What Does It Mean for Fruit to Reach Maturity?

The Lord Jesus often spoke about seed, trees and fruit to show us the true state of our hearts. The seed of God's Word is not sown merely to start a spiritual life, but so that it may grow to maturity and bear fruit. In God's eyes, the worth of a tree does not lie in the beauty of its leaves but in the fruit it bears. In the same way, the worth of our spiritual life is not measured by how much we know, how much we talk or how religious we look, but by how far the life of Christ is being formed in us.

In our day many people treat the new birth as the final destination, when in fact it is only the start of the journey. Just as a seed is not sown to stay a seed forever, but to grow and bear fruit, so God has given us new life so that it may develop until it reaches spiritual maturity.

When people talk about fruit, many think almost entirely of souls brought to faith. But this is one of Satan's subtle deceptions, because it draws our attention away from the real fruit God is looking for in the believer's life. Fruit is not first of all what we do for God, but what the Holy Spirit produces in us: the character of Christ, obedience to His will, love, humility, holiness and inner transformation. A man can be very busy in ministry and even have visible achievements in the eyes of others, yet if his life does not reflect the image of Christ, he is like the fig tree that had leaves but no fruit.

Let us open God's Word to Luke chapter 13, verses 6 to 9, where we find a parable the Lord Jesus told. He said:

"A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." (Luke 13:6-9)

The fig tree, planted in the vineyard, had grown without bearing fruit. Yet the owner was not looking for leaves or for shade; he was looking for fruit. This parable leads us to an essential question: **what does God expect from us? Just leaves, or fruit?**

Let us turn our attention to Luke chapter 8, verses 5 to 8: *"A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold."* When He had said these things, Jesus cried, *"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."* (Luke 8:5-8).

The sower sows the seed, and the seed is the Word of God, just as the Lord Jesus tells us: "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God." (Luke 8:11). God's Word is not sown without purpose. Just as a farmer does not sow merely to watch the plants come up, but to bring in a ripe harvest, so God sows His Word in people's hearts with the clear purpose of producing fruit.

Verses 14 and 15 show us very plainly the standard by which God looks at this work: "And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." (Luke 8:14-15)

It is important to notice that in this parable the problem is not only a lack of fruit, but also fruit that never reaches maturity. God does not look only at the beginning of His work in a person, but at its completion. He is after the growth of the divine life all the way to maturity.

In the first group, the seed falls by the wayside. The Word is heard but not received into the heart. The devil comes and takes away the seed before it can produce life. There is no sprouting, no growth, no harvest.

In the second group, the seed falls on rock. It springs up quickly and life appears. There is enthusiasm, there is joy. But the root does not go deep. When trials and troubles come, the plant withers. The life that began does not last long.

The third group is especially important, because here too there is life, and even the beginning of fruit. The plant does not die like the one on the rock. It keeps growing, but its growth is choked by other concerns. The cares of this life, the chase after prosperity, the desire for comfort, the pleasures of the world and earthly preoccupations choke the plant's normal development. The result is not a total lack of fruit, but fruit that never ripens.

The Lord Jesus does not say these people had no life, or that they had no fruit at all. The problem is that the fruit never reached maturity. The character of Christ was not fully developed. Love, peace, gentleness, faithfulness and longsuffering did not reach the maturity God was aiming for.

In contrast to all this, the good ground is not marked by greater intelligence or more knowledge, but by a heart that keeps the Word and perseveres. The Lord says they "bring forth fruit with patience." Fruit does not appear instantly. It grows little by little, passing through seasons, through rain and drought, through trials and God's discipline, until it ripens.

So we see that the whole parable points to a single goal: fruit brought to maturity. The seed is sown for fruit, and the fruit is left to grow until it ripens. God is not satisfied with just the beginning of the spiritual life; He is after its completion. He is looking for people in whom His Word has finally produced the character of Christ.

That is why the question is not only whether the seed has been sown, or even whether it has sprung up. The question this parable asks is: **has the fruit ripened?** This is the goal for which God sowed His Word in us, and the purpose toward which the Holy Spirit is ceaselessly working

in the life of every believer.

In John 15 the Lord Jesus teaches us about the importance of spiritual fruitfulness. He says: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:1-2). Here we see that God tends us so that we will bear fruit, and our responsibility is to abide in Christ and work together with Him in His work of growth.

To take an illustration from everyday life: no mother in her right mind gives birth to a child only to refuse to feed it, care for it, and leave it to die. On the contrary, her whole concern is that the child should grow, develop and reach maturity.

If that is the natural attitude of an earthly mother, how much more is it the heart of God toward His children. Life is in His hand, for He says, "I kill, and I make alive." God does not give life in order to destroy it in infancy, but to bring it to the fulfilment of the purpose for which it was given.

In our day many people treat the new birth as the final destination. It is often said that if someone is born again today and dies that same night, without going through any process of growth and maturing, God's purpose has already been completely fulfilled. But the question we must ask is a different one: if God has determined that the seed should produce fruit, and that the fruit should ripen, how can we be so naive as to believe that the beginning is God's final goal?

Those who hold this view usually point to the thief on the cross. They see in him a man who was saved with no time for growth, no time to bear fruit and no time to go through a process of maturing. So the thief's case is seen as a loophole through which they too could reach the same destination without their fruit ever ripening.

But this view overlooks the very thing that matters most: the extraordinary power of God. It assumes that God's work in the thief never even began, or that it was left unfinished. Reality shows exactly the opposite. In just a few hours on the cross, under the weight of extreme suffering, God worked in that man a transformation that many never experience in a whole lifetime of religion.

He went from mocking Christ to admitting his own guilt. He went from justifying himself to condemning himself. He went from unbelief to faith. He acknowledged God's justice, Christ's innocence and His coming kingdom, and he put his whole hope in Him. The character that began to show itself in those final hours, in the presence of Christ and under His gaze, proved the deep work of God.

In fact, the thief is one of the clearest proofs of the truth in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." God began a good work in him, and God Himself brought it to completion. Although the time was extremely short, the work was not incomplete.

The issue is not how long God needs to complete His work, but His power to do it. A hundred years ago, if someone had claimed that a car factory would be able to turn out two thousand cars in a single day, it would have sounded absurd. People back then could not imagine the capacities that would exist later.

In a similar way, we tend to judge God's work through the lens of human experience, assuming that if one believer needs decades to reach maturity, that is how long it must take in every case. But God does not work within the limits and pace of human processes; He works according to His perfect power and wisdom.

Scripture gives us an even more powerful illustration in Aaron's rod. Normally an almond tree takes years to grow. First comes the seed, then the sprouting, the growth of the tree, the blossoming and, finally, the fruit. But God compressed all these stages into a single night. Aaron's rod was not a living tree but a dry stick, cut off and separated from its root, with no natural way of producing life. And yet we read: "the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." (Numbers 17:8).

Notice the order: buds, blossoms and fruit. God did not produce just the beginning of life, but the whole process all the way to fruit. What would take years in nature, He did in one night. If God can make a dead stick go from dryness to fruitfulness in so short a time, why should it seem impossible for Him to bring a soul to spiritual maturity in a few hours?

This is exactly where the argument of those who claim that God cannot perfect a believer within his lifetime breaks down, the argument that some further process after death would be needed to bring him to the stature of Christ. Such a view may sound humble, but it underestimates the power of God. It assumes there are situations where God begins the work but fails to finish it in the time He Himself has appointed.

The thief on the cross and Aaron's rod carry the same message. God is not limited by natural processes, nor by the amount of time we think is necessary. He may use years of discipline and gradual growth, but He can also use a few hours of intense fire to bring a soul to maturity. What matters is not the length of the process but the power of the One who is at work.

Church history is full of such examples. There were people who were converted and, shortly afterward, were called to martyrdom. Sometimes only a few days passed, sometimes only a few hours. Yet in that short span their faith was tested, their love for Christ was proven, and their self-denial and obedience were brought to light by the fire of trial. It is not the length of the road that decides the matter, but the fact that God carries His work through to completion.

That is why the case of the thief on the cross must not be seen as an exception that cancels the need for spiritual maturity, but as proof of God's power to bring to completion very quickly what in other cases He works out over many years. The thief and many martyrs do not prove that fruit is unnecessary, but that God can speed up the ripening when He sees fit. The thief is living testimony that He who begins the good work also has the power to finish it, whether He has decades or only a few hours.

Scripture speaks constantly of growth, of being built up, of being made perfect, of reaching the stature of the fulness of Christ, and of fruit that reaches maturity. God is not presented as a Father who merely gives life, but as One who watches over the one who has been born again, feeds him, disciplines him, prunes him like the branch that must bear more fruit, and leads him on until His plan is fulfilled.

If we come to believe that God can begin this work but does not usually aim to finish it, we risk losing sight of the very intention He has declared. The apostle Paul says plainly in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." God does not begin a work aiming to leave it unfinished, but to bring it to perfection.

We see the same principle in the parable of the barren fig tree. The owner did not plant it in order to cut it down straight away; he came looking for fruit. Even when he found none, the vinedresser asked for more time to dig around it and tend it, saying, "Lord, let it alone this year also." The aim was not to destroy the tree but to bring it to bear fruit.

Notice that in the parable the emphasis falls on the patience and care given to the tree. It is dug around, tended, fertilised and waited for. All of this shows that what the owner intends is fruit. God invests time and effort in His children because He wants to see the character of Christ come to maturity in them.

God did not give us new life through the new birth in order to leave us unfinished, but so that the divine seed placed in us might grow, develop and bear fruit until it ripens. Just as a tree is planted for its fruit, so the believer is called to reach maturity in the character of Christ, bearing the fruit of the Spirit to the glory of God and for the good of His kingdom. Birth is the wonderful beginning of God's work, but maturity is the goal toward which He is leading this new life.

The Lord Jesus urges us: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." (John 15:4). The seed is the Word of God, and our spiritual life comes from God. It is not natural life, but life born of the Word of Christ, brought to life by the Spirit. The Spirit has a purpose clearly set by God: to renew us, grow us and develop us until we reach the stature of the Lord Jesus.

Just as a child is born to grow and to live, not to die, so we too are called to grow spiritually. God does not bring His children to birth in order to leave them in infancy, but to lead them to maturity, until the image of Christ can be seen in them.

In 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 we are told: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

This is God's purpose for every believer: to be transformed into the image of Christ and to grow to spiritual maturity. Spiritual death does not come from God, but from an evil heart of unbelief that turns away from Him.

To understand what this transformation means, we must look at what Scripture calls "the fruit of the Spirit": "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

It is important to notice that Scripture does not speak of the "fruits" of the Spirit, but of the "fruit" of the Spirit. It is the character of Christ formed in the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit. This fruit is not the product of human effort, nor the result of religious ambition. It is the work of God's Spirit in the person who stays united with Christ.

Yet the fact that the fruit belongs to the Holy Spirit does not mean we have no responsibility. God works in us, but not without us. Our part is to abide in Christ, to listen to His voice, to submit to His Word and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus says: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." (John 15:4)

The branch does not produce the sap. It does not create the life, nor the fruit. But it can stay attached to the vine, or it can dry up by being cut off. In the same way, the Holy Spirit produces the fruit, but the believer must remain obedient, must not grieve the Spirit, and must cooperate with His work. When the Spirit prompts us to forgive, to drop a quarrel, to answer gently or to humble ourselves, that is exactly when the fruit is being formed.

We are called to examine ourselves and see how much this fruit has grown in us. How much love do we have? How much peace? How much gentleness? How much longsuffering? Spiritual growth is a continuing process, like a flower that over time turns into fruit. At first only signs of life appear; then the fruit forms, grows and finally ripens.

But how do we come to gentleness and longsuffering?

The Lord Jesus tells us: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matthew 11:29)

We see that Christ's meekness and humility are tied directly to rest for the soul. The person who is always resisting, who fights for his rights, who answers every offence and always wants the last word, cannot have peace. His soul is constantly in turmoil.

Instead, the Lord Jesus teaches us the way of non-resistance: "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." (Matthew 5:39)

This teaching is not weakness; it is God's way of destroying the root of anger and forming longsuffering in us.

Longsuffering does not appear instantly, nor through a single prayer prayed once. It is formed as we walk with God. The process is simple; it may be short or long, but it is often painful.

Perhaps someone insults you. The old nature wants to hit back at once. But the Holy Spirit urges you to be silent and gentle. If you listen, you have taken the first step toward forming

longsuffering.

Another time, a new situation comes up. Once again you are provoked, criticised or treated unfairly. The flesh wants to defend itself, but again you choose to leave the matter in God's hands. In that moment, the Holy Spirit is working something within you.

After experiences like these, you notice that the things that used to set you off no longer have the same power over you. Not because you have become indifferent, but because Christ has grown in you. Where there was anger, peace appears. Where there was revenge, mercy appears. Where there was resistance, trust in God appears.

That is how we come to longsuffering, which must grow to maturity.

A practical example might be a husband who receives repeated, unfair criticism from his wife. At first he answers back, defends himself and gets into conflict. Later he learns to keep quiet and pray. Over time he stops being ruled by other people's reactions and keeps his peace even when provoked. The circumstances have not changed; the inner man has been transformed.

This is how the Lord's promise is fulfilled:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29)

Rest for the soul does not come because people stop hurting us, but because we stop fighting for ourselves and learn to leave everything in God's hands. When we give up resisting, constantly justifying ourselves and wanting revenge, the soul begins to enter into the rest of Christ.

Meekness is the opposite of malice, anger and harshness. A meek person is not a weak person, but one who has surrendered his strength to God's control. He does not shout, he does not look for conflict, and he does not pay others back in their own coin.

In Colossians 3:12-13 we are urged: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any."

This is the soil in which the fruit of the Spirit grows: forgiveness, humility, obedience and dependence on Christ.

We are deceiving ourselves if we think we can reach the final destination without this fruit ripening. God is looking for the character of Christ in us. He is looking for love, gentleness, peace, goodness and longsuffering. In most people He finds only knowledge, theories and religious forms, like a tree full of leaves but with no fruit.

The Lord Jesus left us two very powerful pictures of this. The first is the fig tree full of leaves. From a distance the tree looked promising and gave the impression of having fruit, but when the Lord came near, He found nothing to eat. It was all appearance, with no fruit. In the same

way, a person may have a great deal of Bible knowledge, attend meetings, talk about the things of God and have a good religious reputation, and yet, when God looks for meekness, humility, love and longsuffering, find nothing but leaves.

The second picture is the parable of the barren fig tree in the vineyard. For three years the owner came looking for fruit and found none. He did not come looking for leaves, or shade, or outward beauty, but for fruit. This is also the purpose for which God gave us His life. He is not looking only for a profession of faith, but for the character of Christ formed in us. That is why the vinedresser asked for more time to dig around the tree and tend it, so that it might finally bear fruit.

These examples show us that God is interested in fruit that has reached maturity. Just as a tree is planted for its fruit, so the believer is called to bring the fruit of the Spirit to ripeness. Leaves are necessary, blossoms are necessary, but neither is the final goal. The goal is ripe fruit.

Here we see one of the enemy's most subtle strategies. If he cannot stop God's seed from being sown, he tries to change the purpose for which it was sown. God sows the seed to produce fruit and to form the image of Christ in a person. Satan, however, tries to convince the believer that the beginning is enough and that the final goal is no longer necessary. And so attention shifts from fruit to leaves, from inner transformation to gathering information, from character to knowledge.

In this way many come to regard the forgiveness of sins as the final destination, when in reality it is only the entrance gate. The new birth is the beginning of God's work, not its end. ***Just as a seed is not sown to remain a seed, but to become a tree and then fruit, so the believer is not saved merely to receive forgiveness of sins, but to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.***

Because of this, many people's attention has shifted to the leaves. There is much discussion about complex theological subjects, prophetic timelines, doctrinal details, whether salvation can or cannot be lost, the order of events at the Lord's coming, and many other topics that are important in their place. But all the while, the essential question often goes unasked: is the fruit of the Spirit ripening in us?

What good is it to be able to explain the prophecies if we lose our temper at the slightest provocation? What good is it to sustain long doctrinal debates if we cannot forgive from the heart? What good is it to have answers to every theological controversy if we do not have the meekness of Christ? God will not come to the tree to see how many leaves it has, but how much fruit it has borne.

This does not mean sound teaching is unimportant. It is very important. But teaching is like the roots and leaves that sustain the life of the tree. Fruit, however, remains the reason God planted the tree. If all our concern stops at knowledge and never moves on to the transformation of character, we have lost sight of the purpose for which we were called.

That is why we must examine ourselves honestly. The main questions are not how much teaching we have accumulated, how many theological subjects we have mastered or how many religious activities we are involved in, but these: has love grown? Has gentleness developed? Is there more peace in us than there was a few years ago? Are we harder to provoke and quicker to forgive? Has longsuffering grown? Have we learned not to resist, to leave justice in God's hands and to find rest for our souls in Christ? These are the signs that the fruit of the Spirit is nearing maturity.

The Lord Jesus said: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5)

God is not looking only for life in the tree, but for fruit on the tree. Not just leaves, but ripe fruit. Not just the beginning of His work in us, but its completion. That is why the whole work of the Holy Spirit has a single aim: forming the character of Christ in the believer until the fruit of the Spirit reaches full maturity.

So the believer's main concern must be to abide in Christ and bring the fruit to maturity. The seed is sown to produce fruit, and God has ordained that every fruit should ripen. In the same way, the new life received through the new birth must grow until it reaches the full maturity of Christ's character. The sowing and receiving of the seed made the forgiveness of sins possible, but God's final goal is ripe fruit: the character of Christ formed in us and a life that reflects His glory before the world.

The process begins with spiritual infancy, continues through childhood, then youth, and moves on toward maturity. As the believer abides in Christ and walks in obedience to the Holy Spirit, the fruit grows, develops and ripens, until his life becomes a reflection of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so what began as a work of grace ends in likeness to Christ, to the glory of God.

May the Lord help each one of us to work toward the fruit He expects from us. Lord, help us to bear the fruit You are looking for in us. Amen.

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