

Mortify the Deeds of the Body

“They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5).

“To be fleshly-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace . . .” (Rom. 8:6).

“If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13).

Paul makes it very clear in these words that there are two ways of living, two kinds of character and disposition—the natural and the spiritual; and further, that one leads to death and one to life.

One way takes no effort, no knowledge, no ability. It is just acting naturally, pleasing ourselves, doing what we want to do, following nature.

Because men’s interests and capacities and backgrounds differ, the way of the flesh takes a wide range of courses, some, in fact, very good and commendable from a natural point of view. But all come under the general heading of the will of the flesh, and all end in eternal death at last.

The other way is to realize, from the Word of God, that the whole range of the way of the flesh, from worst to best, leads only to death, and to thankfully accept the life-giving way of the Spirit. This way involves setting the whole life to the task of learning and applying the instructions God has given, and constantly seeking His help in absorbing and fulfilling them—constantly examining ourselves: our hearts, our motives, our desires.

The greatest enemy to our salvation is taking it for granted, being satisfied with ourselves, seeing nothing wrong.

Baptism, and membership in a Christadelphian ecclesia, is no passport to final acceptance. They are just the barest beginning. We are warned that the way of life is narrow and hard and mortifying to the flesh, but that in the infinite mercy of God it is within the reach of all who give their whole lives and energies to obtaining it.

God does not mock men by requiring impossibilities, but—neither does He permit men to mock Him by presumption and complacency. He presents Himself as infinitely tender and eager to help where His help is sincerely and wholeheartedly sought, but a consuming fire against the double-minded, the careless, the worldly and the insincere. He is a terrible, destroying God, and a wonderful, loving, compassionate God.

And He is no respecter of persons. The Christadelphian name will awaken no response and recognition with Him, if the Christadelphian character—the mind of Christ—spiritual-mindedness—is not present.

Writing to the Galatians, chapter 5, Paul gives two lists of characteristics which are in direct contrast to each other—the “works of the flesh,” and the “fruits of the Spirit.”

We need not dwell on the first list. They are the negative, natural aspect. They do not come under the description of “whatsoever things are lovely, pure, of good report,” etc., which we are exhorted to meditate upon—to feed our minds upon. If we concentrate on absorbing and developing the beautiful fruits of the Spirit, the works of the flesh will be choked out and put to death.

Let us then, briefly, once again consider the fruits of the Spirit, one by one, remembering that the apostle is here spelling out the “living according to the Spirit” which is essential to obtaining salvation.

Let us constantly remember that these are not just beautiful and desirable and pleasant-to-think-about things. The Scriptures warn us repeatedly that they are vital and essential things—not just hazy ideals but definite requirements—that there is no hope of life without this spiritual character. Let us call to memory the very striking and searching expression of the Spirit to Ezekiel, concerning those who crowded to hear him—

“They sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them, for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

“Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear Thy words, but they do them not” (Eze. 33:31-32).

They got so much satisfaction and enjoyment and relief from sitting piously before Ezekiel and listening to all his teachings and warnings that they could go out for another whole week and live according to the flesh before they need to come back and ease their conscience by dutifully sitting and listening to him again.

They would have been terribly hurt and offended to hear the Spirit’s evaluation of them. They would say, as so many of the flesh say when presented with the true facts, “How discouraging!”

James gives the same picture when he speaks of a man looking at himself in the searching mirror of God’s perfect law, and then going right out and forgetting what he saw. Forgetting is our great problem. We see everything so clearly and beautifully when we sit listening to an exhortation, and then we go and straightway forget and act like the rest of the natural, fleshly human animals of the world.

We need helps to our memory. We need systematic daily, even hourly, reminding. At the turn of each hour we should stop for a quiet moment and get our spiritual bearings, check up on where our minds and interests and attitude have strayed.

There are nine of these fruits of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-23—three threes. That’s a simple, easy pattern to remember—

Love	Longsuffering	Faith
Joy	Gentleness	Meekness
Peace	Goodness	Temperance

The last should be, more properly, not “Temperance” but “Self-Control.” We should memorize this list (as we should many important lists in God’s inspired Book of Life)—go over it often in our mind—check our characters and actions repeatedly on each item in order. This is a matter of life and death, like finding the way out of a burning building while precious seconds remain.

Aid the memory by some phrase using the initials, as—

“Let Joy Prevail: Let God’s Grace Fill My Thoughts.”

When Jesus came to the fig tree and found no fruit when there should have been fruit, he cursed it, and it shrivelled to the roots, as a terrible and impressive lesson to all his professed servants. When the divine husbandman in the parable came seeking fruit on his tree, and found none, he said (Lk. 13:7)—

“Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?”

And when the vine-dresser examined the vine and found branches not bearing fruit, he cut them off, and had them gathered and cast into the fire and burned.

All will depend in the end upon whether or not we are found bearing fruit: these Fruits of the Spirit.

Let us then, with sober earnestness, realizing the dreadful issues involved, constantly check ourselves against this list of spiritual fruits on which our destinies depend. Peter says that if these things be in you and abound they make you that ye shall be “neither barren nor unfruitful.” If these spiritual qualities do not “abound” in us—that is, not just be present, but overflow and dominate our whole being and course of life—then we are guaranteeing our own rejection as surely as if we were writing our death-warrant.

LOVE

Love is the first and greatest. It is the power and spirit of them all. It must radiate like light from us toward everyone and everything. In defining what love is, and how it acts, John lays the very clearly-defined foundation which we must constantly keep in mind:

“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” (1 Jn. 5:3).

If we get away from the commandments, we are not loving in the scriptural and acceptable sense, however affectionate our feelings or good our intentions. There must be a careful adherence to divine commandments to keep love in a sound and healthy path.

But there is far more to love—ininitely more—than a cold, technical compliance to command. In our necessary opposition to the wishy-washy sentimentalism of the world's religion, we may tend to lose sight of some of the immeasurable depths and beauties of love.

Love is far more than any technical definition can encompass. Love is a transformation of the mind from the cramped self-centeredness of the natural man to the universal beneficent goodwill of the man of God. Love is complete and glorious newness of life.

In our defence of sound doctrine, in our condemnation of evil, in our opposition to looseness and laziness and compromise and declension, let us never—never—belittle or betray love.

Let us never crush love, or cast it aside, even momentarily, on the pretext of any other virtue or necessity. What cannot be done in love and kindness should not be done at all. It is so easy to let self-righteousness and natural antagonism and contentiousness trample love underfoot on the pretext of duty.

JOY

The second fruit of the Spirit is Joy. The command to rejoice is repeated over and over. It is a vital ingredient of godliness. It is essential to pleasing God. It may at first thought seem strange to be commanded to rejoice, for we think of joy as something that comes naturally as a result of joyous things and events. But deeper thought will reveal the wisdom and necessity of the command. The brief spontaneous giggle of a temporarily pleased and gratified infant has no relation to the steady, unchanging, intelligent, spiritual "Joy" here referred to.

We are commanded to rejoice in everything in our lives, good or bad, for all is of God and all is for a wise and loving purpose. We rejoice in the fundamental, unchanging realities that God is good, and that God is great, and that all things work steadily forward toward eternal joy.

A sour, complaining, self-pitying attitude is purely of the smallness and evilness of the flesh. If we are not fundamentally, basically joyful, we cannot please God—rather we insult and dishonor Him.

Paul "rejoiced in tribulation." The disciples rejoiced that they were considered worthy to share in the sufferings of Christ. Jesus said:

"Rejoice and be exceeding glad when men revile and persecute you" (Matt. 5:11-12). The infinite goodness of God and His purpose must overwhelm and overshadow every other consideration in our mind. Paul had the sound, sensible, balanced perspective when he said—

"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Paul realized the vital importance of this spiritual fruit of thankful joyfulness if we are to be of any constructive use in God's purpose. Nehemiah exhorted the rebuilders of Jerusalem, at a time of trouble, and in a day of pitifully small things—

"The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10).

All who are sorry for themselves or difficult to please or given to complaining or always wanting something they haven't got, or in any way dissatisfied with their lot are barren of this spiritual fruit, and are not only making themselves and others unnecessarily unhappy in this life, but are cutting themselves off from the life to come.

PEACE

Peace is the third fruit of the Spirit. Jesus said, on the last night, as he went forth to suffering and death (Jn. 14:27):

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Throughout the Scriptures we are invited to peace, to:

“Cast all our cares on God, for He careth for us.”

Do we really believe in this promise? Have we a real and assuring faith in God’s constant care? Paul, writing to the Philippians, gives a clear, specific formula for peace. He says:

“Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, Rejoice!

“Let your gentleness be known unto all men.

“Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:4-6).

The five essential ingredients of peace which he here lists are: Rejoicing, gentleness, casting all care and worry and anxiety upon God, prayer, and thanksgiving—a healthy, spiritual, beautiful frame of mind. And the assurance he gives, if this formula is followed in loving faith, is:

“The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

The commands of God are all designed to purify and beautify our characters and make our lives fuller and richer. They are the loving instructions of infinite wisdom for controlling and curing mankind’s worse disease—sin-in-the-flesh.

All natural mankind are deathly sick of this disease. It has filled the world with sorrow and suffering and inequality and oppression and hatred and confusion.

Let us have the wisdom to carefully follow the instructions of the Great Physician, and enjoy the glorious spiritual health and joy that these fruits of the Spirit portray.

Paul says that Christ is our peace, and in all his salutations to his brethren he speaks of peace as a blessing from God, and prays that his brethren may receive it abundantly.

Are we sincerely concerned with the spiritual peace of our brethren? If we are, we will be very careful to do everything that will contribute to their peace, and avoid everything that will disturb it. Then we can with Paul, sincerely pray to God that His peace may be on them. It is hypocrisy to pray for their peace while wilfully disturbing them.

LONGSUFFERING

The fourth fruit is long-suffering—patience toward others. This is the first and basic aspect of love that Paul enumerates in 1 Corinthians 13:

“Love suffereth long” (v. 4).

This is certainly the most important aspect of love, and for most of us it seems to be the most difficult. How often does our “love” break down at this first testing point! Love—true divine love—suffereth long, and is kind.

We may find we can make quite a fair show of our spiritual fruit if we are allowed to display them in attractive and pleasing circumstances at our own convenience, but the enumeration of “longsuffering” faces us with the problem of irritations, obstruction, opposition, provocation.

How does our long-suffering stand up? Our patience and long-suffering are the measure of the depth and sincerity and spirituality of our professed love for others. If our works are marred by impatience and irritation, then our motive is exposed as not spiritual love but fleshly self-gratification.

GENTLENESS

The fifth is gentleness. That is mildness, sweetness of character.

James says the wisdom from above is “gentle and easy to be intreated,” quick to adjust and conform and conciliate where comfort or convenience or the desires and well being of others is concerned. Never harsh, or abrupt, or willful, or selfish. Jesus said:

“Blessed are the peacemakers ... agree with your adversary quickly” (Matt. 5:9, 25).

And the Spirit through Paul instructs us to be at peace with all men, to the fullest extent that is possible in harmony with faithfulness. Some bearing the name of Christ glory in conflict and harshness and antagonism to mankind, thinking thus to manifest their “zeal for the Lord.” But the Spirit of Christ is the spirit of gentleness.

This “gentleness” is the same word Jesus used when he said—

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly. . .

“My yoke is easy” (Matt. 11:28-30).

“Easy” here is “gentle.” His yoke was gentleness—a loving, but all-powerful yoke.

Paul, who had full authority to condemn, appealed in love to the proud and self-satisfied Corinthians:

“I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:1).

And God said through Hosea, of backsliding Israel:

“I drew them with bands of love” (Ho. 11:4).

GOODNESS

The sixth fruit is goodness. Jesus himself disclaimed the description of “good,” saying—

“There is none good but God” (Mk. 10:18).

This shows the height to which this spiritual fruit points. Here is Godlikeness—complete devotion to truth and righteousness and purity and holiness—absolute sincerity and integrity—hating anything that in the slightest degree deviates from truth and wholesomeness. Here is the preserving salt of incorruptibility that gives all the other spiritual fruits soundness and purpose. Jesus said:

“Truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32).

Only perfect truth can give freedom from corruption. Paul’s words concerning the flesh make a striking contrast to this most exalted of the fruits of the Spirit:

“In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good” (Rom. 7:18).

And James declares that all goodness and perfection are gifts from above.

FAITH

Seventh is Faith. Faith is the channel by which everything is accomplished. Faith is our link with the divine purpose. Faith is the unshakable conviction of the universal power and reality of God that turns weakness into strength and overcomes the world—

“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith!” (1 Jn. 5:4)

Jesus made everything hinge on faith:

“All things are possible to him *that believeth*” (Mk. 9:23).

In view of the magnitude and immensity of the divine relationship to which we have been called, we exclaim with the disciples:

“Lord, increase our faith!” (Lk. 17:5).

But there is a vital part in the process that we must do:

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Our duty is to increasingly build the power of our faith by constant study of the Word.

How clear is the majestic picture faith portrays, compared with the pitiful confusion and speculation of the world:

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God” (Heb. 11:3).

MEEKNESS

The eighth fruit is meekness. The word for meek literally means “tame,” not wild. It is somewhat related to gentleness, which comes before, and also to the final fruit, self-control, which follows.

While gentleness carries more the idea of consistent kindness and courtesy toward others, meekness refers rather to the wisdom of true humility and lowliness. “Learn of me,” said Jesus:

“For *I am meek* and lowly, and ye shall find rest to your souls” (Matt. 11:29).

The opposite of meekness is pride and self-satisfaction and desire for praise and admiration. Meekness is true wisdom. It sees all the foolishness of mortal pride and glory that brings no real happiness and satisfaction and only ends in death.

TEMPERANCE

And finally, Self-Control—the full control of the scripturally-enlightened mind over all the desires and reactions and impulses of the flesh—what a glorious, worthwhile culmination!

What a wonderful promise that if we will do our part, God will “work in us to will and do of His good pleasure,” that we may be gloriously transformed in the spirit of our mind, given power to overcome the flesh! Following the list of these nine beautiful fruits of the Spirit, the apostle continues—

“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:24-25).

(Taken from “Be Ye Transformed” Volume 2, G. Growcott.)