

Knowing Through Loving

Beloved brethren,

I have been pondering what the Bible says about the current limitations imposed upon our knowledge. We can and do easily assume that we know much, and we act accordingly. We know what we want and need as well as what others want and need. We even know others' thoughts and intentions, and due to the advancing scientific and technological advances in our day, we pretty much know all that there is worth knowing.

What I have just written may sound smug and arrogant, and it is, but such thinking and the actions to proceed from it are based on assumption, not knowledge. It is frustrating, inefficient, and dangerous for us to assume more than we know. Most, if not all, disagreements that arise between individuals are largely prompted by ignorance. Most of the wars that have been fought, especially in modern times, have begun because the combating powers acted on partial and inaccurate intelligence, made worse by miscalculation and mismanagement of data.

We all do know some things about some things; we all do know relatively more things about a few things that are special to us. However, no one has ever or will ever know in this life all things about all or even about a few things. Yet in every age people have assumed that their generation was at least near the pinnacle of knowing all things about all things.

The truth is that the difference between knowledge that the most intelligent and highly educated person possesses and the knowledge that the most ignorant and uneducated person has is miniscule in comparison with the immense universe of ignorance that both share. Even in our vast and common ignorance, however, there is a critical difference between a person knowing what he does not know and his not knowing what he does not know. I may know that I know little, if anything, about molecular biology and human anatomy, and that knowledge of my ignorance tends to make me rely more on a trained doctor than on myself when it comes to medical treatment. However, when we fail or refuse to know that we do not and cannot know all things, we then live and move and have our being in confident but blind assurance that we can live effectively. We even fancy ourselves as being experts on how others should live.

The Bible plainly tells us that now we know in part (1 Cor. 13:9). How did the Apostle Paul come to that realization? The answer is not that he was a lover of knowledge and wisdom, but rather that he was a lover of the God of all truth, knowledge, wisdom, and love. Paul declares the deficiency of all human knowledge toward the end of the love chapter of the Bible (1 Cor. 13). The reason love is patient, kind, and not arrogant is that when we love others, we seek to know them as they really are and not as we wish them to be. We seek to know them not to discover and condemn their faults and sins—true love enables us to accept that such things are in all of us. When we love others, we do not seek to know them so that we might dominate them and seek to change them by our controlling directives.

The more we grow in love, the more we realize that such love comes only from God and that our love springs from His love and is growing to be ever more like His love. The love of God does not prompt Him to seek loveliness in us and to love according to what He finds. The love of God deposits loveliness in us and nurtures that loveliness to perfection. Therefore, love is not provoked, takes no account of a wrong suffered, bears, believes, and hopes all things in the light of truth (1 Cor. 13:5-7). When we grow in such love, we find that facts, truths, even thoughts and intentions of God and others begin to open up to us. This is how we come to possess true knowledge. People yield their secrets (that form a substantial part of them) only to those who

love them and help them to know that they love are loved. Those who love become keener gatherers of intelligence and knowledge because their love not only encourages disclosure from others but also because those who love most know best how to use the knowledge they attain in ways that serve to bless those from whom they gather the information.

Even though we may grow in love and grow in the understanding of our vast ignorance, we will never be perfected in love or knowledge in this life. But on the final day when we are all changed into the perfect likeness of Christ, we will know all things and know them as Christ knows them. Then, also, we shall be known by others as we have been known through all time and eternity by God, who in love has chosen and predestined us in Christ to the end that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In light of that glorious perfection we shall see our brethren and ourselves as God has seen us from foundation of the world—perfected in His beloved Son. That is why in glory there will be no accusers, no judgment, and no condemnation. All people in that glory will be transparent and unashamed.

While we can only here and now dimly see each other in that light of holy love, we should be increasingly affected and guided by that light. Then, because we humbly know that there are many factors and features to the lives and circumstances of others of which we are ignorant, we will exercise the judgment of charity as well as a spirit of patience, kindness, and gentleness that issues from the Holy Spirit. Then we will be slow to speak and ready to hear, slow to give glib directives and quick to seek understanding, slow to take offense based on our partial knowledge and quick to seek and rejoice in a fuller apprehension of the truth. Such living brings relief and joyful comfort to others while it fills us with joy in the knowledge that we are blessing and not needlessly bruising others.

Yours, learning to find light by loving,

William Harrell

Prayer and Peace

Dear brethren,

How well do we understand prayer? How well do we pray? The answer to the first question is one we cannot rightly answer because we are inclined to overestimate our understanding of prayer. The Bible tells us the humbling truth when it declares that we do not know how to pray as we should pray (Rom. 8:26). Because we do not know how to pray we tend either not to pray or to pray amiss. That is the answer to the second question.

The good news is that we can grow in our understanding and practice of prayer. Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray and He did, giving to them the model that we call the Lord's Prayer. But how well do we understand our Lord's model prayer and fashion our praying in accordance with it? One of the ways we can test our comprehension and competence with respect to this enormous privilege and power is by our simply reflecting upon the degree and frequency of our anxiety. We are taught in God's Word that true praying vanquishes our anxiety (Phil. 4:6,7). The apostle Paul writes in stark and absolute terms when he tells us to have *no* anxiety about *anything*, and positively in *everything* to express our requests to God in prayer. The immediate result of such praying is not always that we receive the answer to our request but rather is always that we receive the soothing embrace of our Lord to whom we pray. Paul

indicates this when he writes that the first result of our prayerful petitioning is that the God to whom we pray gives to us His incomprehensible peace. Our Lord delivers us from our anxieties as we cast our burdens upon Him (1 Pet. 5:7). He does so because He cares about and will tend to the burdens that we prayerfully deliver to Him infinitely more than we could ever do.

However, He cares more about *us* than He does about our *burdens*. He lovingly acts to correct our perceptions of our burdens that are distorted into exaggerated proportions by our fears. The Lord does this because He loves us better than we love ourselves or the other people for whom we pray.

The Lord replaces our anxiety with His peace in a way that Paul clearly specifies in two aspects of our relation to Christ. God first deals with our emotions; then He deals with our thoughts. Fear and its lesser cousin, anxiety, are not in themselves sins. They result as bitter fruits of sin. Adam knew no fear until He sinned, and then he hid from the Lord his God because he was afraid (Gen. 3:10). The path of our thinking is now cluttered with the thorns and thistles of our primary emotions of shame and fear. Even in Christ we are plagued by these emotions and we try to think our way out of them instead of praying our way out of them. But our thoughts alone are inadequate in this case. Consider how Adam used his mind as a result of his fear: he tried to excuse himself and blame his wife (and, implicitly God) for his plight. By our praying, by our entering humbly and gratefully into a more conscious, intentional, and dependent communion *with* our God, instead of our trying to put Him off by our rationalizations, we come face to face with the Prince of Peace and our agitated emotions are soothed and sealed in Him and His grace and love.

From this divine treatment serving as a sentry that guards our emotions we are then treated to an enlightening transformation of our thoughts. No longer do we allow our anxiety to captivate our thoughts and pervert them into fuel for our worries. Our thoughts, instead, begin to focus and reflect upon the person and work of our Savior. Truths such as the immeasurable love, infallible wisdom, and almighty power of our Lord—all now in Christ engaged to work for us—open our eyes so that we see that He who is for us is infinitely greater than all that is or could be against us.

When we are brought into the matrix of the peace of God, we can then face even the worst prospect as a legitimate answer to our prayers. We may dread the worst and seek to avoid it apart from prayer, or even to dodge it by our praying amiss. But when we find refuge of heart and mind in Christ through whom we pray, we can and do ask with sincerity and with grateful trust that it not be our will—our finite and worried will—that prevails, but rather that God's will be done. So, let us learn to pray more and to our wonder and delight we shall find that we worry less. Our worries will decrease as we find the One to whom we pray increasing in our apprehension, as He works in answer to our prayers and for our peace, His glory, and the good of others.

Yours gratefully in Christ,

William Harrell

Thoughts on Church Titles

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I have expressed casually on several occasions my observation regarding what the Bible has to say about titles that are given to various people in the Church. It is not an insignificant matter and therefore I intend to address it a bit more fully in this letter.

Let us begin by considering the state of the Church in our day with respect to the matter of titles and ranks used among the people of God. We as Protestants have a history of deploring such offices and titles as Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, and so forth in the Roman Catholic Church. However, we have our own titles that indicate a hierarchy among us that may be closer to what we criticize than we may realize. There are Priests, Bishops, Superintendents, even Apostles named among the Protestant ranks of Lutherans, Methodists, and Independents. In our own Presbyterian denomination we have Elders and Deacons because we see clearly those offices in the New Testament (1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5; Acts 6; 1 Tim. 3). However, does it follow that we find titles of respect attached to those offices anywhere in the Word of the Lord? We will search the Scriptures in vain to find anyone addressed in them as Reverend, Pastor, Elder, Deacon, or even Apostle. The men who served the Lord as the foundation of the New Testament Church (Eph. 2:20) invariably announce themselves and are addressed by their given names. Paul introduces himself in his letters, for example, not as, *Apostle Paul*, but rather as, *Paul an apostle*. Furthermore, such men as the apostles uniformly cultivated not so much a superior or paternal relationship with those to whom they ministered, but more of an egalitarian and fraternal relationship. The highest rank any of them ever claimed was that of *brother* who served lovingly their *brethren*.

Why were they that way? It is because they took seriously the warning and instruction of Jesus about His followers attempting to determine their rank in relation to each other. Our Lord tells us that kings of the Gentiles assert and maintain high ranks and positions of domination over others but that in His Church it must not be so (Lk. 22:24-26). The greatest in Christ's body will be the least imposing, most humble, and most loving servant of his or her brethren in Christ. This is so because it was the very essence of Christ that He humbled Himself to become our servant, in things as mundane as His washing His disciples' dirty feet and as magnificent as His pouring out His life for us (Phil. 2:1-7). If anyone deserves a title, it is our Lord Jesus. And yet His Word tells us that He is not ashamed to call us His brethren (Heb. 2:11-17).

The truth is that the Son of God came to our world to redeem us by giving Himself up for us (Gal. 2:20). He came not to create an organization or corporate structure that contains various tiers of rank and dominating power; He came, instead, to create for Himself a bride, the Church, composed of living stones whom He cherishes and calls to love one another as He has loved them. When we erect ranks and create and use titles, we do not serve to build one another up so much as we devise ways to distinguish ourselves from each other so that we relate to each other like masters and slaves instead of like mutually loving brethren.

I am not asserting that our use of titles is done with a conscious determination to make ourselves something that is not in accord with our Lord's loving and edifying intention and design. I am suggesting that we should become more conscious of how we address one another in the body of Christ, and of how we regard one another. We never want to slip into an attitude where we begin to lord ourselves over others, or allow others to lord themselves over us in the body of Christ. We rather want to be intentional in regarding ourselves as being loving brethren, called to regard

and to treat one another with due respect and, above all, with the royal law of love whereby we all together humble ourselves and seek to edify our brethren.

My office is that of a pastor. That is a functionary position that need not indicate that I am a superior in any way over others in the flock of our Savior. Paul's self-designation of being the chief of sinners should humble any pastor with the realization that he may well be in the pastoral office, where he spends so much of his time in the Word and prayer, not because he is a great saint but because he is a great sinner whom the Lord mercifully keeps close to Himself lest he grow in sinfulness more than righteousness. If I welcome any title it is that of *Christian and brother* to my fellow Christians. Anything more than that seems to me to be a lessening of the precious ties of love that alone bind us together in the body of Christ.

Your pastoral servant and brother,

William Harrell

Our Union to Christ and Relation to His Law

Beloved brethren,

Why are we justified by faith alone? It is because faith alone unites us to Christ who has accomplished our salvation on every level. Christ has made atonement to God for our sins. The holy wrath of God that even the least of our sins deserves has been fully expended on the Savior. For those who are in Christ, there is no divine condemnation or wrath now or forever. Christ has paid the debt our disobedience has incurred and He has taken away all of our sin by taking it all to Himself (2 Cor. 5:21). We are justified by faith because we are united by faith to our perfect Redeemer who has accomplished for us a perfect redemption.

There is therefore now for all who are by faith in Christ Jesus no condemnation (Rom. 8:1)...at least no condemnation from our God. The world, the remnants of our old natures, and the devil work individually and conspire together to accuse us of sins. We are not accused of imaginary sins, but rather of sins we know that we, even as believers and justified children of God in Christ, still commit. The insidious nature of these accusations is evident when we realize that in all cases to some degree the holy law of God is used as the cudgel to beat us into doubting thoughts, fearful emotions, and desperate actions, so that we move away from our God, due to our sense of personal unworthiness.

We all experience these painful and grievous seasons in our walk by faith. How are we to respond to them? There are two false ways of response. The first way is that of the legalist (who makes too much of the law); the second is the way of the antinomian (who makes too little of the law).

The legalist thinks of himself as a disappointing loser who is never good enough to approach God. He confuses this feeling with such virtues as reverence and humility, but he is really a frightened soul who regards God as a harsh Master who is perpetually grieved, disappointed, and angry with him due to his poor performance. The essence of the Christian life for the legalist is that he must always try harder not to sin.

Now it is true that God does not want us to sin. Our deliverance from sin is an essential dimension of our salvation. A legitimate use that God makes of His holy law is in His defining sin and commanding us not to let it reign over us (Rom. 6: 12). But the legalist believes that

when we do sin, God is offended by us and angry with us, and we have cause to stay away from him due to our unworthiness. This belief is logical but not theological. For God tells us in His Word that although the Bible has been written so that we might not sin, when we do sin there is divine provision for us in Christ who is our Advocate (He merits our forgiveness), and our propitiation (He has borne God's holy wrath).

These are positive truths that liberate us from our sins and prompt us *toward* the God against whom we have sinned, not *away from* Him, as Adam in his fall moved away from God, even as God was approaching him not to punish him but to promise him salvation! The focus of the legalist becomes increasingly negative for himself and others. He tries not to sin by keeping the law as a devious way to stay out of trouble, and he resents any brethren who appear to be less committed to such an endeavor than he is. The legalist is, however, faking a friendship with the law in a vain endeavor to persuade God, whom he thinks wields the cudgel that is ever pounding him, to lessen and lighten some of the blows.

The other false way is that of the antinomian. His attitude is that it is not so much sin that is our problem, as it is the law. Therefore, the antinomian conceives of his salvation in terms of his having won a divine lottery that gives him free license to sin. The antinomian fails to understand that Christ died to save us from sin, not to indulge and confirm us in it (Rom. 6:1,2). He also fails to realize that the very essence of sin is that it is not only incompatible with the believer's new nature in Christ, but its effect is always that it will separate us *from* God, not draw us *to* Him. The essence of eternal life is that we should intimately know God (Jn. 17:3).

The antinomian thinks he is ever in a perfect relationship with God because he equates the no condemnation of justification with a sinless perfection in sanctification. For the antinomian, the Christian life is lived with the false assumption of divine indulgence that treats his sins as though they do not matter. The legalist hates his sins and believes that he is responsible to work his way out of them by his own obedience; the antinomian loves his sins and will not tolerate the Lord or His holy law condemning them. Although these two views seem extremely diverse, they are essentially the same in their pathologies. Both focus excessively on sin and law and both focus too little on the person and work of Christ for us as well as in us.

The focus of those having and exercising faith is upon Christ. They delight in His person and love His law precisely because it is the reflection of the character of Him whom they love. The faithful delight in the saving work of Christ because it is the one thing necessary for our peaceful and joyful reconciliation with God. The faithful focus upon the work of Christ *in* us, by His Spirit nurturing our new natures, as well as His work *for* us on the cross. The faithful focus upon *the name* of the Lord, meaning the Lord as He has revealed Himself in the whole counsel of God contained in Scripture. That revelation teaches us that the law of God is essentially good and holy (Rom. 7:12), but that the Lord has given it to us neither as a means of our salvation nor as a requirement of our sanctification. The law can only condemn us. It cannot change us into the likeness of Christ. The law rightly guides us in our sanctification, while the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the comforting power of the Holy Spirit prompt our new natures to grow in the knowledge of the Lord, whom to know is eternal life (Jn. 17:3). It is when we fix our hope on our triune God that we thereby grow into His likeness (1 Jn. 3:3).

Legalism promises purity and provides only sinful pride that separates us from God. Antinomianism promises love and provides only a license for sinful indulgence that leads us into separation from the face of our Lord (Isa. 59:1,2). Faith in Christ unites us in holy love to our Lord because by faith we know that He has first, last, always, immeasurably, and unchangeably loved us (Rom. 8: 38,39; Eph. 3: 17-19; 1 Jn. 4: 19).

Faithfully yours,
William Harrell

The Fruit of the Spirit: Love

My brethren,

When I was preaching through Galatians several months ago, some of you asked me to write from my sermon notes a booklet on the topic of the fruit of the Spirit. I do not feel led or inclined at this time to produce such a work, but I can use these monthly letters in our Record to set down in writing at least a summary of what the Lord showed us through those sermons. I begin to do so with this month's letter, starting with an introduction to the aspects that compose the fruit of the Spirit as a whole, then sharing some observations on the first aspect: love.

We begin by noting in contrast to the assorted works of the flesh that we who are in Christ have the fruit of the Spirit. Paul writes of the flesh of the natural man producing works (plural), while he writes of the Spirit producing fruit (singular). There is significance to this difference. The works of the flesh consist of an assortment of fearful attitudes and actions that show the sinner's futile attempts to promote himself. In contrast, the nine aspects that Paul lists in Galatians 5:22,23 are not components of a random assortment but are, instead, distinct but inseparable facets of a coherent whole. We who are believers grow by the sanctifying work of the one Holy Spirit, so that we manifest all of these beautiful facets. We do this not as puppets, lifelessly animated by the Spirit of God. Instead, we do this as ones regenerated by God and growing in our new natures into His likeness.

The fruit of the Spirit is actually the character of the Savior imparted to all believers. That character is singular but richly faceted. We do well to meditate regularly upon this character as a whole and the distinctive characteristics, singularly and in relation to each other, because it is God's will that we should be formed into this image. When the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, telling His people of His plans to give them a future and a hope, their having this Christ-like character was ultimately what He meant (Jer. 29:11).

Love is the first and leading aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. The primary position of love indicates its foundational and supreme importance in relation to all other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. God Himself is love (1 Jn. 4:8), and He has demonstrated His holy and sacrificial love by giving His Son to die for us while we were at our sinful worst (Rom. 5:8).

Because God has so sincerely and sacrificially loved us, and because His Son has freely loved us and given Himself for us (Gal. 2:20), the divinely given Ten Commandments tell us to love God and to love our fellow man (Mt. 22: 34-40). What God commands, He also graciously gives by His Holy Spirit, who guides us into the knowledge of what holy love is and enables us increasingly to become loving in our thoughts, emotions, words, and works.

Jesus prayed for such love to be in His people, saying: *I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known; that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them* (Jn. 17:26). For this love Jesus prayed, and died, and sent His Holy Spirit to indwell us. By God's making His love to become our love, He begins the work that His grace will perfect in the final day. That work is one of nourishing our growth into His likeness to the point that we perfectly, personal, and perpetually love Him entirely and our neighbors as ourselves. And because it is God who has planted His love within us, we will grow increasingly to love as He loves.

This means that our love will be self-determined. It will be self-determined not by our old, sinful and self-regarding corruption that is antithetical the love that seeks to embrace others in holy and intimate relationships. Our love is a fruit that develops within our new natures and issues from our new life in Christ. Our God determined to love us. Nothing that is within us or that pertains to us drew the divine love to us. God took the initiative to love us from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4,5). Christ determined to love us and to give Himself for us, even when we were sinfully unlovely. Therefore, the love that the Spirit is forming in us will not let us wait to discover loveable features in others before we begin to love them. Instead, the Spirit will prompt us and our new natures will impel us to take the initiative to love others, no matter how unlovely they may be. By our doing so, we, like our God, deposit love in others whereby loveliness within them can and will grow.

Because we are growing to love as our God loves, our love will be sacrificial, as His love was, is, and forever will be sacrificial. Love will orient us not primarily toward our deriving satisfaction and pleasure from those we love. That desire to be loved is legitimate, but we will sacrifice it as a primary intention and take up the matter of our loving God and others as our singular aim. Love prompts us to give ourselves in love to our God who has first loved us; then it prompts and empowers us to give ourselves to others no matter the cost, difficulty, or suffering we endure.

We often confuse love with our strong desire for someone or something and the intense delight we find in our having them in our lives. The truth is that love is primarily about our giving, rather than our receiving. The loving person desires the holy happiness of the beloved, and derives his own highest pleasure through his knowing that his love has brought such happiness to the beloved. Such desire to give love, however, does not ruin our capacity to receive and rejoice in the love that God and others give to us. It actually expands our capacity to receive love because we do not become obsessed with and disappointed by the imperfect love others offer to us. We can receive and sincerely rejoice in what love they may give to us because we are focused upon our God, who is the source of love and whose perfect and immeasurable love satisfies our hunger for love while making us capable of covering the faults and sins of others by our loving them as He has loved us. The love that we have growing within us by the nurturing ministry of the Holy Spirit in combination with the growth of our new natures is an effectual power. By it, we establish and nourish relationships of mutually and increasingly satisfying benefit and delight. These relationships, established and maintained by love, are the sweetest fruits of God's redeeming love for us in Christ that has reconciled us to Him and to one another in Him.

Yours in His and my growing love,

William Harrell

The Fruit of the Spirit: Joy

Dear Brethren,

In last month's *Record* I began what I plan to make into a series of letters dealing with the fruit of the Spirit. In that first letter, I noted some introductory matters about the fruit of the Spirit as a whole and then wrote about the first aspect of the fruit of the Spirit: *love*. With this month's letter I move to a consideration of the second aspect: *joy*.

We have seen how love, due to its nature and primary placement in the nine facets of the fruit of the Spirit, is to be considered as the foundation for the eight following virtues in that list (Gal. 5:22,23). Love infuses and conditions all of the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. To some extent, all of the facets of this blessed fruit mutually condition each other. Yet love is the root and trunk from which the other aspects issue as branches. There is no separation between any of the nine aspects of this fruit and there is certainly no confusion or contradiction among them. However, we do need carefully and precisely to consider the relations among these aspects or we may practically, if not formally, consider them as an assortment of isolated virtues of which we each have only some, and those being the ones we prefer, while thinking that we can dispense with the rest.

We noted in last month's letter that love has its source in God, who is love, and partakes of the character of divine love as it has been supremely exercised and demonstrated in Christ. Accordingly, we find love to be self-determining, in that true love is not given or withheld on the basis of another's loveliness, but is given unconditionally as a power that deposits, rather than discovers, loveliness in the beloved. We also observe that love is sacrificial. It orients us not primarily toward our deriving satisfaction and pleasure from those whom we love, but rather it prompts us to give ourselves and of ourselves to others for their satisfaction and delight.

These features of love would appear to militate against our own joy. Yet here in the listing of the fruit of the Spirit, joy immediately follows love, as though it issues from our self-determining and sacrificial loving of others. This appearance of our joy issuing from our loving others is absolutely true. Recall how the flesh produces vile and destructive works (Gal. 5:19,21). The Spirit of God dwelling in us, and our new Christ-like natures growing in us, together produce singular and virtuous fruit, the facets of which cohere in something that is sweetly nourishing to all who possess and share it with others. This coherent and sweet nourishment is not diminished for us by our having these virtues and lovingly exercising them in our relationships with others. While love is predominantly giving and sacrificial, it does not beget sorrow in those who rightly love others. Instead, it produces joy.

This joy is not the superficial glee or occasional happiness that springs from desirable circumstances that sometimes gratify our passions. The joy of the Lord is our deep, abiding, and fortifying delight (Neh. 8:10). It is the holy pleasure that is inspired by the knowledge that we are first and foremost loved and secured by our God. This holy pleasure ignites and expands within us as we love Him in return and realize that our loving Him pleases Him. Our joy also grows when we love others and, by such loving, serve to bless and please them in ways impossible to attain or even imagine when we do not love.

In Luke 10:21,22, we read of Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit precisely because the Spirit kept Him conscious of His Father's love for Him. The Spirit also kept Jesus conscious of and committed to His determination to love others to the extent that He would freely and sacrificially deliver Himself up to those painful and humiliating sufferings whereby He would die so that we might live. Our blessed living through His death, and the Father's good pleasure in that redeeming work, together formed the joy that was set before Him as the result and reward of His costly love (Heb. 12:2).

Because Christ dwells in us by His Holy Spirit and because of who we are as new creatures in Christ, we who have the seed of God's character growing in us (1 Jn. 3:9) love as He has loved us and find our joy in our loving others as He has loved us. True joy is inextricably tied to the exercise of holy love. As we love others, we find our joy in bringing joy to them by our lovingly serving them. To the end that His people should have such joy through their receiving

His love and sharing holy love with one another, Jesus prayed (Jn. 17:13,26). That His people should have such joy issuing from their receiving and giving of such love, Jesus gave His life and sent to us the Holy Spirit as the divine comforter who crowns all of our loving of others with joy that is inexpressible.

If we have little or no joy, it is invariably because we have loved others little or not at all. God has made us for relationships bound together with love. Sin has become a separating force that not only causes us to be fearfully isolated from one another, but that also brings upon us misery as a direct result of our isolation. In Christ, this is all changing. We are reconciled to God and to others, not only by truth and righteousness but also and especially by our being bound together by our mutual love. It is in such love that we find true and lasting joy. Therefore, as the Spirit inclines and empowers us to love others, He sweetly sets us on the right track to give and receive joy in ever increasing measure.

Yours in the joy of the Lord of love,
William Harrell

The Fruit of the Spirit: Peace

Dear friends,

I continue to write on the fruit of the Spirit. We have seen how love, due to its character and primary position in the nine facets of this blessed fruit, is the foundation and pervading essence of the other eight virtues listed in Galatians 5:22,23. Love has its source in God, who is love, and partakes of the self-determining and sacrificially self-giving nature of the love God has demonstrated in His having given His Son to save sinners. We further have observed that while such self-giving would seem to militate against the personal happiness of the one loving, in reality nothing begets joy in us more truly and lastingly than when we love others. Accordingly, joy follows love as the second facet of the fruit of the Spirit. Joy is the deep, abiding, and fortifying holy delight of our souls that issues from our knowing that God loves us and also issues from our loving others as He has loved, and commanded, and enabled us to do.

This leads us to the third facet—the final facet of the first of the three trios that from the fruit of the Spirit—*peace*. When our first parents sinned by their doing what God had forbidden, their action was an offense against their good and holy Creator that aroused His holy wrath against them. The pathology of their sin produced disquieting shame in them as they considered themselves, and fear in them as they considered their relationship toward each other and especially toward God. That is why they troubled themselves to fashion clothing to hide themselves from each other, and that is why Adam fled from God when he heard the Lord approaching him. There was peace in none of these attitudes and actions. This miserable condition of self-shame and dread of God and others has without any exceptions dominated our human race throughout our history. That we lack peace in ourselves and in our relationships with others is the inescapable essence of our being that has been increasingly manifested in the wars, laws, economic structures, and cultural distinctives—all of which speak powerfully of our personal and societal agitation.

The fundamental blessing of the gospel of salvation is *peace*. The fullness of that blessing is best conveyed by the Hebrew word *SHALOM*. Such peace is that tranquil security that we enjoy when we know that we are, by faith in Christ, justified in the sight of God. The peace that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in us, making us know that we are beloved so dearly by our heavenly

Father that we can refer to Him with intimate familiarity as our Daddy (Abba), is something so deep and strong that it sustains us even in the most severe trials (Jn. 14:27).

However, this peace is more than the subjective serenity of our souls. It is based on the objective peace that Christ has wrought between the holy God of heaven, whom we have offended by our sins, and ourselves, the sinful people of earth who eke out our lives in the fearful misery and alienation from God and others that we have brought upon ourselves because of our sins. It is *in* Christ that we have peace with God (Jn. 16:33). It is *through* our faith in Christ that we are justified and so experience peace with God (Rom. 5:1). It is *by* the comforting and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit that we hear and heed the truth that we are beloved children of God and no longer children of His holy wrath (Rom. 8:16; Eph. 2:2-7).

This is the peace that issues from God's saving love. It is enhanced by our knowing that God is pleased with us in Christ and rejoices in our communion with Him and in our enjoyment of all that He is to us and in all that He gives to us—which is all things that are *yes* and *Amen* to us in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). This is the blessing that was pronounced on the ancient Hebrews as God was erecting the ceremonial priesthood that pointed to Christ (Num. 6:24-26). This is the blessing that the apostles of Christ pronounce in the benediction that opens most of their epistles: *Grace to you and peace...* (1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:2; 2 Jn. 3; Jude 2). This peace is ours in the person of Christ and through the work of Christ who is our peace (Eph. 2:14).

Because Christ has established this blessed, lavish, and joyful peace for us in relation to our God, it follows because of who we are as new creatures of God in Christ in whom the Holy Spirit dwells that we should be lovers of peace and makers of peace with others. Jesus pronounces blessedness upon those who are peacemakers because they are acting pacifically precisely because they are children of God (Matt. 5:9). Therefore, we observe once again how the fruit of the Spirit in all its facets is sweet to those who possess and exercise those facets and tends to be pleasing to others who know and are influenced by those who have the fruit of the Spirit.

These facets of the fruit of the Spirit are all tested in our lives. Such testing is part of the Lord's nourishing and stimulating work in us as He causes this blessed fruit to grow in us. Our peace is most frequently assaulted by the accusations of Satan that aim to drive us back into our shame. We are also misguided by our own fears, those sorry comforters, that tell us that it is not the nearness of our God to us that is our good. Our response to these trials is simple and clearly stated in God's Word in the numerous times that He tells us to *fear not*. The positive component of that counsel is that we draw and remain close to our Lord by prayer and supplication (Phil. 4:6,7). Then the God of peace will be prevail with us (Phil. 4:9), guarding our hearts and minds, our emotions and thoughts, in Christ who is our peace. This peace vanquishes all our fears of God's holy wrath and all our fears of the attacks of evil men and devils. It also dispels our reservations to love and enjoy our God and our brethren and even our neighbors.

Love, joy, and peace are of God and are given to believers by God through His Holy Spirit. We who are in Christ have God's life and love growing in us to His glory and our joy in that peaceful and pleasant relationship that God has established with us.

Yours in His peace,

William Harrell

The Fruit of the Spirit: Patience

Dear friends,

The first three aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (*love, joy, and peace*) fill God and are given to believers by God through His Holy Spirit. These three facets progressively fill our hearts and souls. So do rest of the facets of the fruit of the Spirit. All of them blessedly condition each other. Of the second trio we begin to consider in this month's letter, two of them (*kindness and goodness*) are gently demonstrative, while the first of the three listed (*patience*) is essentially undemonstrative. With this second set of aspects we find components that are part of the quality of meekness. God's Spirit makes us to be gently virtuous and not imposing. He leads us to be undemonstrative when our impatience or lack of kindness would unduly alarm or pain others for whom we may have true and even loving consideration.

It may seem strange that such an essentially undemonstrative virtue as patience should follow the cardinal virtues of love, joy, and peace. Shouldn't those filled with such foundational aspects of the sweet fruit of God's Holy Spirit be eager and assertive to press their virtuous exertions on others? Yet, forceful manifestations of love, joy, and even of the peace we have with God can be repellant rather than attractive to those who are strangers to the sweet fruit of the Spirit, and even to those who have yet to ripen very much in their personal production of the Spirit's fruit. We are all at different points in our spiritual development and we all grow at differing paces. With patience, a person listens more than he speaks, and waits more than he works. The patient one seeks to be understanding and sympathetic with others rather than to impose even good things upon them. Those who are patient think and pray before they act. If we have and exercise patience, we resist the impulses of our residual sinfulness to repay provocation with swift punishment. Those who love much can bear much (1 Cor. 13:5,7), and do so to win other sinners into loving relationship with God and with themselves rather than to prove themselves right and others wrong. And before all of these features of patience toward others can be truly exercised, we learn patience from our God and exercise it with respect to Him, as Scripture often tells us to *wait upon the Lord*. It is the loving patience of God and of His Spirit-filled children that most effectively leads sinners and wayward saints to true and lasting transformations into godliness (Rom. 2:4).

We detect a lack of patience in Adam as soon as he committed sin and fell from his original righteousness. He hastened superficially to address his shame by his fashioning leaves into his crude and woefully inadequate clothing. When the Lord God asked Adam if he had come to realize that he was naked and was ashamed of it as a result of his having eaten the forbidden fruit, Adam answered the Lord with the impetuosity and evasiveness that grew from his guilt and fear.

This seminal display in Genesis 3 of sin's pathology in pressing the sinner to quick and inconsiderate action indicates to us what we have lost by our sin. We have lost our perception of the love of our God and of the joy and secure peace we can have only from Him. In Christ, we experience a fundamental and ever-growing restoration of these things we have lost. Accordingly, when we perceive God's love and love Him in return, we experience joy and peace. From this experience we can afford to be patient because realize increasingly that there is rarely any need for us to hurry ourselves or to rush others. This is not because patience is the same as indolence, in which state we do nothing. Instead, patience is the virtue of a principled waiting upon and trusting in the wisdom, love, and power of our God in all times and situations. Part of our having transformed minds by the mercies of God in Christ is that we serenely and

joyfully resist impulses to impose our wills on others and to do so with haste, lest we miss the opportunity to succeed in our feverish trying. Instead, we accept and vitally rest in the reality that our God knows best, loves best, promotes true righteousness best, and that He fits us to serve Him better in terms of His empowering and inclining us to do so with effectual fruitfulness, than we could ever do by our rushing ahead of Him.

When Jesus calls us to come to Him in all of our weariness, He promises us and gives to us rest (Matt. 11: 28-30). That rest is found not only in the cessation of our pitiful and sinful labors (works of the flesh) as we live and luxuriate in His saving love and grace. But we also experience rest as a result of our being blessedly yoked to Jesus and bearing with Him those burdens He calls and empowers us to bear in cooperation with Him. Consequently, we come to understand that patience is not so much a matter of our inactivity as it is our pacing ourselves according to the living and loving movements of our heavenly Good Shepherd. We lie down when He makes us to lie down because He lies down in yoke with us. We rise up and move to refreshing waters because He knows perfectly where those waters are and when we most need them (Ps. 23:2). Even when we encounter life's valleys of humiliation, pain, and perplexity, we do not obey the fearful impulse to run away from such trials or to rush through them. Instead, we walk with measured and confident steps through them, precisely because He is with us to minister to us precious comforts that we cannot best receive apart from our tribulations into which He leads us (Ps. 23: 4, 31:21).

Our patience is a feature of the Spirit of Christ in us and of our new nature in Christ acting together to exercise that precious faith the Lord has given to us. By such faith we vitally and practically realize that our God reigns with sovereign authority, infallible wisdom, and almighty power to sustain and govern the world and orchestrate everything in it for our good (Rom. 8:28). In all of this, He does not require us to be in a rush, but He always calls and prompts us to wait on Him and sometimes to be still and, knowing that He is God, watch Him work for us as well as through us (Rom. 8:31). So much of our growth in the Lord and of the development of our loving intimacy with Him and with others depends on our being intentionally perceptive with the eyes of faith and receptive of all that we see the Lord is in His person and in His work for us. We should learn to resist the false sense of urgency that distracts us from such edifying and comforting wealth as we impetuously rush blindly to have our own poor way, instead of the enriching way our Lord provides for those who wait on Him.

Yours learning of the wealth in waiting,
William Harrell

The Fruit of the Spirit: Kindness

Dear Friends,

In this month's letter, I will address the fifth aspect of the fruit of the Spirit: *kindness*. It is found in the middle of the second triad of the nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. Of the three facets that form this second triad, two of them (*kindness* and *goodness*) are gently demonstrative, while the first of the three listed (*patience*) is undemonstrative. These are aspects that make us to be gently virtuous. The Holy Spirit leads us to be undemonstrative, or gently demonstrative, when our impatience or lack of kindness would unduly alarm or pain others for whom we have loving consideration, and to whom we may be trying sincerely to speak the truth in love.

In last month's letter, we considered the virtue of patience. We saw that while the patient

may be longsuffering with the slow development and even unjust contradiction of others, they do not bear with stoic indifference such things that try their patience. The Spirit not only prompts and enables us patiently to endure the inconsideration and even cruelty we may receive, but He also prompts and enables us to demonstrate kindness towards those with whom we bear patiently. But there is more to this than the Spirit's prompting and empowering us to act kindly. Through His sanctifying work in our lives, the Spirit nurtures and stimulates the growth of our new natures in Christ. Accordingly, we act kindly because we are becoming truly and essentially kind in Christ, and are not merely acting kindly under compulsion.

We perceive kindness more in the manner of one's speech and action than in what one says or does. Kindness is the lovingly considerate softening of our expression in the administration of truth and love. We are right to speak the truth in love, even when it may hurt others to hear that truth. However, our growing kindness leads us to be intent upon softening the blow as much as possible as we determine not to add any unnecessary pain to the salutary suffering we may be obliged to administer to others. Jesus faithfully and lovingly rebuked sinners such as the woman caught in adultery and busy Martha. He spoke to them words that were true and loving. But He also did so in a kind manner that befitted His love for them and his respect for their penitential regard for Him. The truly spiritual person does not blast out blunt truth, but instead considers how to clothe his communications in kindness that will better commend the truth.

The incarnation of God in Christ was an essential and vitally necessary demonstration of the kindness of the Lord. He who is our glorious Maker and sovereign King could have in truth and righteousness confronted us with His holy wrath and condemning judgment. However, in the counsels of eternity, our God in love chose us in Christ to be His redeemed and adopted children and to stand before Him ultimately holy and blameless (Eph. 1:3). When God entered the world to accomplish our redemption, He did so not with the consuming glory of His pure and holy divinity, but rather He came humbly as very God of very God but also in the true humanity of the baby born in Bethlehem. As the God/man, Christ Jesus grew up in obscurity and poverty, ministered faithfully in the face of growing opposition, and humbled Himself ultimately to become sin for us and to die the death of a judicial execution wherein He was regarded as a blasphemer and criminal (Phil. 2:10ff). All of this demonstrates the kindness of the Lord that we are taught to observe with gratitude and that leads sinners to repentance in a way that mere true and righteous commands could not do (Rom.2:4). Jesus makes this most clear to us when He issues His most appealing invitation, in which He says: *Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.* (Matt. 11: 28-30). It is the Spirit of this kind Christ who indwells us. It is also the nature of this kind Savior that has been planted in us at our regeneration and that is developing in us as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. This is why we have the characteristic of godly kindness and as we look for and find more and more of the kindness of God written on every page of Scripture, and observe especially the kindness of Jesus in His dealings with others, that we shall behold our perfect example of kindness after which we can model our attitudes and actions.

We must never regard kindness as a weakness that may be endearing in spiritual infants or children or mild-mannered adults, but has no place in the strong, mature, and effectively serving saints of God. It is the kind gentleness of our saving God that sweetly draws us to Himself as He powerfully delivers us from the hard dominion of our sin and exalts us to His glory (Ps. 18:35). As we grow in kindness we will find our effectiveness in true spiritual service increasing greatly,

and our circle of close friends and brethren growing to be almost embarrassingly large. Only the wicked, the fearful, the tyrannical, and the brittle, who delude themselves into thinking they are strong who despise Christian kindness. And in the history of the Church, even many of them have been blessedly conquered by the gentle but potent virtue of godly kindness.

Yours seeking more of the milk of godly kindness,

William Harrell

The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness

Beloved Friends,

I continue to write in this letter on the fruit of the Spirit. At this point in this series of letters we have considered five of the nine aspects of the character of Christ that is forming in us as a result of our new natures growing in conjunction with the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God. The previous aspect, *kindness*, speaks to us of the manner in which we seek lovingly to bless others. The spiritual person is not only conscious of the truth but also endeavors to convey the truth to others in a kind way that comports with the love that should characterize all of his communications. Such manifestations of kindness serve better to commend the truth to others while at the same time, making the truth more acceptable to others.

With *goodness*, the sixth aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, such kind ministering of blessing to others is guided by one's being consciousness of and committed to what is right and even best for others. As love without truth is no longer love, but is really sentimentality, so kindness without goodness is no longer kind, it is really a sweet but cruel indulgence of the evil passions of others. We can reach a point, in our dealings with some people, when kindness becomes a pearl that must be withheld from those who prove to be moral swine. Jesus was kind in His dealings with weak, broken, and grieving sinners, such as the woman caught in adultery. However, our Lord manifested more goodness and less kindness when He drove the money changes out of the temple and when He castigated the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23).

The goodness of the Spirit-filled will not permit them to allow their kindness to be perverted into an indulgence of wickedness. Such indulgence would be neither good, nor kind, nor loving. Instead, goodness fills us with a consciousness of the good character, holy will, and righteous deeds of our God. Those who have goodness developing within them are ones who have themselves been rescued from their naturally inherited depravity by the redeeming provision of their God who is good and the source of all that is good. In their possession of an increasingly good disposition and their loving devotion to the God of all goodness, they are filled with a grateful commitment not only to be good themselves but also to do good to others.

There is definitely a positive dimension to goodness. That dimension issues from our redeemed moral appetite for all that is true, right, pure, lovely, and excellent (Phil. 4:8). Our good God lavishly feeds this appetite with the nourishment contained in His holy Word, and by the sanctifying work of His Holy Spirit. There is also a negative dimension to goodness. That dimension is our hatred of and opposition to all that is evil (Rom. 12:9). The good soul will tolerate evil not from a spirit of apathy, still less from a spirit of pity. Those full of the goodness of the Lord will only endure evil when they are convinced that such patience will serve the higher ends of goodness. For example, our Lord is patient with sin and with sinners, not because He is indifferent to sin, but because He purposes to lead some to repentance (Rom. 2:4) while

allowing others to fill up their allotted measure of sin before He brings His righteous judgment upon them.

The goodness of the Lord is the fountain of the goodness that we who are in Christ possess in growing measure by the edifying work of His Spirit. It is from the goodness of the Lord that His saving grace and redeeming compassion flow (Ex. 33:19). Those who know the Lord as their Shepherd can have the comforting confidence that His goodness and lovingkindness will not only go before them, preparing their way, but also will be with them in their daily lives and even will follow them as their rear guard, mending the wounds they have received through the evil attacks against them as well as from their own stumbling and falls in their walk by faith (Ps. 23:6). By our goodness that is a fruit of His goodness to us, we become more intent upon our being good to others, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). God has made it clear to us what is the sum of what He requires of us: to love Him with all that we are, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Such love is good and right in the sight of God and desirable among men. The practical aspect of such loving of others is our doing justice, our loving kindness, and our walking and working humbly with our good God so that we do good to others (Mic. 6:8).

With goodness we have come to the final aspect of the second triad of the fruit of the Spirit. We have seen in this second triad components of the quality of meekness that is the gentleness of the Lord that invites us to Him and into the realm of His goodness so that we might find the regeneration and refreshment of our souls in Him (Matt. 11:28-30). As we find our deepest rest in the gentle yet strong yoke of His grace, we become increasingly inclined and enabled to be meek ourselves and to show our virtues gently to others so that they, too, seeing God's light shine in us, might be drawn to taste the sweetness of the Lord's grace and delight in His goodness.

Yours in His good grace,

William Harrell

The Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness

My brothers and sisters,

For the past several months I have been writing to you some thoughts on the fruit of the Spirit. We have considered in this series two of the three trios of the nine aspects of that fruit, and now we begin to consider the third and final trio. This final trio begins with *faithfulness*, which arises from saving faith but is distinct from it. Saving faith is essentially receptive of God's gracious giving. Faithfulness is essentially an outworking of that saving faith. So, the faithful person receives blessing from God's ordinances of grace, and is also faithfully loyal and true to the God of salvation, as well as to His ordinances, and to His people. The faithful person not only maintains a grateful and joyful allegiance to his God, but he also and especially acts in fidelity to, with, and for his Lord who has revealed His person, work, and will in His Word. The faithfulness of those possessing the fruit of the Spirit will prompt them not to manifest their love or kindness or any other aspect of the fruit of the Spirit in a way that would be contrary to the Lord or to His Word.

We should observe from this that faithfulness describes the character and strength of a relationship that the faithful one has with various entities. As with all facets of the fruit of the

Spirit, so it is with faithfulness that it comes to us by God as a measure and aspect of His own divine Spirit. We can, therefore, come to a clear understanding of our faithfulness by our first considering the faithfulness of our God. Our Lord manifests His faithfulness in three primary areas: He is faithful to Himself; He is faithful to His Word; and He is faithful to His work.

These areas touch not only His own person but they also embrace others. For example, in all that the Lord plans, promises, and provides, He acts in accordance with and never contrary to or separate from His own holy, just, and loving character. Supremely, He delights in Himself, acts for His own glory, and swears by His own name. In our Lord's high priestly prayer, we learn that our God loves and delights in Himself as the one, true, and living divine Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jn.17:21-26). God always acts for the sake of His own glory (Isa. 48:9), and when He condescends to give assurance to His people of His covenant love, He swears by His own name (Heb. 6:13-18).

The Lord is also faithful to His Word. His promises recorded in His Word issue from His holy and loving character. The provisions the Lord has given and will yet give in fulfillment of those promises are certain and in conformity with those promises due to God's faithfulness to His Word (Heb. 7:20,21).

God is also faithful to His people. The God who is love has inspired in His Word the use of a Hebrew term that means faithful, covenant love, and has employed that word far more than any other synonym for love. We might think that God's supreme faithfulness to Himself would either exclude us from His faithful actions or at least reduce us to a place of lower consideration. The reverse is true. It is precisely because God is faithful to Himself—the God of holy love—that He is faithful to us to a degree that would seem to indicate that He considers us as more important than Himself. We cannot avoid that appearance when we consider the incarnation of God in Christ and His atoning death on the cross that He freely undertook in love to save sinners. And yet it is the height and perfection of God's glory that He should so manifest His saving grace for us.

The faithfulness that we who are new creatures in Christ have growing in us by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit operates along these same three lines that we have observed in the operations of the Lord's faithfulness. As God's faithfulness is supremely a matter of His fidelity to Himself, so our faithfulness essentially and supremely operates in our being faithful to our saving God. We are called by His Word and impelled by our new natures and by His Holy Spirit to love Him, trust Him, and serve Him with all of our being. As we grow into spiritual maturity our thoughts, emotions, and actions are increasingly captivated by God in Christ. Therefore, we desire to know Him more truly and to be conformed to His character more perfectly (1 Jn. 3:2,3). Accordingly, our fidelity to Him also becomes our highest fidelity to ourselves as we truly are and are ever more becoming in Christ.

Our faithfulness also operates in relation to God's Word. We love the Word precisely because through it our God reveals Himself most perfectly to us in our walk through this world of distracting sorrows and misleading shadows. We, like Jesus, would rather starve physically before we allow ourselves to starve spiritually, for we now live not by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of our Lord. And while we can draw a distinction between God and His Word, we can never separate the living, divine, eternal Word from the written Word of Scripture. The faithfulness that is developing in us gives us a growing hunger and thirst of this Word that is our light and liberating power.

Finally, our faithfulness pertains to our relationship with others in our world, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Our God tells us that if we do not love others, we

cannot truly say that we love Him (1 Jn. 4:20). We who are in Christ are directed by our God not only to love Him with all that we are, but also to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). In fact, we are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ as though they were more important than ourselves. Husbands are to sacrifice themselves for their wives (Eph. 5:25), and we all are to regard others in the body of Christ as being more honorable than ourselves (Phil. 2:3,4). In these ways of seemingly losing ourselves for the sake of others (who may actually be less worthy than we are) we find ourselves in ever more faithful relationship with our Lord, with His Word, and with our brethren. Accordingly, our faithfulness progressively leads us out of our mistrustful fears and sinfully self-regarding passions that were killing us, wounding others, and grieving God. Our faithfulness does all of this negative work as it positively leads us into the love of God that casts out all fear, and into the love of His Word that enlightens and empowers us in our working out of our salvation, and into the love of others that never impoverishes but only profits them, even as it pleases us.

Faithfully yours,

William Harrell

The Fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness

My dear friends,

In this letter I will address the eighth of the nine facets of the Fruit of the Spirit. This facet is *gentleness* and it is the second in the final trio that begins with *faithfulness*. We have seen that faithfulness is essentially our outworking of our saving faith. The faithful person receives blessing from God's ordinances of grace, and is also faithfully loyal and true to the God of salvation, as well as to His ordinances, and to His people. The faithfulness of those possessing the fruit of the Spirit will prompt them to manifest their love, joy, kindness, or any other aspect of the fruit of the Spirit only in a way that is acceptable to the Lord and in conformity with His Word.

As it is with faithfulness, so it is that gentleness has its root in the person and work of God in Christ. Its outworking is summed up by Paul when he writes that those who have received mercy from the Christ who is meek and humble in heart (Mt. 11: 28,29) should, *be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.* (Eph. 4:32). The imposing Christian is not only a contradiction of his new nature but also of the Spirit's graces and of Christ's person and work and of the Father's tender and saving compassion.

It might seem to us that the sovereign authority and almighty power of our God would impel Him to relate to His children and certainly to those who sinfully live and act in rebellious alienation from Him with manifestations of His holy zeal and consuming wrath. If He has all power and dominion, why should He not act powerfully, exerting His omnipotent strength? However, what we actually observe is that our God acts with extraordinary patience and gentleness. His tender mercies can be considered even by His children and certainly by His enemies to be His folly and weakness. Why should He who called the universe into existence by the word of His power not roar in dominating force over all the evil that is in this world and over all of the imperfections that remain in His people? Why should God reduce His might to the confines of a book that people can ignore at will? The answer is that our God acts gently toward

us because He essentially is meek and humble in heart (Matt. 11:28-30). He is also love (1 Jn. 4:8). When those whom He loves are poor sinners who are essentially ashamed of themselves and filled with fear and trembling toward Him, His love is supremely demonstrated by His humbling Himself to die for us (Rom. 5:8; Phil. 2: 5-8), rather than through His strong demands that we serve and honor Him. It is this very quality of our Lord's gentleness that makes us great as those who have been exalted by His grace (Ps. 18:35). And it is this divine, infinitely costly gentleness that redounds to God's highest glory, as holy angels and all of the redeemed declare our saving God to be worthy of all power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing because He has been slain for our salvation (Rev. 5: 12).

If our infinite, eternal, and divine Master has so tenderly and mercifully dealt with us, should we not love and serve one another with merciful and loving gentleness? It is the unbelievers who seek to dominate others (Lk. 22:25). Our new natures incline us to grow into perfect gentleness in our dealings with others, as our Father is perfectly gentle in all of His dealings with us. We may be tempted to lord ourselves over others. We may think it enhances the gospel when we hold to it with grim zeal and declare it with thundering words of warning. We may yearn for the days when the Church is respected by the world, if not ruling over the world. Yet all of these forms of domination are foreign to and militate against the Lord who has made us to be partakers of His nature that includes gentleness.

Too often we present the precious doctrines of grace in a graceless manner. Our words are never to be ones of hard demands, however right we delude ourselves into thinking they may be. We are to convey truth and love (Eph. 4:1-3, 11-16) seasoned with the grace of God (Col.4:6). This means that we are to think and feel and speak and act not in ways that are high or harsh or imposing on others, regarding that they deserve such treatment while we in our righteousness have warrant to dish it out to them. Instead, our new natures and the Holy Spirit and loving example of our God all lead us to manifest through our gentle ways how safe and secure they can be in our love for them. If we live and serve in that spirit, we will not be condoning people in their sin and faults and failures. Instead, we will be effectively drawing them out of those things that are killing them and leading them to the One whose merciful gentleness has saved us and filled us with thanksgiving and joy.

Yours in His gently prevailing grace,

William Harrell