

### 13. The Fruit of the Spirit: The Essence of Christian Character (1Q 2010—The Fruit of the Spirit)

**Biblical material:** Col. 1:27, Matt. 6:33, John 15:8, Rom. 3:20–26, 14:17, 1 Tim. 6:11, 1 John 2:15.

#### Quotes

- The Holy Spirit loves so to arrange men’s circumstances that they are brought within the sphere of God’s influence. *Maurice A. P. Wood*
- The fruit of the Spirit is not excitement or orthodoxy: it is character. *G. B. Duncan*
- To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Spirit fulfilling in us all that God intended him to do when he placed him there. *Lewis Sperry Chafer*
- The best index to a person’s character is (a) how he treats people who can’t do him any good, and (b) how he treats people who can’t fight back. *Abigail Van Buren*
- Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing. *Abraham Lincoln*
- Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of value. *Albert Einstein*

#### Questions

Why is character such a significant issue? In what way do you think the Spirit helps in your character development? If the issue in the great controversy is over God’s character, how does this affect us? If all we take with us are our characters, shouldn’t we concentrate more on this? How are we truly transformed?

#### Bible discussion

The motto: “Christ in you the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27). We are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33)—and this can only come through the agency of the Spirit that brings the fruit in our lives (John 15:8).

For no one is made right before God by doing what the law says, because the law only helps us understand what sin is: “But now the way that God is right has been demonstrated—a way that isn’t to do with the law, even though it was spoken of by the law and the prophets. God’s right nature transforms everyone who believes and trusts in Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter who we are: everyone has sinned and is a long way from reaching God’s glory. God’s free and gracious gift is to make us right through the purifying salvation of Christ Jesus, whom God sent out to bring about reconciliation through trusting in him. He shed his blood to demonstrate that he is right, because in his mercy he overlooked sins in the past. Now at this time God proves he is absolutely fair, and that he can legitimately make right those who trust in Jesus.” (Rom. 3:20–26 FBV).

For those who are preoccupied with ritual righteousness, a legal mechanism to achieve what God wants, Paul explains that “God’s kingdom is not about eating and drinking, but living rightly, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17 FBV).

We, like Timothy, are to “pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.” (1 Tim. 6:11 NLT), not loving the world (1 John 2:15).

## Comment

“When Moses asked God to show him His glory, it was then that the Lord revealed to him His character as merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth (*Exod. 34:6*). And so when ‘we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image from glory [character] to glory [character], even as by the Spirit of the Lord’ (*2 Cor. 3:18*).” (Sabbath afternoon’s lesson). Notice the focus on the character of God, and the change in our characters. *It’s who God is and who we are that really counts!*

The lesson makes it clear that there is no exhaustive list of the fruits of the Spirit given in Scripture. The results of the Spirit are many and varied. Yet transformation into the image of God is the great objective, the major theme. And this comes from knowing and trusting God as he truly is, as he has revealed himself to us.

The terrible danger is not that we may have an imperfect and incomplete awareness of truth, and especially of salvation, but that we seek to make our faulty and even totally wrong concepts the definition of truth. False ideas of God, His character and nature, and the way in which He saves, led the religious systematizers to kill Jesus. The risk for us is that we do the same. Doing evil in the name of good is the ultimate blasphemy.

To reduce God’s wonderful offer of free and full salvation to a set of mechanical concepts, to make a loving relationship into a legal contract, to turn truth into error—all of this is as easy as setting up a system based on human concepts of appeasement, satisfaction, penalties, payments, retribution, justification, punishment, and reparation.

Those who reject the “legal satisfaction” system are easily denounced as heretics, and as easily disposed of, since “right” is on the side of such a system—and as “justified” as Shylock wanting to collect on his pound of flesh.

The preoccupation with legality and systematized “justice” led to Jesus’ death on the cross, since it was “better” that one man should die than the whole system be compromised. The demonic hatred of the scribes and Pharisees that led to their conspiracy to kill Jesus came from their commitment to a false idea of God and his saving methods. Could it be that we share some of these feelings and purposes that come from our own false ideas about God and salvation?

God’s grace is supposed to bring happiness and acceptance, not hostility and anger and plotting. If our theological system leads us to fight fellow believers, to use intrigue and deceit to damage others with whom we disagree, to think that the end justifies the means, then we need to think again. Or are we with those who kill grace?

## Ellen White Comments

The Holy Spirit will not compel men to take a certain course of action. We are free moral agents; and when sufficient evidence has been given us as to our duty it is left with us to decide our course. {RH, July 17, 1888}

Christ says, “The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life.” John 6:63. “He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life.” John 5:24. In every command and in every promise of the word of God is the power, the very life of God, by which the command may be fulfilled and the promise realized. He who by faith receives the word is receiving the very life and character of God. {COL 38}

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