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Greek
karpōs

Aramaic
ܩܒܐ

Hebrew
פרי

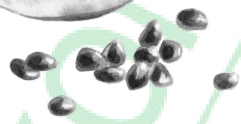
Fruit

NIV

KJV
fruit

DRB
fruit

Latin
fructus




fruit, bough, reward;
fruit (as plucked);
qualities of the heart



Setting the Scene

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST has many faces shown to the world. Sometimes, these 'faces' look askance at one another. My own denomination doesn't think of itself as 'the only true church,' but it can tend to see itself as 'the most enlightened branch'. It does, however, come under criticism from others over one key issue: we seem to be more enamoured with the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit than we are with His *fruit*.

Though it's been a long time since I've heard any focused teaching on the gifts, our siblings have got a point. When you're sure you're the 'bee's knees' and you're producing evidence of the Spirit's presence, what could be amiss? Is not this evident proof of His endorsement?



Are we more enamoured with
the *gifts* of the Spirit
than the *Fruit* of the Spirit?




When we look at such ‘endorsements’ in the Bible, what we see – time and again – is an eclectic list of people with chequered motives, inconsistent devotion, confusion, doubt and poverty, each bringing their mess before the Lord. The kings, priests, apostles and heroes are no exceptions: not all capes wear heroes. It’s hard to spot the difference between someone whose ministry is succeeding because they’re ‘doing it right’ and someone whose ministry is succeeding through the immense grace of God, despite them ‘doing it wrong’.

And what does God do with such ambiguity? He gives it to us straight. And then He has mercy, and *helps* – as we see in the episode at the ‘Gates of Hell’ (Matthew 17).



The fruit of your *ministry*
≠
the fruit of your *Life*.

In the end, the fruit of our ministry is a separate thing from the fruit of our lives. The one is the outflow of the fact that the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29) and the other is the slow transformation back toward the perfect image of Christ, as we are changed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). When Jesus talked in John 15:16 about ‘*fruit that remains*,’ it’s likely He was speaking of the fruit of their lives. You can ‘do the work’ while remaining largely untouched yourself by the presence of God, but the reverse is not true. No amount of good works will conform you into the image of Christ, because that is the role of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Lord, we can do nothing about our sin-tendency. We can employ behavioural modification; we can adopt scaffolding; we



can train ourselves. But it will only take a particular kind of pressure – the enemy knows this – to bring all of our selfishness right back to the surface. Even when we are fully surrendered to the Lord, this is true. I've wrestled with this: what, then, is the difference between a 'good pagan' and a 'rotten Christian'?

There is the issue of *ownership*. We are translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light; our citizenship has been ratified despite our shortcomings. We are new creations, *'born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God'* (1 Peter 1:23 NIV). But like all babies, toddlers, children, teens, adults ... we must grow into the fullness of His DNA. And that is where walking hand-in-hand with the Spirit comes in. That is what it means to walk humbly with our God: to live with the realisation that we are one slip away, at all times, from deserving the justice He enacts and needing the mercy He delights to show. Becoming born-again is not a graduation – *well done, bye bye, see you later*. It is an apprenticeship, in the careful company of the Master.

We don't like the straight-talk of Jesus. We prefer the more hippie-like of His traits: *'Let the little children come to Me.'* But if we take out all the frankness of His approach, we are left with a sugar-daddy who will give us anything we want, without consequences or even a pulling-up. But this is not the *real* Jesus. The mercy of God does not exist in a vacuum. It sits next to His justice and His truth.



The *mercy* of God
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His *justice* and His *truth*.

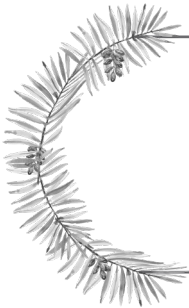


Forgiveness without correction would be unjust: it would leave us floundering in our mistakes and chasing dead ends. And God the Son, secure in who He is and operating out of a nature of pure love, is qualified to bring it. In much the same way, His strength sits next to His humility. He is all-wise and all-powerful, but also all-empathising.

Just because the gifts and call of the Lord are given by Him *'without repentance'* does not mean He automatically endorses everything we do, or even what we do with these gifts. Think of Balaam in Numbers 22–24. Here was a man who used his prophetic gifts to sell out to the enemy. And yet God still allowed him to keep them, right up until he was slain in Joshua 13 for actual divination. Peter, Jude and Jesus (in Revelation) make him a byword and aren't shy about the kind of guy he was.

The presence of spiritual gifts does not supersede the injunction to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. It does not exempt us from allowing the Holy Spirit not only to anoint us, but to *amend* us. Invite Him to meddle! By our *fruit* will people know us – not by our manifestations. Operating one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be done in a single instant, a moment in time. It is in some senses a 'flash in the pan,' albeit a useful and powerful one. Its focus is on those around us. But living out our partnership with Him as He shapes us? This is about us, and it shows up across our lifespan.

There's comfort in that dilation: nobody is expected to be all things loving, joyful, peaceful, patient and so on, right at the get-go. But it is the general shape we are being moulded into. It is the culture of the Kingdom, which overrides all the lesser faces we show the world, as we turn all of them toward Him. There are many actions (and even antics) we can deal out in our Christian walk and tell ourselves that the end (building the Kingdom) justifies the means (behaving poorly in the process of using the King's gifts). So it's useful to ask ourselves: *is this action I'm about to take for the pan or the lifespan?* Is there genuine soul-change backing up the temporary



performance I'm giving? Am I working for the long haul, or just for an hour's success? Am I pleasing God with my faith in His transformative power, as well as with my deeds? In other words ... am I seeking to *perform* rather than to *transform*?

Are we seeking to *perform*
or to *transform*?

In Jesus's last homily before Golgotha, known as the John 13–17 *Farewell Discourse*, He speaks of sending the Holy Spirit to take His place in the disciples' midst. In fact, over dinner and the walk after, He brings up a number of things which we can now identify as belonging to the fruit of the Spirit. (Fruit, *karpos*, is a singular noun: one fruit, not many fruits. This makes Galatians 5:22–23 less of a *list* and more of an *overall picture*.)

Jesus expresses His love in humility (**gentleness**) as He washes the disciples' feet. In **kindness**, He gives them a heads-up that He is not leaving them in the lurch. Jesus tells the disciples that they must **love** one another just as He has loved them. He prays that His **joy** may be in them, and may be complete. He says He is leaving His **peace** with them. He doesn't use the word 'patience,' but He does let them know that there will be a **wait** before they see Him again '*in a little while*,' and also a wait for the Holy Spirit to be given. He tells them as a group to ask the Father in His name for what they need: **faith**. And then He demonstrates **self-control** under the ultimate test conditions, by continuing to cleave to exactly what the Father has asked of Him.