

Fruit unto Holiness

What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things [is] death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. (Rom 6:21-22)

Holy God and our Heavenly Father, we do count it a joy and a blessing to be gathered around the Scriptures today, to consider the wondrous truths that you've laid up for us in the treasure house of your Word. Bless us Father, as we seek your face in the beauty of Christ in the word. Help each of us to obey your command, "I am the LORD thy God: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psalm 81:10). And if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will You, heavenly Father, give the Holy Spirit to us, who ask you in the name of your Beloved Son and our Beloved Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ? Send your Spirit Father, that we may worship in Spirit and in Truth and so may we bring glory to your Name. Amen.

I. Fruit

a. Review of Biblical Concepts

i. Nature of God

For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. (John 16:27-28)

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. (John 14:7)

Jesus said "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9) for He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), "the express image of his person" (Heb 1:3).

1. Eternal Generation
2. Procession of the Holy Spirit

The doctrine of the Trinity consists in the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son – and the exact identity and equality of these three infinite, eternal Persons in being, wisdom, power and glory. Though identical in nature, and equal in power and glory, yet the Trinity consists in the eternal interpersonal relationships of Father, eternally begotten Son and eternally-proceeding Spirit. Perfection of holiness in knowledge, love and goodness is the eternal blessedness of God. But that blessedness is not static. The eternal generation of the Son and the eternal Procession of the Holy Spirit are mysteries to us but reveal a dynamic nature of a superabundant overflow of life and goodness in God. Aristotle reasoned well when he wrote that "there is something which always moves the things that are in motion, but the first mover is itself unmoved" – clearly there must be a first mover and just as clearly the first mover cannot be moved by another or else he is not first. Aristotle felt the knot but he was unable to untie it and resolve the mystery.

The timeless eternity of God means that He sets in motion but why? A static view of the eternal god, as in Islam, implies that such a god never would (indeed never could) create anything. But the triune God of the Bible is timelessly eternal in Trinity – infinite, eternal and unchangeable – truly, the unmoved mover – yet, by the revelation given to us in the gospel we can see that the impetus of creation has its ground in the overflowing goodness of God. “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26) and the triune nature is the hyperabundance of knowledge and love into personal subsistences in an incomprehensibly glorious Being who is the ground of all being, who yet stoops to create and to show goodness to the creation in the redemption of wretched, poor, lost, hopeless, sinners.

ii. Nature of Creation

Aristotle also wrote that, “in reference to the first mover it is of the same kind as the thing it moves,” but there is a fallacy in his reasoning, as even he would be forced to admit that, if the unmoved mover is eternal and unmoved, therefore the creation which is moved cannot be of the same kind as Him. God is unchangeable and the creation is ever-changing. God is utterly unique and wholly separate from the creation by virtue of His incomprehensible eternal nature. But it is true that we see some reflections of the Creator in the creation – though we must always be careful to understand them analogically, as revealing truths about things truly beyond our finite comprehension and that we can only see through a glass darkly for the time being.

We proceed by way of Divine revelation as our only hope to understand those things about which Aristotle could only grope hopelessly in the dark. We start with the creation account in Genesis 1.

And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.
(Genesis 1:12)

1. A fruit tree yields fruit after its kind
2. Good fruit is desirable
 - a. the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food (Gen 2:9)
 - b. Micah lamented, there is no cluster to eat of the first-ripe fruit which my soul desires (Micah 7:1)
3. Bad fruit is not desirable
 - a. [1] The LORD showed me, and there were two baskets of figs set before the temple of the LORD [...] [2] One basket had very good figs, like the figs that are first ripe; and the other basket had very bad figs which could not be eaten, they were so bad. (Jer 24:1a,2)
4. Fruit has seed in itself
 - a. The Greek word used to define fruit-bearing plants is composed of two words: AGGOS and SPERMA. The first is a vessel to contain things, like a bucket or jar, and the second is the seed.

So, the fruit is the “seed container” – its whole purpose is to make every provision for the tree to reproduce by getting the seed to grow.

b. If the fruit falls to the ground and rolls a bit, the fruit body will nourish the seed and allow it to sprout and grow. If the fruit is eaten by an animal, the seeds will pass through the digestive tract of the animal and find themselves embedded in fertilizer and dropped somewhere in the woods.

c. The seed itself is an amazing little package, containing an embryo in a protective outer covering capable of reproducing the parent tree. Each seed is itself an entire tree just like the parent tree ready to go.

5. A tree must have a root to have fruit

a. The first motion of the seed is the emergence of the root downward in search of stability and nutrients.

b. And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. (Isaiah 37:31)

c. The wicked covet the catch of evil men, but the root of the righteous yields fruit. (Proverbs 12:12)

d. Their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit. (Hosea 9:16)

iii. Fruit as Metaphor of Act and Consequence of Act

1. Act – whether good or evil

a. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it. (Jer 6:19)

b. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. (Matthew 7:16-17)

2. Consequence –good or evil outcome

a. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: (Prov 8:19-20)

b. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. (Pro 1:29-31)

c. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? (Romans 6:21)

3. The Fruit of the Fall – the seeds of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil continue to bring forth death in all Adam’s seed

- a. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (Genesis 3:6)
 - b. And, the fruit of this act is expressed by Jude, in that manning has become “trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12).
 - c. Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image (Gen 5:3)
 - d. And as we have borne the image of the earthy [the first man, Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [if we are in Christ and being conformed to His image] (1 Cor 15:49)
4. The Fruit of Redemption
- a. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things [is] death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. (Rom 6:21-22)

So, we see that fruit is a very rich concept in Scripture and one that is so common that it is evident in everything around us – everything is a fruit of something and produces fruit in its own consequence. Therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name (Hebrews 13:15).

b. Bearing Fruit (Luke 8:5-8, 11-15)

5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. 6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. 8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. ... 11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those by the wayside are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. 13 They on the rock [are they], which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. 14 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. 15 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 8:5-8, 11-15)

This is a well-known portion of Scripture, but I just want to draw out a few ideas relevant to bearing fruit. These things are so obvious that they need to be pointed out!

- i. The seed is the word of God

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Peter 1:23). The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Romans 1:16). The word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Peter 1:25).

As seeds have an efficacious virtue in themselves to produce trees of the same kind as the parent which produced them; so the word produces qualities in the heart like itself. The law in the heart is the law in the word transcribed to the soul; it is a graft which places a crab tree stock into a sweet tree; like a seal in hot wax it leaves the likeness and impression of itself; it works a likeness to God as he is revealed in the gospel, for we are changed into the same image. What image? The same image which we behold in that glass, 2 Cor. 3:18; not his essential image, but the image of his glory represented in the gospel for our imitation. The word is the glory of God in a glass, and imprints the image of the glory of God upon the heart.

ii. Some seed falls along the Path

1. Too hard – the seed never penetrates –
2. Nowhere perhaps is the devil more active than in the congregation of churchgoers. Nowhere does he labor so hard to stop the progress of that which is good, and to prevent men and women from being saved. From him come wandering thoughts and roving imaginations--listless minds and dull memories--heavy eyelids and fidgety feet, weary ears, and distracted attention. In all these things Satan has a great hand. People wonder where they come from, and marvel that they find sermons so dull, and remember them so poorly! They forget the parable of the sower. They forget the devil.

iii. Some seed falls among Rocky Soil

1. Rocks prevent roots from growing downward. Remember this: Where there is no root, there can be no fruit.
2. The seed of the word springs up immediately, as soon as they hear it, and bears a crop of joyful impressions, and pleasurable emotions. But these impressions, unhappily, are only on the surface. There is no deep and abiding work done in the soul. And hence, as soon as the scorching heat of temptation or persecution begins to be felt, the little bit of religion which seemed to have been attained, withers and vanishes away.
3. It is quite possible to feel great pleasure, or deep alarm, under the preaching of the Gospel, and yet to be utterly destitute of the grace of God. The tears of some hearers of sermons, and the extravagant delight of others, are no certain marks of conversion. We may be warm admirers of favorite preachers, and yet remain nothing better than stony-ground hearers. Nothing should content us but a deep, humbling, self-mortifying work of the Holy Spirit, and a heart-union with Christ.

4. There is a remedy – The LORD asks, Is not my word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? (Jeremiah 23:29)
- iv. Some fell among thorns
1. Thorns prevent the plant from growing upward
 - a. Note that the soil is good, else there would not be thorns growing there. The problem is not in the soil but in the thorns.
 2. The third caution contained in the parable of the sower is to beware of the cares of this world. Our Lord tells us that the hearts of many hearers of the word are like thorny ground. The seed of the word, when sown upon them, is choked by the multitude of other things, by which their affections are occupied. They have no objection to the doctrines and demands of the Gospel. They even want to believe and obey them. But they allow the things of earth to get such hold upon their minds, that they leave no room for the word of God to do its work. And hence it follows that however many sermons they hear, they seem nothing bettered by them. A weekly process of truth-stifling goes on within. They bring no fruit to perfection. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him (Titus 1:16).
 3. Thousands of things, which in themselves are innocent, become, when followed to excess, become so many highways and byways to hell. Open sin is not the only thing that ruins souls. Amid our families, and in the pursuit of our lawful callings, we have need to be on our guard. Unless we watch and pray, these temporal things may rob us of heaven, and smother every sermon that we hear. We may live and die thorny-ground hearers.
 4. Again, the LORD offers the remedy --Is not my word like as a fire? (Jer 23:29) It shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day (Isaiah 10:17).
- v. Good soil
1. The last caution contained in the parable of the sower, is to beware of being content with any form of religion which does not bring forth FRUIT in our lives. Beware of those having a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Timothy 3:5). Our Lord tells us that the hearts of those who hear the word aright, are like good ground. The seed of the Gospel sprouts roots which go down deep until they find the source of life and stability in Christ, and then grow upward to produce the outwards fruit in terms of faith and practice, first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. Outward profession of Christianity, and the formal use of Church ordinances and sacraments, has never yet given a person a good hope in life, or peace in death, or rest in the world beyond the grave. There must be the fruits

of the Spirit in our hearts and lives, or else the Gospel has so far been preached to us in vain.

2. Only those who bear spiritual fruit, shall be found at Christ's right hand in the day of His appearing. The Father cuts off every branch of Christ that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful (John 15:2).
3. We must all pay the more careful attention and BE CAREFUL HOW WE HEAR because it is a matter of life and death for us.

c. Holiness

(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) (Eph 5:9)

While the KJV has “the fruit of the Spirit” there is an interesting textual issue here, and many good mss have “the fruit of the light”. Calvin comments on this verse, <quote>“I wonder how the word Spirit (πνεύματος) has crept into many Greek manuscripts, as the other reading is more consistent, — the fruit of the light. Paul’s meaning indeed is not affected; for in either case it will be this, that believers must walk in the light, because they are ‘children of the light.’”</quote> The meaning is not changed since God is light and the Spirit is God but the phrase “fruit of the Light” is quite natural in the context and is really quite an appealing connection between the metaphors of fruit and light; let’s consider bearing the fruit of the light, as bearing fruit unto holiness, by the grace and power of God the Holy Spirit.

While perfect holiness is always represented by pure white, it is a matter of fascination that the purest white light when seen refracted through water in the clouds appears as a rainbow. That is, by way of revelation to Noah, God’s perfect holiness is seen refracted in that picture-perfect judgment. There we see God’s long-suffering, His wrath and judgment on a world of ungodly sinners, but also His grace and mercy shown to Noah and his family. It was a full-orbed display of God’s perfect holiness! So (as it seems to me) God chose as a sign of the covenant with Noah that which represents to us His holiness in a way that we can understand – the full-orbed revelation of Himself made to mankind in that world-wide destruction by water which is made typical of the final world-wide judgment by fire at the coming of Christ (2 Peter 3).

It is an amazing fact about white light that it can be refracted into all the colors of the rainbow. Each of the colors is nothing like white and a blotch of any color would appear as a stain upon the purest white; “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” says Isaiah. White is mysterious because, none of the colors of the rainbow are anything like white, and it is amazing that joining many which are unlike into a perfect union becomes something transcendent and quite unlike each of them. It is utterly surprising!

Also surprising is that while the rainbow consists of many colors, just three colors are enough to constitute white light: Red, Green and Blue. When all three shine at full strength and brought into union, the result is the purest white. We modern folks know about RGB monitors which only have the three colors but yet can produce every color of the rainbow and also white perfectly. Even more interesting is that the human eye has just three types of cones which correspond and respond to red, green and blue

light respectively. So, the three base colors of the color system are enough to reconstitute white and our own bodies are created in accordance with that interesting feature of light. We should all remember that various combinations of colors produce other colors. Red and blue make purple, etc.

By way of analogy, the simplicity of the God's perfect holiness is decomposed for us in this verse into goodness, righteousness and truth and in Gal 5, shine forth in the wider spectrum of the nine aspects of the fruit in Gal 5:22-23. That may not be a complete list because the tree of life, in Rev 22:2, "bare twelve manner of fruits" which must be of the one kind yet graciously distinguished for us into twelve aspects by God's marvelous condescension to our limitations.

The interesting thing is that the terms listed in Eph 5:9 correspond to our natural faculties of judgment. That is, our human nature is bound to perform three kinds of judgment. First, in terms of truth, we judge true vs. false, second, in terms of righteousness, we judge right vs. wrong, and third, in terms of goodness, we judge good vs. bad. These three aspects of the human nature cover the entirety of our human nature (as far as I can tell) such that the fruit of the Spirit/Light takes root downward and bears fruit upward in every part of our beings. Nothing can remain unaffected by the gospel – all our thinking, all our speaking and all our actions, in every area of our lives must all come under the comprehensive reformation of the gospel. We must "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5).

Paul presents the terms in Eph 5:9 in order of eminence with goodness first, then righteousness, and last, but not least, truth. We however will begin with truth because it is the most properly basic of the three. Simply put, we must know the law before we can obey the law (though ignorance of the law is no excuse;) and we must know what is good before we can know to do good. So, we will begin with truth and our relation to the truth via knowledge.

i. Truth

Jesus said, Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. (John 17:17) Christ Himself is the Truth, the Word of God, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). And this is life eternal, that we might know God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ, whom He sent, in the power of the Holy Spirit whom They sent.

Peter wrote, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:2-3)

Science and unaided human reason are "ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." Plato records the basic questions of knowledge in a dialog between Socrates and a young Pythagorean (relativist) and notably mankind has not really progressed much beyond the miserable situation outlined there by Plato. We think we know this and that but when pressed, we might admit that we really don't know what knowledge is. Since Plato, men have known that knowledge is true belief plus some sort of account but struggle because they can't find a way to give an account and yet can't deny the need for knowledge. You may say you believe something to be the case, and that thing really

may be the case but doesn't mean you know it to be the case. To claim knowledge, you will have to have some proof, an eyewitness account, documents, etc.

Science proceeds from observation and induction – scientists grope for the wall like the blind, they stumble like drunken men toward an ever-changing group hallucination. They are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth because they are trying to reach from temporal to the eternal without any reference to a Mediator. Truth is eternal but our experience is of this world and as Moses asked, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it? (Deut 30:12)

We, however, look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor 4:18). Christianity moves in the other direction – it is the Eternal Truth reaching out from eternity to the temporal to reveal eternal truth through the prophets and apostles, and directly through His own Son, who is the very Truth Himself, the Mediator who proceeded from the Father, and came to reveal the Father to us; He is the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared the Father to us (John 1:18).

He is as necessary for knowledge of any kind as He is to salvation. He is the one who upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3) and who lights every man (John 1:9). By His common grace unregenerate men are illuminated and enabled to become doctors and philosophers. Yet they abuse His graciously given light by using it to deny Him, the True Light. Oh, this is a bitter truth!

If you would exercise yourself to godliness, study the knowledge of God. It is ignorance of God that is the origin of all sin. If men only knew the sad fruit of his eternal wrath, they would turn from their sins and not continue to provoke him. Didn't the rich man in hell, in pity for his five brothers, urge Abraham to send one from the dead to keep them from that awful place? "but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Oh, it was too late for him! And yet he had a thought for his brothers. But Abraham replied, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead." (Luke 16:31)

But if men knew the sweetness of God's favor, they would do, they would suffer anything to please him. It is in the mist of ignorance that they lose their way, and wander from him who alone is the Good.

Those who know God most, love him most, and fear him most, and trust him most. It is life spiritual, and the seed of life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent, John 17:3. All godliness, all grace, is seeded in the knowledge of God, and grows from it. Those who with open face behold the Lord, though as in a glass, are changed into his image, from glory to glory; from one degree of grace to another, 2 Cor. 3:18.

Oh! what a work, a gracious sanctifying work, the knowledge of God makes in the soul! It makes the understanding esteem him above all, the will to choose him before all, the affections to desire him, to delight in him, more than all; the whole man is made to seek him, to serve him, to honor and praise him above all things in heaven and earth. The reason that God is so much loved, admired, worshipped and glorified in his church, when all the world around despises him, is this, 'In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel' Ps. 76:1.

ii. Righteousness

In a consideration of personal righteousness, we must always begin at the beginning and source and everlasting fountain of all righteousness – the Lord Jesus Christ who is the LORD our righteousness, who Second Person of the Trinity, who wedded Himself to a human nature in order to represent the Father to the world and to redeem a people for Himself. If His righteousness is not your righteousness by faith in an imputation based on an actual, spiritual union with the Mediator, then you are yet separated from Christ and have no spiritual life in you (1 John 5:12). But he who stands in a justified relation to the Father, having had his guilt washed away by the blood of Christ and, being clothed with the righteousness of the Mediator, must necessarily have had His law written on their hearts -- whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1). That is, it cannot be that a person stands justified in Christ and accepted in the Beloved and not have had that work of the Spirit in regeneration and the giving of a new heart, that is, the ingrafting of the soul into Christ, with a new principle of life, chiefly expressed in the promise of the New Covenant.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people (Hebrews 8:10)

The establishment of a relationship with God is not haphazard or ad hoc, it is in strict accordance with the principles of Covenant Theology. We are set free from the law as the great millstone of the covenant of works, sure to sink everyone about whose neck it is tied. The great millstone is taken away in Christ but that does not end our relationship to the law. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law (Romans 3:31).

In fact, the law becomes the friend of the one in whose heart it is written. We live in gratitude for the wonderful redemption that is in Christ toward the end that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Romans 8:4). The truth of Christianity is contained in the wisdom of seeking after righteousness. “having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal 3:3). The human heart is like the Lernean Hydra, the nine-headed monster of Greek mythology – Hercules had to kill it but every time he cut off one of the heads, two would grow back and his situation became more dire. Finally, he conceived the plan with a helper that every time he would cut off a head, the helper would rush in with a burning torch to burn the stump and prevent more heads from growing. Thus, by this cooperation, Hercules was able to defeat the fearsome Hydra.

The human heart is like the Hydra in that when once some sin is cut off there invariably grows up two sins, the original which had not been mortified and pride in the fleshly mortification of sin. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live (Romans 8:13). It is living after the flesh to attempt to seek righteousness in the flesh, or to reform the flesh. The law of the flesh is pride and unless it is through the Spirit that sins are mortified, you are merely chopping off Hydra heads only to see new ones grow back and to be worse off.

Jesus said, “if ye love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15) meaning that continued and growing love for Christ produces obedience to the commandments and personal righteousness. And

again, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:22) so that we know it isn’t without knowledge that we can keep the commandments but all obedience is based on a robust understanding of the law of God. But the end must be sought, as it is, in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:31). Our hearts are filled with love towards Him as we meditate on the great truths of the gospel and apply them to ourselves. And so, as we meditate on the gospel and in prayer, the sword of the Spirit takes off the head of the Hydra in the heart, and the flaming torch of the Spirit of God burns the stump so that it will not grow back. Thus, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Herein is the Father glorified, that we bear much fruit; so shall we be His disciples (John 15:8).

iii. Goodness

Of three concepts we’re covering today, goodness is the most difficult to get a grasp on theoretically but the simplest to understand in terms of application. We use the word “good” to apply to so many things, without really thinking, that the concept has become fuzzy in our minds. It is so common to say, “that’s good” that we never stop to really think about what it means. But even if we stop to think, we are soon over our heads. What is good, really? We immediately think “No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mark 10:18) but that doesn’t really tell us what goodness is, it just replaces one ineffable term with another.

We can only humbly begin and the beginning of creation and see what the Scriptures say.

And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw *that it was good*. (Genesis 1:12)

This is the refrain of the creation account, that it was good. God created every sort of creature to reproduce after its own kind, and God saw that it was good that things were this way. The fruit tree produces fruit and the fruit contains seeds to produce new trees. And this is good because it is like God, a temporal reflection of that fountain of life which eternally overflows in His own nature into creation bringing forth that which is suitable, pleasant and beneficial in blessing to others. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11)

By goodness is meant the bounty of God. This is the notion of goodness; when we say a good man, we mean either a holy man in his life, or a charitable and liberal man in the management of his time, energy, and goods. A righteous man and a good man are distinguished in Romans 5:7, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.” For a man who is scrupulous in righteousness none would lose his life; but for a good man, one who is a rich source of blessing to others, a tender-hearted and beneficial man, someone might, out of a sense of gratitude and love, even dare to die. “The LORD God is a sun and shield”. He sends out his beams, without receiving any addition to himself, or gain of advantage from his creatures. We must have God as “my goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust” (Psalm 144:2) He must be our all-in-all to the exclusion of all others.

If our goodness is grounded in the overflowing abundance of life in the Triune nature of God, what must be the form of our participation in that goodness? If reproducing after one's likeness is good then reproducing the nature of Christ in His goodness means that we must be all-in and all in earnest of the work of "bringing many sons to glory" (Heb 2:10).

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. (Proverbs 11:30)

Here is the fruit of the flourishing branch mentioned in verse 28, "the righteous shall flourish as a branch" (Prov 11:28.) The whole course of the righteous life — the meditation on the gospel, good theology leading to doxology, makes love to Christ by the Holy Spirit, -- this is a veritable tree of life. What the tree of life was in paradise; what it will be in heaven, that he is in this wilderness, fruitful (Rev. xxii. 2, with chap. x. 11, 31, 32), nourishing (Rev .ii. 7, with chap. x. 21), healing. (Chap. xii. 18; xv. 4.) "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." (Song 2:3).

And surely, he, who is inflamed with love for Christ and so becomes a tree of life for others, and sets himself to win souls to righteousness and salvation, is wise indeed. Christ only builds His Church yet he has appointed His people to do the work of preaching the gospel, "as though God were pleading through us: we implore men on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). Now thanks be to God who through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place (2 Cor 2:16).

God grant that the seed of His goodness would take root downward and bear fruit upward in us such that by the example of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, who condescended to become the eternal good of wretched sinners such as ourselves, and so to reproduce Himself in others. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24) This is the nature that Christ had in Himself and which His Spirit reproduces in His people. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and we know when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

Finally, if we understand that God is the Good and that men stand in desperate need of that Good, being themselves utterly bereft of goodness in themselves, as Paul affirms, "that in me, by nature, nothing good dwells" and "oh, wretched man that I am!" (Romans 7:18,24). We have all to some extent been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation – which is the to participate in the doing of the highest good that can be done to a creature, being instrumental in bringing a new child into the kingdom.

A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. (John 16:21)

And what a joy it is for a sinner to be brought into the kingdom!

Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:10)

Remember that the whole purpose of fruit is to be a seed-carrier -- we have this treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us (2 Cor 4:7) – and

whether the fate of the fruit is to fall naturally or to be devoured by wild beasts, it is all for the purpose of glorifying God. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples”

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask 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; (Colossians 1:9-10)

Amen.