

THE TEACHING LEGACY OF DEREK PRINCE

Faith as a Fruit

In my previous letter, we looked at the nine spiritual gifts listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. Now we turn to the list of the nine forms of spiritual fruit Paul gives in Galatians 5:22–23: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*” (KJV). The seventh form of fruit listed here is faith. Recent versions offer a variety of translations, such as “faithfulness,” “fidelity,” or “trustfulness.” However, the Greek noun Paul uses is *pistis*. This is the basic word for faith throughout the New Testament.

Fruit vs. Gifts

One way to bring the difference into focus is to picture a Christmas tree and an apple tree. A Christmas tree bears gifts; an apple tree bears fruit. A gift is both attached to a Christmas tree and removed from it by a single, brief act. There is no direct connection between the tree and the gift: one may be a garment, the other a fir tree. The gift tells us nothing about the nature of the tree from which it is taken.

On the other hand, there is a direct connection between an apple and the tree that bears it. The nature of the tree determines the nature of the fruit—both its kind and its quality. An apple tree can never bear an orange. A healthy tree will never bear unhealthy fruit (see Matthew 7:17–20). The fruit on the apple tree is not produced by a single act, but is the result of a steady, continuing process of growth and development. To produce the best fruit, the tree must be carefully

cultivated. This requires time, skill and labor.

Let us apply this simple analogy to the spiritual realm. A spiritual gift is both imparted and received by a single, brief transaction. It tells us nothing about the nature of the person who exercises it. On the other hand, spiritual fruit expresses the nature of the life from which it proceeds; it comes only as the result of a process of growth. To attain the best fruit, a life must be carefully cultivated—with time, skill and labor.

We may express the difference in another way by saying that gifts express *ability*, fruit expresses *character*.

Which is more important? In the long run, undoubtedly, character is more important than ability. The exercise of gifts is temporary. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13, there will come a time when gifts will no longer be needed. But character is permanent. The character we develop in this life will determine what we will be throughout eternity. One day we will leave our gifts behind; our character will remain forever.

However, we do not need to choose one at the expense



of another. Gifts do not exclude fruit; fruit does not exclude gifts. Rather, they are intended to complement each other. Gifts should provide practical expressions for character, just as they did perfectly in the person of Jesus Himself. His loving, gracious character was expressed by the fullest possible exercise of spiritual gifts. Only through the gifts could He meet the needs of the people to whom He had come to minister, fully expressing to them the nature of His heavenly Father whom He had come to represent (see John 14:9–11).

We should seek to follow Christ's pattern. The more we develop the attributes that characterized Jesus—love, concern, and compassion—the more we will need the same gifts He exercised in order to give practical expression to these attributes. The more fully we are equipped with these gifts, the greater will be our ability to glorify God our Father, just as Jesus did.

Fruit, then, expresses character. When all nine forms of spiritual fruit are present and fully developed, they represent the totality of Christian character, each form of fruit satisfying a specific need and each complementing the rest. Within this totality, the fruit of faith may be viewed from two aspects that correspond to two different but related uses of the Greek word *pistis*. The first is trust; the second is trustworthiness.

Faith as Trust

The first aspect of faith as a fruit is trust. *The Jerusalem Bible* translates *pistis* as “trustfulness.” Many times over, Jesus emphasized that one of the

requirements for all who would enter the Kingdom of God is to become as little children (see Matthew 18:1–4; 19:13–14; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17). There is probably no quality more distinctively characteristic of childhood than trustfulness. And yet, paradoxically, it is a quality that is seen at its perfection in the most mature men of God—men such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul. We may conclude, therefore, that the degree to which we cultivate trustfulness is a good measure of our spiritual maturity.

More fully, the fruit of faith—in this aspect—may be defined as a quiet, steady, unwavering trust in the goodness, wisdom and faithfulness of God. No matter what trials or seeming disasters may be encountered, the person who has cultivated this form of fruit remains calm and restful in the midst of it all. He has an unshakable confidence that God is still in complete control of every situation and that, in and through all circumstances, God is working out His own purpose of blessing for each one of His children.

The outward expression of this kind of trust is stability. This is beautifully pictured by David in Psalm 125:1: “*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.*” All earth's mountains may tremble and shake and even be totally removed—except for one. Zion can never be moved. God has chosen it for His own dwelling place, and it alone will abide forever.

So it is with the believer who has learned to trust. Others all around him may give way to panic and confusion, but he remains calm and secure. “*His foundation is in the holy mountains*”

(Psalm 87:1).

We must know for sure that our soul is safe in the Lord's hands. The key to this kind of trust is commitment. We first make a definite, personal commitment of our life to Jesus Christ. Then in the hour of testing—perhaps at the very threshold of eternity—we do not need to make any further commitment. We need only rest in the commitment we already made—one that included both life and death, time and eternity.

In Psalm 37:5 David says, “*Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.*” More literally the verse says, “and He is doing it.” Two things are here required of us. The first is an act, “commit.” The second is an attitude, “trust.” The act of commitment leads to the attitude of trust. So long as we continue in an attitude of trust, David assures us, God “is doing it.”

Committing a matter to the Lord is like taking cash to the bank and depositing it in our account. Once we have received the teller's receipt for our deposit, we need no longer be concerned about the safety of our money. It is now the bank's responsibility. It is ironic that people who have no difficulty in trusting a bank to take care of their money find it much harder to trust God concerning some vital personal matter.

The example of the bank deposit illustrates an important factor in making a successful commitment. When we walk out of the bank, we carry an official receipt, indicating the date, the place, and the amount of our deposit. There are no uncertainties. We need to be equally specific

concerning those things committed to God. We need to know, without a shadow of doubt, both what we have committed and when and where the commitment was made. We also need the Holy Spirit's official "receipt" acknowledging that God has accepted our commitment.

Trust Must Be Cultivated

Trust is like all forms of fruit: it needs to be cultivated and it passes through various stages of development before it reaches full maturity. The words of David in Psalm 62 well illustrate the development of trust: "*He [God] only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken*" (verse 2, NASB). But after making exactly the same declaration of trust in God, he says, "*I shall not be shaken*" (verse 6, NASB). Between verses 2 and 6, David progressed from not being "greatly shaken" to not being shaken at all.

We need to be as honest about ourselves as David was. Before our trust has come to maturity, the best we can say is, "I shall not be greatly shaken!" At this stage, troubles and opposition will shake us, but they will not overthrow us. However, if we continue to cultivate our trust, we will come to the stage where we can say, "I shall not be shaken"—period! Nothing will be able even to shake us—much less overthrow us.

Trust of this kind is in the realm of the spirit rather than the emotions. We may turn once more to the personal testimony of David for an illustration. He says to the Lord, "*When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee*" (Psalm 56:3 NASB). Here David recognizes

two conflicting influences at work in himself simultaneously: trust and fear. Fear is superficial, in the emotions; trust is deeper down, in the spirit.

Mature trust is like a deep, strong river, making its irresistible way to the sea. At times, the winds of fear or doubt may blow contrary to the river's course and whip up foaming waves on its surface. But these winds and waves cannot change or hinder the deep, continuing flow of the waters below the surface, as they follow the path marked out for them by the river's bed to their predetermined end in the sea.

Trust in its full maturity is beautifully exemplified by the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12: "*For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*"

By all worldly standards, at this stage Paul was a failure. Some of his most influential friends and supporters had turned against him. Of all his close coworkers, only Luke remained with him. Demas had actually abandoned him and turned back to the world. Paul was infirm and aged, a manacled prisoner in a Roman jail, awaiting unjust trial and execution at the hands of a cruel, depraved despot. Yet his words ring with serene, unshakable confidence. Beyond the horizon of time he looks forward to an unclouded day—"that day" when the righteous Judge will award him "*the crown of righteousness*" (2 Timothy 4:8).

For Paul, as for David, trust was the outcome of an act of commitment. It is expressed in his own words: "*He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him.*" "Trusting" was the result of

"entrusting." Years previously Paul had made an irrevocable commitment of himself to Christ. Subsequent trials and sufferings gradually brought forth an ever-deepening trust that had now come to its full fruition in a Roman dungeon, its radiance all the brighter by contrast with its gloomy setting.

Faith as Trustworthiness

We turn now to the second aspect of faith as a fruit: trustworthiness. Linguistically, trustworthiness is in fact the original meaning of *pistis*. In *Arndt and Gingrich's* standard lexicon of New Testament Greek, the first specific definition given of *pistis* is: "faithfulness, reliability." If we go back to the Old Testament, the same applies to the Hebrew word for faith, *emunah*. Its primary meaning is "faithfulness"; its secondary meaning is "faith." The verb from which it is derived gives us the word *Amen*—"So be it" or "Let it be confirmed."

Both meanings alike converge in the person and nature of God Himself. If we view faith as trust, its only ultimate basis is God's trustworthiness. If we view faith as trustworthiness, it is only through our trust that the Holy Spirit is able to impart to us God's trustworthiness. God Himself is both the beginning and the end of faith. His trustworthiness is the only basis for our trust: our trust in Him reproduces in us His trustworthiness.

Probably no attribute of God is more persistently emphasized throughout the Scriptures than His trustworthiness. In the Old Testament there is one special Hebrew word reserved for this attribute:

chesed, which is variously translated “goodness,” “kindness,” “lovingkindness,” or “mercy.” However, none of these translations fully expresses its meaning.

There are two distinctive features of God’s *chesed*. First, it is the expression of God’s free, unmerited grace. It goes beyond anything that man can ever deserve or demand as a right. Second, it is always based on a covenant that God voluntarily enters into. We may combine these two features by saying that *chesed* is God’s trustworthiness in fulfilling His covenant commitments, which go beyond anything that we can deserve or demand.

We thus find a close connection between three important Hebrew concepts: *emunah*, “faith or faithfulness”; *chesed*, “God’s trustworthiness”; *berith*, “a covenant.” This is the recurrent theme in this psalm:

And My faithfulness [emunah] and My lovingkindness [chesed] will be with him...My lovingkindness [chesed] I will keep for him forever, and My covenant [berith] shall be confirmed [amen] to him...But I will not break off My lovingkindness [chesed] from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness [emunah]. My covenant [berith] I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Psalm 89:24, 28, 33–34

The last verse brings out a special relationship between God’s trustworthiness and the words of His mouth. There are two things God will never do: break His covenant or go back on what He has said. God’s trustworthiness, imparted by the Holy Spirit, will reproduce the same characteristics in us. It will make us

persons of unfailing integrity and honesty.

We have already seen that God’s *chesed*, expressed in His covenant commitments, is based on His grace, going beyond anything that we, its recipients, can ever deserve or demand. This too will be reflected in our covenant relationships with fellow believers. We will not limit ourselves to the mere requirements of justice or some legal form of contract. We will be ready to make the full commitment God made in establishing His covenant with us—to lay down our lives for one another. “*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 John 3:16). It is by the laying down of our lives that we enter into full covenant relationship with God and with one another.

Scripture paints a fearful picture of the breakdown of moral and ethical standards that will mark the close of this present age (see 2 Timothy 3:1–4). As the world thus plunges deeper into darkness, God’s people must—by contrast—be more determined than ever to walk in the light of fellowship. We must show ourselves both willing and qualified to enter into and maintain those covenant relationships upon which fellowship depends. For this purpose we will need to cultivate to full maturity the fruit of trustworthiness.

Summary

Spiritual fruit differs from spiritual gifts in two main ways. First, a spiritual gift can be imparted and received by a single, brief transaction; fruit must be cultivated by a continuing process,

requiring time, skill and labor. Second, gifts are not directly related to the character of those who exercise them, while fruit is an expression of character. Ideally, fruit and gifts should balance one another in a combination that glorifies God and serves humanity.

As a form of fruit, faith may be understood in two distinct ways: as trust and as trustworthiness. Trust is manifested in stability, which increases as trust matures. It requires an initial act of commitment. We base our trust on God’s trustworthiness. God demonstrates His trustworthiness toward us by fulfilling His covenant commitments, which are beyond anything we can deserve or demand. In turn, it makes us the kind of people who are willing and able to enter into and maintain covenant commitments, both with God and with one another.

ADAPTED FROM A NEW WINE ARTICLE ENTITLED “FAITH AS A FRUIT.”

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