

## These Call for Commitment

Hello Dear Listeners;

God's way is a good, a safe and blessed way! Someone has said that when we live God's way he brings gifts into our lives" <sup>1</sup> Now that fact did not originate with Eugene H. Peterson who wrote it. For though he is a pastor, scholar, writer and poet he 'borrowed' that saying about God's way and his gifts brought into our lives, from the infallible Word of God!

In his Message The Bible in Contemporary Language, Peterson dealt with Paul's letter to the Galatians. The last few weeks on this program we've dealt with a verse or two in chapter five of that letter, namely, the verses 22 and 23 that speak about the fruits of the Spirit."

It is clear from Paul's letter as well as other passages in the bible that the Holy Spirit brings his gifts into our lives "Much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard". <sup>2</sup>

Today we want to consider these last three fruits mentioned by the apostle, namely, "*faithfulness, gentleness and self control*". When you read scripture it becomes clear that also these fruits mentioned in Galatians five are simply representative. Representative of a whole

---

<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson in The Message , p. 2123

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 2123

‘storehouse’ of fruits which God the Holy Spirit is willing and able to work into your life and mine.

This “faithfulness or simply “faith” really means *loyalty, fidelity*. Such loyalty was sorely lacking in the conduct of many of the Galatians, towards Paul. It appeared to the apostle that he had become their enemy simply because he told them the truth. ( ch. 4: 16) Yet it was not so much disloyalty to himself but more so, a lack of faithfulness to the Gospel, the living word of God. Right at the beginning of his letter Paul lamented the fact ( as he does in chapter 1:6) that they were “deserting” the one who called them ( “you” ) “*by the grace of Christ*” and were turning to a “*different gospel*” . Yet it was no gospel, no good news at all!

They were not committed to the one who alone was able to save them and give them peace. They needed their lives turned around and back to the Christ who had been proclaimed to them. They were in need also of this gift of the Spirit called *faithfulness*. For without it, as another biblical author would write, “ *Without faith It is impossible to please God*”.<sup>3</sup>

When the bible speaks of faith and faithfulness it means, more often than not, that which is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as “ *Being sure of what*

---

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 11:6

*we hope for and certain of what we do not see*". At the same time it is that sure knowledge of God whereby I hold for true everything he's revealed in his word. The Lord Jesus wants to see such faith and faithfulness in our dealings with others. Surely it speaks about a hearty commitment to love one's wife and family. To be faithful to the vows one has made.

Yet faithfulness is not some commodity on which you and I can easily lay our hands. It is rather a gift that the Holy Spirit would work in the hearts of frail and often unreliable, unfaithful human beings. Also in this Jesus Christ occupies a prior place. He was faithful unto death, even death on a cross. And he promised his disciples, who so often showed they were men of clay that he would be with them always. He'd send the Holy Spirit down that they might be led by Him and his Word. And he did not go back on his promise.

This world is full of fickleness and unfaithfulness abounds both in relation to God and to one's close neighbours, even one's family. Yet the Lord is faithful still. He did not simply dismiss those who were troubling Paul and his helpers as well as the sincere Christians in Galatia. He didn't turn his back to them. He instructed them all that they might take to heart the liberating news of living by grace alone and by faith alone, cherishing the gifts and the fruits of God's Spirit.

He'd also have you and me and all of mankind live in gentleness. or, as we could also read, "meekness," as well as self-control.

Now we mustn't misunderstand what Paul, ( and e.g. Christ himself in Matthew 5:5) meant when speaking about meekness as another fruit of the Spirit. It is not, as some ( many?) imagine it, to be weak or tame and deficient in courage. It certainly doesn't mean being quite satisfied with people running roughshod over you. It is instead *power under control!* In the Old testament Moses, is described as the meekest man on earth ( Numbers 12:3). Yet he was hardly a pushover. Jesus describes himself as "*meek and lowly*" in Matthew 11:28, 29) yet just think of his vigorous assertion of authority when he on two occasions cleansed the temple of those who had made it " a den of robbers".

Yet meekness involves a refusal to inflate oneself. It is not that kind of attitude by which "me and myself and I" are seen to rule the day. Paul calls attention to the need for humility when he writes to the church at Rome, "

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" ( Romans 12:3).*

Meek people see themselves as servants of God. They have a servant's heart rather than an inflated self-image. The latter was one of the sad things about those (supposed) Christians in Galatia who nevertheless promoted their self importance and their legalism as being indispensable for salvation.

Then there is self-control. There are those who say you certainly don't have to be a Christian to lay claim to that character quality. It is true, non-Christians can sometimes teach others a lesson in their refusal to be provoked and to *'fly off the handle'* when things don't go their way. Yet also the question for them is, "Why practice this restraint?" Is there no more to it than that you abide with what you consider to be a "golden rule?"

A Christian will acknowledge that he or she belongs not to himself/herself, but to Jesus Christ. It is he, Only Saviour and Master who lays claim to all of one's thinking, emotions, behavior, relationships. True self-control is really *abiding by God's control*. It is honoring Christ's command and consequently there is my prayer, "*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you o Lord!*" In all our ways we are to acknowledge his Lordship.

Said Paul, against such things, that is, this whole cornucopia of the fruits of the Spirit, "There is no law." At no time do you hear Christ

Jesus saying, “ Whoa, wait a minutes, stop living in love, rejoicing in me, living in peace and patience and showing bushels of kindness and being meek and gentle to boot!” You’re overdoing it!” Instead he says, “ *Grow in grace and in godliness.*” Let also these fruits *mature* and you be an instrument to sow faithfulness and perseverance, long-suffering and joy in the hearts of others. Point to way to Jesus Christ for if you belong to Jesus Christ you will crucify your sinful nature with its passions and desires ( cf Galatians 5: 24)

Then, through the Spirit you will go to work and exhibit those fruits that are the paving stones of that territory called “ The kingdom of God.” That walking this ‘pavement’ you will one day meet the Master, who will call you to enter the joy of his very presence.

Dear listeners, may our gracious God be near to you and equip you to walk in a godly what, the way of the Spirit, for Christ’s sake, Amen, and thank you so much for tuning in.