

## Three Very Good Fruits

Hello Dear Listeners;

Last week we began a short series of messages in which we spent some time discovering the richness for what the bible calls “*The fruits of the Spirit.*” Though God’s word deals with these fruits in more than one passage, we concentrated on Paul’s letter to the Galatians, chapter 5 and in particular vv 22 and 23.

The churches Paul addressed were being confused by false teachers called Judaisers. They were teaching the new Christians that they were really not saved unless they obeyed all the Jewish ceremonial laws - such as circumcision, eating special foods and celebrating Jewish feast days.

But the apostle proclaimed the message of free grace and of salvation by Jesus Christ alone. So then, not “Christ plus works of the law,” but *Christ alone*, our works in devotion to God being evidence of the thankfulness we owe God for his gift of salvation.

That meant not giving free rein to the acts of one’s sinful nature, that whole ‘*basket of misery*’ which Paul enumerates in vv 19 and 20 of Galatians 5. A true hornet’s nest of sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry and witchcraft. Not to mention hatred, discord, jealousy and fits of

rage. All things which would horribly disrupt the fabric of Christian living and Christian care for one's neighbours.

Rather, a colourful basket of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Not that these jewels exhaust what Scripture has to say about the fruits of the Holy Spirit. But that especially in the love we are to show to God as well as to others these things have a leading role.

Today lets consider these three: *patience, kindness and goodness*.

An older, yet accurate rendering of that word *patience* is *long-suffering*. It's one of those words whose meaning stares out at you. A long-suffering person is one who exercises patience even in the face of those who annoy, oppose and trouble him. Such a person doesn't give way to violence in an outburst of anger. A long-suffering person may be severely troubled but doesn't lash out at his/her antagonists.

In this, long-suffering persons take their example from God himself for the bible testifies to his "*kindness, tolerance and patience*" (Romans 2:4). The same is said of Jesus Christ who also to the apostle Paul, displayed his "*unlimited patience*" as we can read in 1 Timothy 1:16.

Such long-suffering is not some accidental benefit for those who wish to live a godly life. It is fuelled and inspired by trust in the fulfilment of

God's promises. A long-suffering Christian may be weary and vexed because of the cruel opposition by fellow human beings. Yet he looks beyond the blows he's suffering to the rich inheritance of life everlasting, so, of peace and joy in the presence of God and the angels. ( Hebrews 6:12)

Long-suffering was desperately needed by the believers in Galatia who were being troubled and torn apart, as it were, by strife and cruel opposition of what we may call *the circumcision party*.

Patience, i.e., long-suffering is a powerful antidote and a weapon over against the hostility the church of Christ often suffers in this world. For it is a thoroughly human inclination to fight fire with fire. We see that being practised in many communities today. But it doesn't solve any problems. It only sets the stage for more bitterness and it runs counter to Christ's rule of love, even for one's enemies. He himself was abused, vilified, tortured, and hung on a cross. Although he could have called a legion of warrior angels to come down and destroy his adversaries he didn't. Because he came to suffer and to die in the place of those children he made his own. He suffered not only the wrath of humankind but the anger of his heavenly Father. That Father's anger *with our sin* was loaded on Jesus who became our substitute.

Why? That you and I and all who believe in him would live in kindness and goodness. For is human kindness not an endowment from God and a *reflection* ( be it an imperfect one), of God's own kindness shown to mankind. ( Romans 2:4) It is in his kindness that Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, "*loved of God*" that they were to continue. To continue to live and to work and to interact with others.

Read the bible and we see how often it testifies to the kindness of Jesus Christ who is called the "*pioneer of our salvation*," that we might follow him. A kindness that is astounding for as the hymn says, "*It saved a wretch like me.*" For we are all sinners and not one is worthy of the kindness and mercy of God.

Paul also mentions goodness and that, dear listeners, covers a vast territory. It is really a moral and spiritual excellence that is indicative of generosity of heart and of actions towards others.

It too is not an attitude to be cut out of a dictionary for wholesome living and to be pasted on your lips. It too is a divine gift David in his well-known Psalm 23 declares, "*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life...*" He knew that goodness, so closely allied with God's mercy to be a very sure thing. With those twin 'guarding angels', of goodness and mercy he would be able to walk

through the “valley of the shadow of death”. He would fear no evil. They would be with him, all the days of his life.

Paul wanted the Galatians to know that as well. It would have been easy to lose sight of God’s goodness and to begin to doubt it and even act contrary to it. The churches of Galatia were Immersed in a climate of provocation, self-conceit, envy and slander, with evil spirits no doubt at work, egging people on . Dangerous territory in which even Christians would be tempted to follow suit and adopt the same miserable mindset.

That’s why you can hear Paul saying ( ch. 6:1) “ *Watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*” And a few verses on, “ *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked, A man reaps what he sows.*” ( 6: 7) And again, “ *Let us not become weary in doing good for at a proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*” ( 6: 9)

Now the ‘fruit-basket’ of God the Holy Spirit does not run out. He doesn’t need to go looking and begging to keep it filled. God is an overflowing fountain of goodness and mercy, faithfulness, kindness and love.

The question is, do you and I treasure his very good gifts. Are we filled with the Spirit, treasuring those gifts which he would plant in our

hearts and see active in our daily walk of life? We're far removed in time and space from those in Asia minor in Paul's day. There doesn't seem to be any so-called circumcision party laying heavy burdens on the church today.

Yet the gospel of free grace in Jesus Christ though embraced by millions, meets more and more opposition today. Even in this Canada of ours, once rightly called a Christian nation. Yet in many quarters today it is not the Holy Spirit who is called on to lead people to live a life of devotion to God and his Son. Instead we are being bombarded with slogans elevating mankind's supposed "human rights" to do what is pleasing to oneself. In the process many end up doing "*what comes naturally*".

And what is that but those very "*Acts of the sinful nature*" like "Sexual immorality, impurity and idolatry, even witchcraft hatred, discord, jealousy , selfish ambition, drunkenness, orgies and the like", which the Holy Spirit ( and not just Paul, or some other preacher) says we must shun and fight against.

Would you and I inherit the kingdom of God, that vast spiritual empire that will come to completion on the day Christ returns to judge the living and the dead? Do you desire everlasting peace and joy, and a

society cleansed of all hatred, class warfare, and all the other by-products of sin and slavery to the devil?

Treasure the fruits of the Spirit and live in love, joy and peace.  
Practice true Christian faith in patience, kindness and goodness.  
These will surely bear fruit..... and God will be pleased and honoured.  
For His is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever,  
Amen, and thanks again for listening.