

## **Galatians 5 - Fruit of the Spirit Patience, Kindness & Goodness**

*[NKJV Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### **Introduction**

I am sure that there are many listeners who have been involved in appraisals at work, either having to do them for other people or being appraised themselves. I have to do a number of them at work for other people. Part of the process includes a review of the individual's behaviours against a set of characteristics that the company expects to be shown in our everyday work. It is one of the hardest parts to determine as it requires a knowledge of the person in their day-to-day activities. I usually request some feedback from customers to try to gain some evidence of the individual having shown these characteristics. It is interesting to think though that there is such importance put on behaviours and impressions in a standard work appraisal.

Today, we are looking at the second set in our short series on the 'Fruit of the Spirit', covering patience, kindness and goodness. These three traits, however, do not show up on the company's appraisal behaviours list. Hopefully after our talk today we will be able to see that they perhaps should be something that should be included, and I am sure customers would be more than happy for these three traits to be shown by all who they ask to do work for them.

But alas, these three aspects of the 'Fruit of the Spirit' are neither common nor popular. If we were to look at the first three in the series, namely love, joy, and peace, we would not find much objection. The pursuit of love is a very popular theme for people. Joy is something that people strive to find in some way or another. How relevant peace is! At the time I was preparing this talk, another war was breaking out rather closer to home than we would normally expect. The last set, which is faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, are still generally accepted qualities. But the middle three are perhaps not what we are encouraged to be in the world around us today. With a climate of 'looking after number one' and 'being all you can be' at whatever cost as quickly as you can, patience, kindness, and goodness are not likely to be at the top of the agenda.

What a challenge we face then as we consider these parts of the 'Fruit of the Spirit.' Let us imagine for a moment if we were to be appraised about our Christian lifestyle, would there be evidence that we demonstrate these traits? Alas, it is further complicated by the fact that it is not encouraged nor appreciated in the world in which we live. How would we perform?

There is another thing to consider here which adds a further challenge. It has probably already been mentioned during the first talk in our series. We are looking at three traits that make up the nine listed as the 'Fruit of the Spirit.' The key part is that it is fruit not fruits – they come as a whole. We cannot therefore separate them out and congratulate ourselves if we are good at a few, but not concerned about the ones that we are not so good at or the ones that are not so popular. If we fail in one aspect, we are failing to show the 'Fruit of the Spirit.'

So let us now look at these three – patience, kindness, and goodness – in more detail. I plan to look first at the definitions of each trait in terms of their biblical meaning. I will then look at some other scriptures for each to see what we can gain from them before making some practical conclusions.

## **Our Perfect Example**

But before we crack on with the things I have just listed, I want to just take a moment to think of why such traits are important to God, despite being generally unimportant in the world around us. There is even the point to make that we would not necessarily consider these things were we to discuss the concept of what God is like. So why are they here, and where have they come from? Of course, the answer is found in the life of our Lord Jesus. I remember hearing a speaker once talk about similar traits to these and he made a point that has always stuck with me. The paraphrase is this – ‘Attributes such as these were once considered personal weaknesses, but when the Lord came, they were revealed to be spiritual strengths.’

When we consider that statement, we see that these are not merely traits that God would like us to show in our lives. We are not just following a pattern, but we are actually trying to emulate these attributes of God. I suppose the clue is in the title, 'Fruit of the Spirit.' It is “of” not “from.” In showing the 'Fruit of the Spirit' we are able to represent the behaviours of God Himself here in our lives. What a privilege!

As well as this, we also see how essential these things are in providing our salvation. The patience of God means that all these years after the cross of Calvary, we are still able to be brought into the blessing of God’s love. The kindness of God is such that He is always eager to deal with the problem we have, by showing His care and compassion. Lastly, His goodness is such that, despite the pain and suffering of Calvary, God was prepared to do whatever was necessary in order bring us an undeserved good by saving us.

Alas, the world shuns this, as was demonstrated when Jesus Christ was rejected by this world and crucified. We face the same rejection when we show these attributes of God. However, our minds should be set on the objective to follow God’s ways and to be more like Him, rather than allowing the thoughts of the world around us to determine how we behave.

## **Patience – A Definition**

So, with this in mind we can start to look into what these aspects of the 'Fruit of the Spirit' actually mean. I will probably spend the most time on this because they are not quite as simple as they first appear to be. There is also the issue of making sure we have understood the biblical meaning, especially as the common meaning you may find in the dictionary, or even the understanding on the street, may not align with each other.

We arrive at patience then. Our first question then is whether this word is correctly translated in the first place. Although many English translations use the word patience, a Bible concordance would point to the use of the word long-suffering. Rather unhelpfully though a Bible dictionary is likely to suggest forbearance, long-suffering, or patience, for the same original Greek word. The breakdown of the original word is actually the combination of long and temper, which is why long-suffering was used in earlier translations. It would therefore point to long-suffering as a better term to understand its meaning.

When looking into this, I came across an interesting note which I think explains why in the past the distinction has been made. It pointed out that long-suffering is a quality that exercises self-restraint in the face of provocation, whereas patience is a quality that does not surrender or succumb under trial. The first is a restraint of action that could justly be displayed and is linked with mercy.

Patience is more to do with not becoming despondent and avoidance of failing under pressure. Naturally the first is a more fitting description for an attribute that God would display. Given that the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is to do with displaying such attributes, it makes sense to look at it from the long-suffering point of view.

This conclusion is by no means dismissing the other view of the word patience. It is an essential part of Christianity which is particularly linked with the hope we have in Christ. But it is not what is being considered here in the context of the 'Fruit of the Spirit.' Here we are looking at that behaviour which is reflective of the mercy that we have been shown. In the face of provocation, we do not take retribution or exercise vengeance. We show restraint and show mercy when we find ourselves being persecuted because of our walk with God. We look at the bigger picture which is one where all judgement will be carried out by a holy and righteous God. Let us be long tempered in our behaviour and in some small way reflect that which has been shown so much to ourselves by the One whom we seek to follow.

### **Kindness – A Definition**

Let us turn now to kindness where we find even more difficulties in trying to understand what is being presented. Again, the word kindness is not actually reflected in the Greek original. However, rather than providing an alternative, it seems that there is no English word that properly reflects the term. The King James Version uses gentleness in place of kindness – which is not to be confused with the same word which will be taken up during the next talk in this series. Clearly this is not a straightforward idea that is being presented.

I remember hearing a talk on this in the past and the speaker pointed out that the term gentleman was based on this idea. This of course was that old term gentleman which was reserved for men of certain standing in society, and therefore were expected to behave in a certain way. The term here is looking more towards a particular demeanor and manner of behaviour which is in a way morally excellent. Kindness is but a part of this, along with other factors such as upright behaviour, goodness of heart, good actions towards others, gentleness even. The German translation uses *Freundlichkeit*, which is directly translated friendliness. That idea is an open and friendly nature. Again, this doesn't quite do the job because friendliness can conjure up images of some hyper friendly person who is oblivious to everything and looks like they could be taken advantage of, a bit like kindness can. I suppose we need to think of someone who is interested in the well-being of others, no matter what the circumstances. This is not through compunction or rule, but because that is who they are.

Ultimately this term is best set out by looking at the Lord Jesus who, naturally, shows us how it is to be done. In doing so, we immediately remove any thought of this being some clueless person who is just always pleasant. We know that the Lord was not clueless, and He was sometimes very forward in His criticisms. But let us look to how He behaved towards others. He said what was needed, but He wasn't unkind. He didn't make snide remarks or behave rudely. He also always looked to help or comfort when it was asked of Him. Try to imagine what it must have been like to be around the Lord, and you start to get an idea of what this 'kindness' attribute is driving at. A good person, who does good, and behaves in a good way to those around them.

### **Goodness – A Definition**

Our last definition to consider is goodness. You will no doubt be pleased to know that goodness is the common English word used in place of the Greek original. However, we encounter a different problem because such a word in everyday language can easily diminish what this is looking to portray. I think that there are two particular misconceptions to deal with here. The first is the tendency to associate goodness with a sort of quaint naivety. Terms such as 'goody goody' comes to mind with the idea of someone who does 'these sort of things' but isn't really in the real world.

The second problem is that idea of a good person changes so frequently in the world around us that what was once considered good could be considered wrong from one day to the next. This is not even necessarily with regard to well-known moral questions, just everyday things.

The second problem is somewhat easier to deal with. In fact, we don't even need to look at the definition to dismiss the problem. Romans chapter 3 verse 12 tells us that nobody does good, not even one. That therefore means that we cannot rely on what the world calls good. Such a consideration of goodness is therefore only to be made with regard to believers as a result of the saving work of the Lord Jesus. As regenerated people, possessing a new life which is fit for eternity and the presence of God, we are therefore able to consider this term and apply it accordingly. The new life seeks only after what is truly righteous and we know that God is righteous. As we then consider goodness here, it can only be to consider good in relation to the righteousness of God and what He considers good.

With that issue laid to one side, the actual definition of goodness deals with the first problem. The term is quite closely linked to the original Greek work for kindness. It has similar language roots. However, the meaning behind this one is about having a desire, a drive, to do that which is good. I put it this way, instead of just saying doing good things, to emphasise the point. This is not just doing nice things for other people, it is about doing what is right, what is good. Goodness does not look to consider if it is popular or if everyone will enjoy it. It is simply about doing the good thing.

As a practical example we can look at a well-known part of the Lord Jesus' life when He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. Scripture is clear here that it was a righteous act. The Lord was zealous for His Father's house, but nobody could suggest that it was some soft-hearted, quaint act. It may be questioned as to whether this was a good act, but of course it was. Jesus did what was necessary to remove unrighteous activity from the temple. The cleansing of the temple enabled the ordinary person to come and worship God without the risk of being fleeced or taken advantage of.

Goodness in this sense speaks of a desire to do that which is good and righteous no matter how difficult or painful that might be.

### **Examples from Scripture**

Having looked at some definitions, I want to pick out a few parts of the Bible that show how these things are very much part of God's plan. The first one I have picked out is Romans chapter 2 verse 4:

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

This particular chapter in Romans speaks very much of God's judgement, but in the middle of it, the reader is reminded that we are not to think that a delay in judgement is somehow God not acting. We are shown here that God is being patient, He is being good to us. He has patiently delayed His judgement in order to lead rebellious people to repentance. He has been good by allowing sin, which is abhorrent to Him, to continue in order to bring people to repentance.

My next portion from the Bible is from Titus, chapter 3 verses 3 to 6:

“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we

have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

Much could be said about these verses, but I really wanted to pick out that word kindness again, that same attribute we have been looking at. In such contrast to our behaviours, God has shown His excellence and shown mercy. What an example it is to us in our interactions with others.

The last of my picked verses that I want to look at briefly is Ephesians chapter 2 verses 6 and 7:

“And [God] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

I wanted to bring out these verses because when you consider the definitions we have looked at, it is really wonderful that in eternity we will enjoy being shown so much grace by Someone who is morally excellent in the way He deals with us. What a prospect to look forward to! Should we not look to emulate that in our walk here in this world?

### **Showing the Fruit of the Spirit Today**

Now that we have briefly looked into the definitions of our three traits, as well as considering some scriptures which speak about them, I want to look finally at some practical aspects of our topic. There are three final points I would like to make which I hope will be of some practical help in allowing these attributes to be shown in our lives.

My first point therefore is regarding the type of activity we are considering when we think about the 'Fruit of the Spirit.' Fruit is mentioned in several different ways in the Bible. We learn in John 15 about branches being pruned where no fruit is present. We also have another Scripture that says that we know believers by their fruits – Matthew 7. Colossians chapter 1 also speaks about bearing fruit in every good work. Often fruit is linked with the idea of doing good works for the Lord, but I don't believe that is the case here in Galatians 5. The idea here seems to be more in keeping with the evidence of something being done. You could say that these attributes are the evidence of the work of the Spirit in our lives. They are the natural outpouring of a Spirit led life in the way in which we deal with people around us. I believe this is an important thing to grasp because it shows us how to better go about achieving this. We are not able to simply say, “I am going to go and show kindness or goodness to such and such a person today” – that will not work. This is something that has to come as a natural result of letting the Spirit have more and more control over our lives, over our person and being, such that these attributes just simply come to the fore. They are not a decision; they are a reaction. So, our decision has to be to allow the Spirit of God to be more in control of our lives. That's achieved by learning from the Word and knowing better the persons of the Lord Jesus and the Father. It's also by realising more what our natural state is like and having a better focus on the future we look forward to in heaven. All of these things will help us in making us better able to show these attributes.

We come then to my second point which is to consider that the 'Fruit of the Spirit' requires interaction with others. Even with the Lord this was the case. Obviously, these attributes were there perfectly already in the person of the Lord Jesus. But they were only made known to the world when He was here dealing with those around Him. We have seen from the definitions of kindness and goodness that they involve others in order to show them. When Paul wrote this there was the expectation in his writing that these traits were to be displayed in the day-to-day interactions that each believer has with others, both fellow believers and non-believers. This is an increasingly important point in our society. Never before have we been so controlled as to who we

interact with. Social media and such things are pushing us towards only those we agree with. It is much easier to get on with people with a common mind set. But how does one show patience to those who agree with us already? Let us be challenged here to see that we need to be meeting with people in order to show these things that should be evident in our lives. Again, our example in the Lord helps us. He came down to this world to walk among those who not only disagreed with Him but who actually hated Him for what He declared about who God is.

My third and final point is to look at what these things are not. Let us look at Galatians 5 verses 19 to 21 to help us with this. If we are struggling to see what the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is, then at the very least we can use these verses to show us what it is not. Enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions are the particular ones that would be counter to our three aspects today. If these things are regularly featuring in our lives, then we can be sure that we are not giving the Holy Spirit enough room in our lives. I am not usually a fan of coming up with things we shouldn't do because usually it does not work so well. But in this case, it can act as a check against our performance concerning the manifestation of the 'Fruit of the Spirit' in our lives.

I hope these thoughts have been of use and encourage us to go after these things; and to really challenge ourselves to show these features more in our lives by allowing the Spirit of God more influence in our lives. It will be increasingly out of place in this world to do so, but how much we can take comfort in the fact that, in so doing, we will be following in our Lord's footsteps.

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