

### Can An Unbeliever Bear Fruit of the Spirit?

Once I asked the above question in a class. When I asserted that one surely could, I thought one elder was going to cast me out of the synagogue. You may want to lend a hand to help him! So let me ask you in other words: Can an unbeliever love sincerely and exhibit joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (fidelity), gentleness, and self-control? In our answers, let us not have any display of pious pride indicating that others cannot be as good as we are.

But how can one who is not born again and in possession of the Holy Spirit bear fruit of the Spirit? That is not the question I am asking. Can an unbeliever bear fruit of the spirit? Each of us, whether believers or unbelievers, has two natures -- flesh and spirit. Paul is contrasting a person's two natures instead of writing only about the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5. There are no capital letter designations in the Greek manuscript but capitals are chosen by translators to express what they think the writer meant. In this text, it seems evident that they made the wrong choice. Paul is saying, "*But I say, walk by the spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you would*" (v. 16f). In the inner man, there is a sense of right and wrong so that Paul could say that some Gentiles were counted as righteous because they had the law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:12-16).

Jesus told his awakened disciples in the garden, "*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matt. 26:41). This points to the struggle with the law that Paul describes in Romans 7. One of his concluding remarks is, "*For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members*" (v. 22). The willingness of mind and inmost self are identified with the spirit of man. So persons may cultivate their spiritual nature and produce those positive traits which Paul designates as fruit of that spiritual nature within them. The fruit of the spirit is developed traits of character rather than traits infused into us by the Spirit and power of God. By this, we are not denying that God is an enabling power in our lives.

In another setting Paul clarifies: "*Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MINDS, and PUT ON the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*" (Eph. 4:22-24). There is no indication that the Holy Spirit accomplishes renewal and a new nature in us but it is something done willingly "in the spirit of your minds." God originally has a part in this "*by the washing of regeneration and renewal IN the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3:5). It is the renewal "in the spirit of your minds" "IN the Holy Spirit" rather than a renewal OF THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF. Does God's Spirit ebb and flow, surge and subside in us and need renewal? Do you pray for a

renewal of the God's power in you or for your renewal of spirit? Can we rightly pray that "each soul be rekindled with fire from above"? Has his Spirit abandoned us or diminished in us so that we need to pray for him to send his Spirit again? Or is it your own spirit that has lost its emotional zeal and fervor that needs renewal? We are the ones needing renewal and we are called upon to bring that about. "*Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of you mind*" is Paul's exhortation to the Roman disciples (Rom. 12: 2). He did not tell them to just relax and let God's Spirit do it for them. It is by your dedicated and diligent spirit-mind rather than the accomplishment of the Holy Spirit that you will bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.. In justification, God does not change us into the persons he wants us to be but he accepts us as though we were that kind of persons. Righteousness is never accomplished in us but by grace we are accounted as righteous. In being saved by grace, "*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*" (Eph. 2:8-10).

Let me further quote and adapt thoughts of Wanda Shirk. It is important that 46 of the 83 uses of the term "pneuma hagian," holy spirit, in the Greek scriptures, do not have the definite article "the" or "a". Almost all translations render all 83 uses as "the Holy Spirit," adding "the" and capitalization. This is a matter of interpretation. Your spirit should be dedicated, which means "holy" so that you become a holy spirit. Consider for example, "*They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of a holy spirit*" (Acts 6:5). Paul wrote of "*righteousness and peace and joy in a holy spirit*" (Rom. 17:17). Jude actually wrote about "*praying in a holy spirit*" rather than "*praying in the Holy Spirit*" if we wish to translate more literally (Jude 20). May these not be more accurate expressions?

Wanda concludes, "The term 'the Holy Spirit' is certainly valid in many places, but since the article 'the' is used only 45% of the time, we should be careful about building a doctrine based on translators' suppositions in defining 'holy spirit' in all contexts."

Frankly, I have not gone through the scriptures trying to mark all the distinctions as I have mentioned here. Neither have I set these concepts out conclusively and dogmatically. My thought is that some of you may become more aware of these distinctions as you read the scriptures thus enriching your understanding. If your scholarship confirms traditional concepts, that is fine with me; if it explores new territory, that may lead to growth. Just don't be scared of a pathless maze of interpretation you have not traveled before. []

Next issue: Who is your mother?

(Cecil Hook: January 2004)