

Fruit of the Spirit: Patience, Kindness and Goodness

A Series on the Fruit of the Spirit: Part 3

The Fruit of the Spirit results when a Christian is “led by the Spirit,” and the second group of three (patience, kindness and goodness) can be generally understood as attributes focused on human relationships. In examining the Greek text, one can gain a better understanding of these attributes and how the Holy Spirit intends them.

Patience

There are several Greek terms that are translated into English as “patience,” which reflect the subtle nuances of meaning of “to forebear” or “endure,” “persevere with steadfastness,” or “longsuffering.” Galatians 5:22 uses the Greek noun “makrothymia” for patience, which places an emphasis on “longsuffering” as its meaning.

How is divine patience related to human patience? The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:21-35) provides an example of the connection of divine patience to human patience.

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience (verb: **makrothymeō**) with me and I will repay you everything.’ And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience (verb: **makrothymeō**) with me and I will repay you.’ But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant is all about forgiveness. The parable follows Jesus’ instruction on forgiving a person who sins against you (Matt 18:15-20); essentially, Jesus instructs Peter to forgive an unlimited number of times. It is worth noting that forgiveness is not listed as a Fruit of the Spirit, instead the biblical text associates patience with forgiveness.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant draws a contrast between a debt so enormous that it was impossible to repay with a debt that was easily serviceable. The portrayal illustrates God’s incomparable mercy, grace and longsuffering patience with human beings.

Through this parable, it becomes apparent the human patience is dependent on divine patience. God, through his longsuffering, provides an opportunity for salvation, but the Believer’s faith is proved genuine when he is patient and practices forgiveness.

Kindness

The Greek noun used in Galatians 5:22 for “kindness” is “chrēstotēs.” Paul uses this noun to emphasize the incomprehensible kindness of God. Perhaps because human beings are conditioned to respond on immediate rewards and punishment, God’s longsuffering patience is usually taken for granted.

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Paul confronts the Jews in Rome with this very issue:

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness (**chrēstotēs**) of God leads you to repentance? (Rom 2:4)

In confronting the sin of their self righteous attitude, Paul reminds the Jewish religious authorities of the purpose of God's supreme kindness and patient tolerance to bring them to repentance and salvation. For the Jews, cognizant of God's covenant keeping lovingkindness, divine kindness should be a cause for self reflection which God intended as an opportunity for repentance.

On several occasions, Paul makes clear that the kindness of God does not desire the death of the sinner, but his salvation:

Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness (**chrēstotēs**) and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness (**chrēstotēs**), if you continue in His kindness (**chrēstotēs**); otherwise you also will be cut off. (Rom 11:20-22)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness (**chrēstotēs**) toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:4-7)

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness (**chrēstotēs**) of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Tit 3:3-7)

Kindness, with a focus towards salvation, is the means to draw others to Jesus Christ. Paul points out that kindness (and patience) are essential components of love:

Love is patient, love is kind (**chrēsteuomai**) and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

For the faithful, agapē love is alive, active and a character of the elect:

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness (**chrēstotēs**), humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Col 3:12-13)

Thus by God's incomprehensible divine kindness that brought salvation through Jesus Christ and its total fulfillment in the future, the Fruit of the Spirit reflects His kindness in love in the Believer as he relates to his church and community with the goal of pointing back to Jesus Christ.

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Goodness

Goodness, in Galatians 5:22, is translated from the Greek noun “agathōsynē” which has the additional meaning of “uprightness” and “generosity.” “Agathōsynē” is of the word group “agathos” which means “good” and has a wide range of meanings (i.e. material, intellectual, moral or religious context) but usually in the sense of denoting the excellence of the object being described. From the very beginning, Satan implies that the concept of good is rooted in God:

The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:4-5)

This is a contrast to our contemporary culture who sees that man is good apart from God. Yet despite having the divine gift of discerning good from evil (1 Kings 3:6-14), Solomon was not deceived and certainly saw his own limitations:

Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins. (Ecc 7:20)

The English term “good” is impossible to define. Two questions illustrate the Christian dilemma:

Is an act good because God commands it?

If this were true, it poses the problem that morality is subject to God’s whim. It is saying that an act is good because God simply says so, not because it is inherently good; the difference between good and evil does not matter to God.

Or does God command an act because it is good?

If this were true, it poses the problem that there is a moral law that is external to and higher than God. This means God is not sovereign.

While philosophers debate, Jesus is explicit that no one can be good except God alone; Jesus implies that an absolute moral standard is rooted in the character and nature of God.

As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. (Mark 10:17-18; Matt 19:16-17; Luke 18:18-19)

Thus human beings can only know and realize goodness when one has a personal relationship with God. The apostle Paul reveals this to the Christians in Rome and Ephesus:

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness (**agathōsynē**), filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. (Rom 15:13-14)

For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness (**agathōsynē**) and righteousness and truth), (Eph 5:8-9)

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As part of the Fruit of the Spirit, goodness reflects one's faith with the intent of glorifying Jesus Christ to the world and as part of the process of personal sanctification.

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness (**agathōsynē**) and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:11-12)

Set within the contrast of "deeds of the flesh" verses "fruit of the "Spirit" (Gal 5:13-26), the attributes of patience, kindness and goodness place a focus on esteeming interpersonal relationships with others. These attributes reflect an abiding faith and the second greatest commandment, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and fulfills the command Jesus gave to His disciples:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).