

“TRUTH”

The Eleventh Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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In Ephesians 5:9, Paul adds righteousness and truth as additional qualities to the nine distinctive characteristics of the singular "fruit of the Spirit" given in Galatians 5:22-23. Because it is "the fruit of the Spirit," it is the produce or the product the Spirit produces within an individual. When a person reads, studies, and applies the Spirit's instruction — the inspired Word of God given by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21), the Spirit produces within that individual love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, righteousness, and truth. Again, these are not individual fruits but, rather, characteristics of one fruit. For example, an apple is red, round, and sweet. Red, round, and sweet are not types of fruit but characterize the singular apple. Similarly, those who apply the Spirit's instruction will be characterized by these eleven qualities known as "the fruit of the Spirit."

The eleventh quality of the singular fruit of the Spirit is truth. Like many, Pilate asked a pertinent question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). For whatever reason, the Bible does not explain the motives of Pilate when he asked this question. Was he an honest inquirer who was seeking truth which he had not previously found? Or was he being skeptical of what Jesus taught and said this with contempt? Or was he like so many who believe truth is relative? Or was he really uninterested and wanted to end the conversation with Jesus? His motives could have been any one of these or even a combination of some, but the fact remains, we are simply not given that information. Nonetheless, the inquiry is no less important, and we are in need of an answer to this significant question.

Probably the most accepted view of truth today is relativism. Relativism is "the philosophical doctrine that all criteria of judgment are relative to the individuals and situations involved" and "that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press). An illustration that is sometimes used concerns a vehicle accident. The investigating officer questions several witnesses. One witness said the vehicle was coming from the left and turning right while the other said it was coming from the right and turning left. Which is right? They both are. After questioning the witnesses, the police officer found out the witnesses were standing on opposite street corners, and the vehicle turned between them. Though this is used to show relativism, it does not prove their point. Yes, from various vantage points, right and left may change. However, north, south,

east, and west do not change, and with a little questioning, it could be easily determined which direction of the compass the vehicle was traveling and which direction the vehicle turned. That is not relative.

It is always amazing to listen to the proponents of relativism. To them, everything is relative except for what they are saying about relativism. They think what they are saying about it is absolute and not relative. In reality, it is not relative to anything because it is simply not realistic or true. If everything is relative, then nothing can be proven. There is no right and wrong. There is no up and down. There are no standards. However, because there are standards, everything cannot be relative. There are standards of weights, lengths, volume, temperature, and time. Without these standards, the world would be in a total state of confusion. Beside these standards of the material and physical world, there are standards of morals, ethics, and religion. Sadly, the world is in a state of confusion in these areas because they have not submitted themselves to the rightful standard of God's word which was given to all mankind to follow.

Since relativism is not truth, then the question remains, "What is truth?" Like several of the other characteristics of "the fruit of the Spirit," truth is used in a number of ways:

First, truth is used of truthfulness. This is the opposite of lying. Christians are exhorted to be honest in speech. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorted, "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Matthew 5:37; see also James 5:12). In other words, let your yes be yes and your no be no. When you say yes, mean yes, and when you say no, mean no. Be truthful in your conversations because all liars are of the devil. To the Jews who rejected Him, Jesus said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). Obviously, the consequences of lying can be disastrous. In this life, the cost of lying can be all that is dear to an individual. Lying breaks down relationships, destroys families, ruins friendships, and costs people their jobs. In the life to come, it is even more disastrous for all liars "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8). This, by the way, would include a "little white lie." Truthfulness, on the other hand, builds. In 1 Peter 3:10-11 Peter wrote, "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it."

A second way truth is used concerns those things that are genuine, real, and conform to reality. After sending the seventy out, Jesus made this observation:

"The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). He was saying, "the harvest is genuinely great, but the laborers are few..." After witnessing the death of Jesus and the events surrounding His death, the centurion and those with him greatly feared and said, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). They were exclaiming in reality, Jesus was the Son of God. At the end of John's gospel record, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John recorded his purpose in writing. John 20:30-31 says, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." The "signs" of Jesus recorded in John's gospel account were done in reality. These were not from the imagination of men but were genuinely done by Jesus and were witnessed by His disciples.

A third way the term truth is used is in an objective sense — the doctrine of Christ. In Galatians 2:5, Paul spoke of "the truth of the gospel," and in 2 Corinthians 6:7, he wrote of "the word of truth." It is this truth that we as Christians should speak "in love" that we "may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). Concerning true worshipers, Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Worship offered "in spirit" is from the spirit or the heart of the worshiper. Worship offered "in truth" is offered according to the objective standard of the word of God. This is the opposite of the subjective standard of self — doing what is right in our own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Thus, only that worship which is offered from the heart or spirit of man and in harmony with the word of truth is acceptable to God. In His High-priestly prayer, Jesus prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). In order to live acceptable to God, our words and actions must be done in accordance with the truth of the gospel. Paul wrote, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

Truth is vitally important. Without it, men would live in total chaos. A person could never trust another person. An agreement could never be reached. A cry for help could never be believed. Confusion, disarray, and disorder would be all encompassing. You could never escape it, never find rest, and never be at peace. Thank God for truth, and thank God that He is the "God of truth" (Deuteronomy 32:4).