his parents’ faith upon him, and so each boy must eventually wean himself from his parents’ faith so that he can realize his own as a man. He must, in essence, transform from flower to fruit.

Can you honestly say that your faith is your own and not your parents’ or somebody else’s? God forbid, but what if your

parents should die? Such a question should not frighten you, though it may give you pause. Would you, could you, carry on? We're not merely asking if you could survive; we're confident enough that you could round up enough scraps to see yourself through. Rather, we're asking this: could you, with conviction and effectiveness, fight the good fight, and run the good race, and keep the good faith, *on your own...without turning back?*

Gentleness

We would not be surprised if the idea of being gentle does not instantly appeal to you. After all, the idea of being gentle often conjures up images of being dainty, soft spoken, or overly careful. For many people, gentleness seems reserved for sissies and the effeminate. But rest assured, the kind of gentleness that the Scriptures refer to is very much in line with being a man.

Perhaps it is best to start off by describing what gentleness is not. Gentleness is not the opposite of being assertive. We know this to be true because Jesus was very much assertive and was in fact so most of the time. Do you have the ability and willingness to take the lead when no one better than you can, or the ability to instantly follow when the opportunity calls for it? If so, then you are being assertive, and that is a good thing. You do not have to be dainty about leading or following. We hope this helps bring clarification.

So what, then, is gentleness? You already know that being a Christian means that you wield a great and wonderful strength. Among other things, gentleness means exercising your strength with sincere humility so that others might be served. For example, if you are a big brother, you should not order your younger siblings around just because you think yourself privileged.

A gentle man knows that boasting will usually bruise the Spirit's fruit, rather than keep it ripe and fresh. Can you bench

press more than your own body weight or jump five garbage cans with your bike? If so, good for you, but you better be careful showing off to others who can't. In all regards, keep your pride in check. Such is the way of a gentle man.

Are we saying that gentleness involves holding back your muscles? In some cases it might, but we are not saying that you should hold back in all cases. Let's discuss a hypothetical situation to help clarify: Suppose you were an accomplished wrestler, having won several dual meets with very few losses, and you now have an opportunity to show a friend a few moves. Are you going to immediately put him in fireman's carry, followed by a painful cross-face cradle, just because you can? We hope not! You will not have taught him anything other than how to show off and that he should avoid any future instruction from you.

But what if you are in direct competition with others near your equal? Should you hold back then? Not on your life! Show your stuff, or you will be shown up!

Suppose you are in a fully uniformed football game, playing middle linebacker. Being gentle in spirit does not mean you should tiptoe toward the ball carrier and first ask his permission to tackle him. On the contrary, hit him, man, full speed! Make him think twice about running your way again.

But what if, after hitting him, *you* are the man down, and he is on his way to further yardage? Are you going to cower in deference, all in the name of "gentleness"? We hope not! Next time, meet him harder, faster, and altogether better, so that it is he who goes down rather than you.

Competition provides an opportunity for kindness, for it is kind to help hone the skills of another by offering him your best effort. At the end of a game, however, a gentle man will be a good sport. If you win, don't gloat. If you lose, don't pout. That

pretty much sums up what being a good sport is all about.

A discussion on this topic would be incomplete if we did not point out that a gentle man knows how and when to be a gentleman. A gentleman is polite when the occasion calls for it, which is often. If you have mastered “please,” “thank you,” and “you’re welcome,” you are over halfway to being a gentleman. But there is more to being a gentleman than offering verbal courtesies. We encourage you to review our lesson entitled “Social Skills” if the finer points of manners and etiquette elude you.

Perhaps the best measure of one’s ability to exercise gentleness can be found in his speech. The Bible has a lot to say about how we should exercise language. Here are just some of the many passages associated with this topic:

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
Prov. 15:1

...Speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.... Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.
Eph. 4:25, 29

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.
James 1:19

...For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.
Matt. 12:34

Self-Control

It is a true statement that a man is not really able to control

anybody other than himself. Certainly, we are able to *influence* others, but we cannot truly control them. There are too many variables which prevent it, the chief one being the fact that God created men with a free will.

Everybody has a free will. What does this mean? It means that we are able to exercise many options in our lives, both small and large. You and I are free to put our left sock on before our right one as a matter of routine, if we so want. If we want to change this habit and put our right one on first, we may do so. Likewise, we are able to make choices in more important matters of life, like what kind of gun we might save up for, or whether or not we will go to college.

To be sure, there are certain things about ourselves that we cannot control at all, and others we can control, but only to a degree. For example, we have no control over the rate at which our hair grows, nor can we swallow and breathe at exactly the same time. And once our noses decide to sneeze, we can only hold off doing so for so long. Likewise, we may be able to refrain from blinking for a few minutes, but sooner or later our eyelids will dominate our wills.

You may have noticed in your Bible reading that the Scriptures don't really have much to say about what sock you put on first or what kind of gun you might save up for or how long you can go without blinking. This is so because God is far more concerned with your character than He is about anything else. He knows that you have a free will, and that you can use your free will to make good choices or evil choices. So of course God wants you to exercise self-control in this regard.

As a young man growing toward Christian maturity, it is vital to know that you have complete control over choosing evil. Here are a couple of passages to help solidify this important point:

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. *1 Cor. 10:13*

...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin....Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. *Rom. 6:7, 11*

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin... *1 John 2:1*

Indeed, the Bible has a lot to say about the subject of sin. It's sad to say, but there are some well meaning (and some not so well meaning) teachers of the Bible who really cloud this matter. Some of these teachers falsely purport that Christians will always live a defeated life of sin, not being able to do otherwise. This teaching is rooted in the false worldview that mankind does not really have a free will. But how could the Bible state that self-control is part of the Holy Spirit's fruit if it were not possible to control oneself? The idea is just ridiculous. We would encourage you to avoid teachings that imply that a victorious life is not normal, and to respectfully correct such a teaching after recognizing it.

We have previously discussed the importance of being faithful in small things before being faithful in large. This principle applies to all matters in life, self-control notwithstanding. So we encourage you to purposefully make it your life's aim to exercise self-control with small things; doing so will help you when real temptation comes your way.

What do we mean by exercising self-control in small things? We really have no set prescription, but we do recommend a concerted effort to *live a disciplined life*. This might mean simply controlling the urge to laugh out loud in a public library, or refraining from buying a new bike just because your old one has a few loose spokes. A disciplined life might include not sleeping in, or developing an efficient routine of carrying out chores and study. Sooner or later, rest assured, you will face even weightier matters, and being a disciplined man will equip you to meet with success.

How More Fruit is Made

As a young man, you should naturally aspire to bear fruit for Christ's kingdom. So you should know a bit about how God grows His fruit.

Earlier in our lesson, we cited the biblical passage in which Jesus describes our Father as the owner of the vineyard, Himself as the vine, and His followers as branches. To this effect He stated, "Every 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..." (John 15:2).

One of the key ways that God produces fruit is to remove fruitless branches from the vine. While this may be startling in its implications, it really should not be that surprising. Any good gardener or horticulturist knows that a branch that is not producing fruit is nevertheless using certain nutrients at the expense of the branches that are fruitful. So the best thing a caretaker can do for the overall good of the plant is to completely get rid of branches that are not producing any fruit. Such branches are good for nothing other than firewood.

However, many branches bear fruit as intended. This is where the skill of a good caretaker really comes in. A person with such skill knows that certain parts of the branches sometimes need

to be removed so that the plant can grow the way the caretaker wants. For example, a vinedresser may want to improve the health of certain grapes, so he may choose to cut off specific leaves so that more sunshine can reach previously concealed areas. Or the vinedresser may cut off parts of a branch that are diseased so that the surrounding areas will not be adversely affected.

In like fashion, God “prunes” us, in that He removes certain things in our lives so that we can grow the way He wants us to. How will He do this in your life? Ah, that is a question we are not equipped to answer, at least not fully. Maybe it will involve removing something that causes you grief so that you can be healthy, or it may be that He will allow a trial or a tribulation to occur in your life so that you can be tested and thus be bettered (James 1:3).

Regardless of how God works to cause you to grow, know that you are in good hands. He is the supreme Vinedresser, the Husbandman, the Master Gardener. He knows exactly what you need to make you bear fruit for His glory. Therefore, be ever aware that no matter what happens in your life, God can cause it to work for the good to cause you to become more like Jesus!

