

Chapter 2 - Living Fruitful Lives

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 we saw that all Christians are described as *the called of Jesus Christ*, and that the Bible admonishes us to *walk worthy* of our calling. But what must we do to walk worthy of our calling? In the following chapters we will explore some of the teachings of the Bible regarding how to *walk worthy of our calling*.

2.2 Being Fruitful in Every Good Work

Paul, in his letter to the church in Colosse, had this to say on the matter of walking worthy of our calling:

Col 1:9b,10 ... *that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may **walk worthy** of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, **being fruitful in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

We walk worthy of our calling when our lives please God. And part of what we need to do to please God is to be fruitful in every good work. The NT abounds in admonitions to Christians to live fruitful lives, as the following verses demonstrate:-

Rom 7:4 ... *that we should bear fruit to God.*

Eph 5:8-10 *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.*

Phil 1:9-11 *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, **being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ**, to the glory and praise of God.*

2.3 Jesus calls Christians to Live Fruitful Lives

In several passages in the gospels, we have Jesus' clear teaching that His followers are to lead fruitful lives.

Matt 7:16-20 *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **Therefore by their fruits you will know them.**”*

Jn 15:16 *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that **you should go and bear fruit ...**”*

In the opening passage of Jn 15, Jesus calls upon Christians everywhere to be *bear much fruit*.

Jn 15:1-8 *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, **bears much fruit**; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done you. **By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.**”*

God surely expects us to be fruitful. Even when our lives are fruitful, we can expect Him to “prune” us, so that we can be more fruitful. And it is only as we “abide” in Christ, drawing our very sustenance from Him, that we can very fruitful.

When Jesus explained the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9) to His disciples, He said that “*he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*” (Matt 13:23) We see that hearing God’s Word, understanding it and applying it results in fruitfulness; some fruitful (thirtyfold), some more fruitful (sixtyfold) and some very fruitful (hundredfold).

2.4 The Fruit of the Spirit

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul exhorts Christians to walk worthy of their calling, and gave many examples of how they are to do this.

Eph 4:1-3 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to **walk worthy of the calling** with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Here we see that “walking worthy of our calling”, as one would expect, means exhibiting certain character traits or virtues which are characteristic of a Christian, namely, lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, love, unity and peace. Paul has similar lists elsewhere in his writings (e.g., 2 Cor 6:6 and 8:7), and Peter lists similar virtues in 2 Pet 1:5-7. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he describes these characteristics as *the fruit of the Spirit*:

Gal 5:22,23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

Notice that this is not a list of options from which we can pick and choose. It's a package deal! *But the fruit of the Spirit is*” this package of virtues. So we need to prayerfully consider each of these Christian virtues, and examine ourselves to see if each virtue is genuinely reflected in our lives. Where we are obviously falling short of truly exhibiting any of these virtues, we are not “walking worthy of our calling”, and need to pray for God’s help in making up our deficiencies. By way of assistance in our self-examination, here is a brief description of each of the virtues:-

- a. **Love** The NT makes it abundantly clear that, just as God loved the world (Jn 3:16), so Christians are to love God (1 Jn 4:19), love their fellow-Christians (Rom 12:9,10), love their neighbours (Mk 12:31), and even love their enemies (Matt 5:44). The ability to love springs from God’s Spirit within a Christian (Gal 5:22). Jesus said that love proves the genuineness of the Christian’s faith.

Jn 13:34f *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

- b. **Joy** For the Christian, joy is not simply an emotion, but rather an abiding quality founded upon and derived from God. (See Jn 17:13 and Rom 14:17.)

Jn 15:11 *“These things have I spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”*

- c. **Peace** Because the Christian has been reconciled to God, and is at peace with God (Rom 5:1), so God enables the Christian to have peace of mind even in this world (Isa 26:3; Phil 4:7). Like Christian joy, peace is an abiding quality for the Christian, a gift from Jesus Christ.

Jn 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*

Jn 16:33 *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

- d. **Longsuffering** Longsuffering means to bear provocation patiently. It is an attribute of God (1 Pet 3:20), which the Christian should strive to emulate (2 Cor 6:6; 2 Tim 4:2; Col 1:11).

2 Pet 3:9 *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

- e. **Kindness** The NT enjoins the Christian to show brotherly love and kindness (Rom 12:10; 1 Cor 13:4; Col 3:12; 2 Pet 1:5-7).

Eph 4:32 *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

- f. **Goodness** Jesus instructed us to do good, even to our enemies (Matt 5:44; Lk 6:27, 35; Rom 12:20)

1 Thess 5:15 *See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.*

- g. **Faithfulness** Virtually all of these virtues are attributes of God. God is faithful (1 Col 1:9). As Christ taught in the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30), God also expects His servants to be faithful, and rewards their faithfulness. Paul frequently commended his co-workers for their faithfulness (1 Cor 4:17; Col 1:7; Col 4:9).

Rev 17:14 *“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”*

- h. **Gentleness** Gentleness is not weakness; think of it rather as strength and power under control. God is gentle (Ps 18:35; Isa 40:11). Paul writes of “*the meekness and gentleness of Christ*” (2 Cor 10:1). Christians must be gentle in their dealings with others.

2 Tim 2:24 *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient ...*

- i. **Self-Control** Proverbs describes self-control as being slow to anger and ruling one’s spirit. (Prov 16:32). We conclude this list of virtues with a passage of Scripture which lists many of them.

2 Pet 1:5-11 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

In this chapter, we have been exploring the concept that living fruitful lives is part of what it means to walk worthy of our calling and of our Lord. We have seen that certain Christian characteristics epitomize the fruitful life. But in a practical sense, what should we do to demonstrate that our lives are indeed fruitful? The opening verse we quoted, Col 1:10, gives us some help: “*that you may walk worthy of the Lord, ... being fruitful in every good work.*” In the next chapter, we will explore the topic of *good works*.