

DEREK PRINCE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Teaching Letter

The Fruit of the Spirit



Part 6/6

Who Is the Holy Spirit?
By Derek Prince

As we conclude this Teaching Letter series, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?*, it is my hope that the beauty, mystery, and presence of the Holy Spirit have touched your life in a deep and transforming way.

Let's briefly review our journey thus far. In our opening discussion, we focused on the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Trinity, in which "oneness" and "plurality" are eternally combined. We then examined three aspects of His nature that transcend our human understanding: He is eternal, omniscient, and omnipresent. In the story of the servant of Abraham who found a bride for Isaac, we saw the Holy Spirit as the self-effacing Servant of the Father and the Son. We then discussed His role as the Spirit of Truth, the promised Helper Who dwells with us and in us.

Our most recent letter centered on the nine **gifts** of the Holy Spirit, provided to equip us to become the Bride of Christ. The focus of our sixth and final letter in our series will be on the fruit of the Spirit.

Gifts versus Fruit

It is important for us to understand the significant difference between gifts and fruit. This may be illustrated by comparing a Christmas tree with an apple tree. A Christmas tree "carries" gifts. By this I mean that each gift is attached to the tree by a single act, to be received from the tree by a single act. No time or effort is required of the person receiving the gift.

In contrast, there is both time and hard work required to cultivate an apple tree. To produce fruit, it must go through a series of stages that can take many years.

First, a seed must be planted in the earth. From this seed, a root goes down into the soil until a sprout rises upward. Over the next period of years, the sprout grows into a tree, and in due course blossoms appear. As these blossoms fall off, fruit begins to develop.

In the first years, the blossoms or the young fruit must be plucked off so that the tree's root system will develop to support a strong tree. Several years must pass before the apples are finally fit to eat. In fact, under the Law of Moses, at least four years were required! (Leviticus 19:23–25)

Character Development

I pointed out in a previous letter that one aspect of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is that they cannot be earned, nor can

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they be taken away. This is the nature of a gift. On the other hand, the fruit of the Holy Spirit relates to our character, and therefore must be cultivated, like the apples on the apple tree in our example. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). It is our character, and not our gifts, that tell the watching world who we really are.

Fruit must grow from a seed. On the other hand, it takes fruit to produce further seeds. At the beginning of creation God ordained that every "fruit tree should yield fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself" (Genesis 1:12). This establishes an important spiritual principle: Christians who do not produce spiritual fruit in their own lives have no seed to sow into the lives of others.

The nine forms of spiritual fruit are listed in Galatians 5:22–23:

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Love—the primary form of fruit—is listed first. The others that follow may be understood as different ways in which the fruit of love manifests itself, as the following phrases describe.

- Joy is love rejoicing.
- Peace is love resting.
- Longsuffering is love forbearing.
- Kindness is love serving others.
- Goodness is love seeking the best for others.
- Faithfulness is love keeping its promises.
- Gentleness is love ministering to the hurts of others.
- Self-control is love in control.

We could also describe the fruit of the Spirit as different ways in which the character of Jesus manifests itself through those whom He indwells. When all the forms of fruit are fully developed, it is as if Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, is incarnated in His disciple. This should be the goal of every Christian.

The question is how do we go about cultivating this fruit in our lives?

Seven Stages

We find an answer in 2 Peter 1:5–7, where the apostle lists seven successive stages in the development of a fully formed Christian character:

> But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (2 Peter 1:5, nasb)

Peter begins by reminding us that success in this process will demand diligence. Developing Christian character comes through diligence and hard work. The process Peter describes could again be compared to an apple seed developing into a mature apple. The seed is God's Word implanted in the heart. This produces faith, which is the indispensable starting point. Growing out of faith, there follow seven successive stages of development.

Stage One is variously translated "**virtue**," or "**moral excellence**". Originally, in secular Greek, the word was applied to excellence in any area of life—to molding a clay pot, steering a boat, or playing a flute. Here in this verse as well, it covers every possible area of life.

A teacher who comes to Christ should become an excellent teacher. A nurse should become an excellent nurse. A Christian businessman should excel in his field of business. There is no room for sloppiness or laziness in any area of the Christian life.

Stage Two of spiritual development is **knowledge**. The kind of knowledge extolled in Scripture is primarily practical, not merely theoretical. It is knowledge that works. I came to Christ out of a background of philosophy, and what impressed me most about the Bible was how intensely practical it is!

The most essential form of knowledge in the Christian life is the knowledge of God's will as revealed in Scripture. This, too, is practical and demands a regular, systematic study of the whole Bible.

> All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

I have been stunned to discover how many Christians have never once read through the entire Bible. Without realizing it, they are setting limits of their own making upon their spiritual development.

Stage Three, after knowledge comes **self control**—also called **self-discipline** (2 Timothy 1:7, niv). This is the stage at which a Christian must prove himself a genuine disciple—that is, a person under discipline—not a mere church member.

This kind of discipline must be applied in every major area of our personality—our emotions, our attitudes, our appetites, our thought life. It must govern not only our actions, but—more importantly—our reactions.

Stage Four, this kind of discipline must be in place for us to move up to the next stage—**perseverance**. This term implies the ability to overcome the various tests and trials that will inevitably expose any weak and undisciplined areas of our personality. Do you ever wonder why some Christians never progress beyond a certain stage of spiritual development? They never fulfill these two requirements of self-control and perseverance (or endurance).

Three Final Stages

In the three remaining stages of development, the beauty of a truly Christian character unfolds. The first is **godliness**. It is the mark of a person whose life is centered in God—a person who has become a vessel for the presence of God. Wherever such a person goes, the atmosphere is permeated by a unique and pervasive fragrance. There may not be any preaching or other religious activity going on. Yet people become strangely aware of eternal issues.

The late British evangelist, Smith Wigglesworth, relates an incident which illustrates the impact of this godly presence in a non-religious atmosphere. After a time spent in private prayer, Smith stepped on a train and took his seat in a railway carriage. Without a word spoken, the man in the opposite seat—a complete stranger—blurted out, "Your presence convicts me of sin." Smith was then able to introduce him to Christ.

The last two stages of development depict two different kinds of love. The first—**brotherly kindness**—describes the way believers in Jesus Christ should relate to their brothers and sisters in the Lord. Let me say something here which may shock you, but which is based on many decades of interaction with Christians from various backgrounds: It is not easy for Christians to love one another.

Two thousand years of Church history confirm this observation. Scarcely a century has passed that has not been marked by bitter strife and contention between rival groups of Christians—all of whom often claimed to be "the true Church." Why is this so? Because the fact that a person has claimed salvation in Christ does not mean that his whole character has been instantly transformed. Certainly, change has been set in motion. But it may take many years for that change to be worked out in every area of a person's character.

When David needed smooth stones to fit in his sling to slay Goliath, he went down to the valley—the lowly place of humility. There in the brook he found the kind of stones he needed (1–Samuel 17:40). What had made them smooth? Two pressures. First, the water flowing over them. Second, their continual jostling against one another.

That is a picture of how Christian character is formed. First, there is the continual "washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26). Second, as the stones jostle one another in personal relationships, the rough edges are gradually worn down until they become "smooth."

It is a mark of spiritual maturity to sincerely love our fellow Christians. We must love them—not simply for what they are in themselves, but for what they mean to Jesus, who shed His life blood for each of them.

The final stage of development is **agape love**. This characteristic represents the full, ripe fruit of Christian character. This is no longer about loving only our fellow believers. It is God's own love for the unthankful and the unholy. It is the love that causes us to "bless those who curse [us], do good to those who hate [us], and pray for those who spitefully use [us] and persecute [us]" (Matthew 5:44).

It is the love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross when He prayed for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). It is the same love that caused Stephen to pray for those who were stoning him, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60).

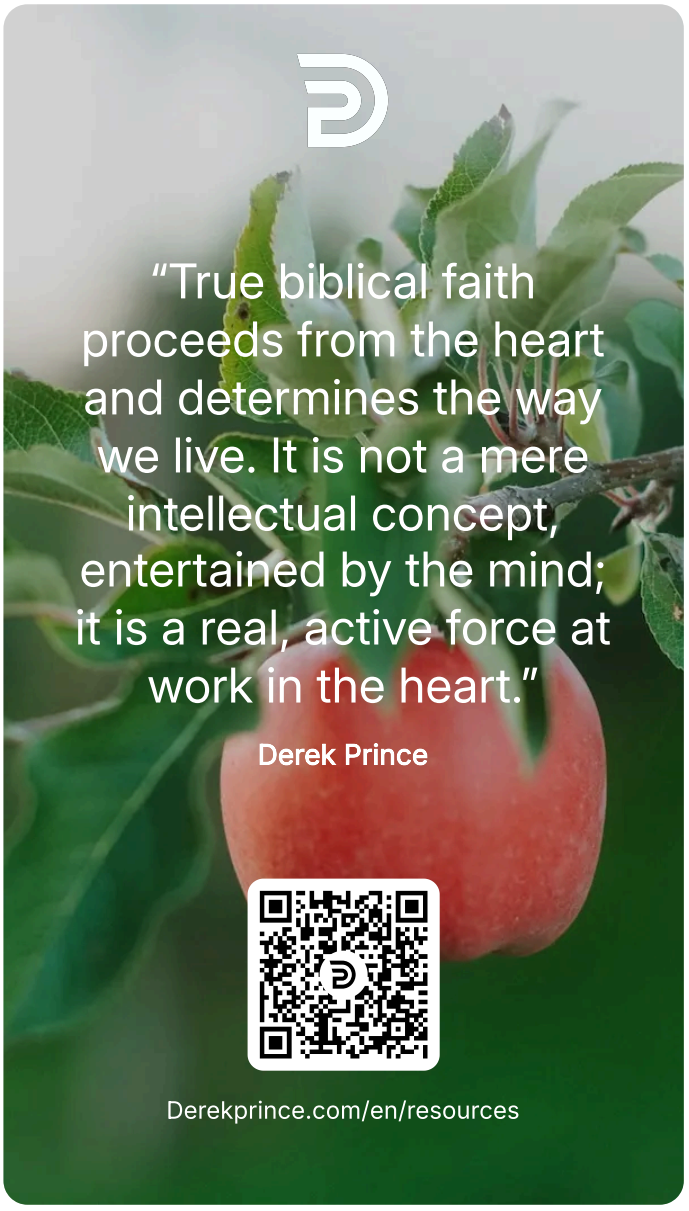
For my part, when I contemplate the Bible's picture of the fully developed fruit of the Holy Spirit, I am both humbled and inspired. Humbled, because I still have so far to go. Inspired, because I have caught a glimpse of something more beautiful than anything this world has to offer.

As we close this series on the Holy Spirit, it is my prayer that your life has been deeply touched. I hope you have caught a glimpse of what your own life could be: full of the

Holy Spirit, abounding in fruitfulness, and permeating the atmosphere around you with the fragrance of holiness. Let's end this series by declaring these powerful words of Paul from Philippians 3:13–14:

> I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

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