

## 6:1 LOVE

**The fruit of the Spirit is love.**

*Galatians 5:22*

**A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.** *John 13:34*

**Dear friends, let us love one another; for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.** *1 John 4:7*

I'm meeting some of my family today, or maybe I've got to spend time with a person I find very difficult, so how can I feel the requisite love for them? With family it shouldn't be too difficult, but do I really love them as much as I should? Or I'm going to meet folk in church – how can I get the right level of *agapē*-love for all of them?

I shouldn't be working myself into a lather over this. I'm born of God, OK? This doesn't mean I'm a super-saint, it means Christ is in me by his Spirit. I don't need to feel a dramatic surge of love for everybody, I just need to ask him to do in and through me what I never could do by myself.

So why does Jesus say it's a new command, when it's been there for ages, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18)? Well, it's new for two reasons: because Jesus himself has set a new level of loving, by laying down his life for his friends (including Pharisees and tax-collectors); and because he has come back from the dead and given us the Spirit to love our neighbour from the inside.

This love goes the second mile; it going involves praying for one's enemies, hugging lepers, reconciling staunch opponents, being patient with the circumcision party, coping with Eros-love, that kind of thing. Doing, saying and being what I can't but he can.

*Maybe I've been subtly off track, as usual. I've been trying to do the right thing, selfless loving, but for the wrong reason (to get over a spiritual high-jump bar) and by the wrong means (by trying to manipulate my emotions). And the Spirit has been waiting patiently for me to ask him to do what he's there to do all along.*

## 6:2 JOY

**The fruit of the Spirit is joy.**

*Galatians 5:22*

**Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive-crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the sheepfold and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.** *Habakkuk 3:17-18*

How dependent am I on material prosperity? Does my mood change according to my circumstances? If I'm honest, I'm like most people: when things are going well, when the weather is reasonable, when there is nothing particularly wrong with my health, it's not very difficult to be cheerful and optimistic. But when things take a turn for the worse, the outlook changes and I'm a different person.

Then we meet someone like this farmer in Habakkuk. Everything has gone wrong, either through a series of misfortunes or owing to his own or another's incompetence. He is staring ruin in the face. Yet he is impossibly cheerful! There he is out in the fields, with his coat-collar buttoned up against the icy wind, and he's actually singing songs of praise.

His secret is that he's discovered a source of joy independent of circumstances. His crops may have failed, but the Spirit is producing a crop within him directly supplied from the God he calls his Saviour. When he says 'I will rejoice, I will be joyful,' he's not hopelessly gritting his teeth, he's simply reminding himself that despite all appearances to the contrary, he's ultimately in good hands.

Isaiah 12:3 says 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.' Wells of earthly joy can so easily dry up, but as Jesus pointed out to the Samaritan woman, he is able to offer the water of eternal life to all who come to him for it.

*Help me to remember that joy isn't a feeling, it's an attitude. Feelings come and go, depending on my physical or psychological barometer; but the settled attitude of Spirit-sourced cheerfulness comes from trusting his word. May I make it my song today.*

### 6:3 PEACE

**The fruit of the Spirit is peace.**

*Galatians 5:22*

**You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord for ever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.**

*Isaiah 26:3-4*

In 1911 they found the tent where Scott of the Antarctic and his two last companions had perished in terrible weather. One of them was Edward Wilson, the expedition doctor, who was known as Uncle Bill. A member of the search party reported: 'On his features were traces of a sweet smile, and he looked exactly as if he were about to awake from a sound sleep.' Captain Scott wrote to Mrs Wilson shortly before he died: 'In his eyes is a comfortable blue look of hope.'

How can someone remain serene and hopeful in the face of total loss and failure, indeed in the face of death itself? At such times you can't manufacture peacefulness. It isn't a quality you can summon up by emotional power or mental will. It comes from a deep and settled inner steadiness.

One of the items found in the tent was Wilson's pocket New Testament which he used to read by himself every morning. Yes, it had been important to reach the South Pole, even if they couldn't be the first; even more vital were his scientific studies and paintings from nature. But his supreme necessity was to stay in touch with his Rock, the eternal God in whom he trusted. This trust was fed from sources beyond himself: the word of God in his daily consciousness, and the Spirit of Christ at the heart of his being and doing.

*I just wonder if I'm looking to the wrong things to give me peace. Circumstances, health, people's approval, music or literature, beautiful surroundings, the touch of a friend: all good things, yet which in themselves have no permanence. Even in my times of reading and prayer, do I reach out and deliberately fix my mind, not on the words alone, but on the Person who gives them meaning? 'On you, Lord.'*

### 6:4 PATIENCE

**The fruit of the Spirit is patience.**

*Galatians 5:22 NRSV*

**So that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

*Hebrews 6:12 NRSV*

'I wouldn't have the patience!' This was the standard response when I said I was a teacher. 'Well,' was my reply, 'nor did I, but you learn it in the end.' But what is patience, and how do you learn it?

Conventionally, it means not losing your rag, keeping a check on your irritation, being tolerant of the other person who is trying you to the utmost. In relation to circumstances, it means not allowing yourself to be thrown, being big enough to survive a few ups and downs, that kind of thing. Whatever.

That is human patience, and it's hard-won, but it only gets you so far. One of the Bible's words for 'patience' is *makrothumia*, 'big-heartedness' or 'great-spiritedness'. This is Divine patience, the fruit of the Spirit who is reproducing the Jesus character in us. With him we can go the second mile; without him we wouldn't make it halfway through the first. Paul writes out of his first-hand experience of the 'immense patience' of Christ Jesus in showing mercy to himself as 'the worst of sinners' (1 Timothy 1:16).

So am I in danger of becoming 'sluggish'? This word can be used to describe a slow or sleepy pupil, or an interlocutor who is hard of hearing. The idea in Hebrews (especially chapters 11-12) is that the Bible is full of examples of people who are 'big-hearted', and if we gird up the loins of our mind to study and follow them, we can achieve what they did and endure as they did. Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Samuel – and Jesus. Running the race with perseverance, fixing our eyes on them, above all on him.

*So it's for him to produce his fruit in me, and it's for me to ransack his word for models, incitements to great-spiritedness. He met the worst that devils and humans could do. He called his betrayer 'Friend.' He forgave his crucifiers. He restored Simon Peter. Am I such a slow pupil?*

## 6:5 SELF-CONTROL

**The fruit of the Spirit is self-control.**

*Galatians 5:23*

**The grace of God teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

*Titus 2:12-13*

Esau couldn’t change what he’d done. He was famished and faint after hunting, so when Jacob offered him a tasty dish of stew in return for his status as older twin, he joked ‘What use is a birthright if I’m dead?’ and went for the immediate gratification (Genesis 25:29-34; Hebrews 12:16-17). At a crucial moment, he lacked self-control.

Self-control is hard and painful, but it is necessary if we are to run the race set before us (Hebrews 12:1). We are to be like Olympic athletes who undergo a rigorous course of training; they do it in the uncertain hope of temporary earthly glory, but we do it in the certain hope of permanent heavenly glory (1 Corinthians 9:25).

The slogan ‘No pain, no gain’ can be twisted into excessive self-chastisement that has led some highly-motivated Christians into serious error. Our training should be carried out in dependence on the Holy Spirit and the grace of God. If physical self-denial is required, the best incentive isn’t awarding ourselves points from a check-list, it’s fixing our eyes on Jesus who endured the cross and calls us to share his eternal joy.

‘Eyes on the prize, Violet!’ cries the father of Roald Dahl’s anti-heroine of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Her ultimate aim, of course, was total self-indulgence. In a sense, so is ours – as long as we realise where our best interests lie.

‘Search me, O God, and know my heart; see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting’ (Psalm 139:23-24). Our trainer knows us through and through. He knows the best regime for me. Saying ‘No’ can be desperately hard, but when it’s combined with saying ‘Yes’ to Jesus, I can begin to see things in perspective.

## 6:6 FILLED

**Be filled with the Spirit.**

*Ephesians 5:18*

**Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.**

*Philippians 1:11*

Jesus promised his disciples that they would be fruitful. Like the branches of a vine, they would naturally bear tasty and attractive grapes – as long as they stayed in vital contact with the parent tree (John 15:1ff). Their lives would have a Jesus character and their prayers would be heard and answered. This would bring praise to his Father as the world discovered what God was really like.

We don’t have to grow this fruit by our own efforts to be good. We grow it as he produces it in us. We don’t have to feel suffused with Spirit coursing through our veins, either: to be filled with the Spirit isn’t a special come-and-go experience we can only get at a big conference or through contact with a specially gifted individual. It is daily and continual.

It ‘comes through Jesus Christ.’ As he lives in me, and I talk to him, and he reminds me how much and how unreservedly he loves me, he replaces my half-loves and my half-gods with his own gentle and distinctive reign, and I begin to grow his kind of fruit.

What exactly is ‘righteousness’? It is rightness. Before I met Christ I was wrongly aligned to God. He took my wrongness to the cross and exchanged it for his own perfectly aligned rightness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Now through the work of the Spirit he applies that work on the cross to my everyday life, realigning my character to his own.

*Lord, I want to be like you, walk like you, talk like you. The Lion King in me. But do I want this in order to get some kind of power over others? To be known as a gifted leader, speaker, writer? ‘The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45).*