**Lesson 20**

**The Fructifying Ministry of the Spirit**

The term “fructifying” means “to bear fruit” or “to make fruitful.”

“Far more is said in Scripture upon this aspect of our many-sided subject than is generally supposed—different figures being used, especially in the Old Testament, to express the graces and virtues that the Spirit imparts to and develops in the elect. A considerable variety of emblems are employed to set them forth.

* They are frequently referred to metaphorically as flowers and gardens of them, to beds of spices, and unto trees and orchards. Consider the Song of Solomon 4:12-15 . . .

***Song of Solomon 4:12-15— 12 "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a rock garden locked, a spring sealed up. 13 Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, henna with nard plants, 14 Nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, along with all the finest spices. 15 You are a garden spring, a well of fresh water, and streams flowing from Lebanon."***

What are some of the characteristics of a garden that make the image of fructifying so appropriate to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us?

* A “***garden***” is a piece of ground distinguished and separated from others for the owner’s use and delight—so the Church of Christ is distinguished and separated from all other people by electing, redeeming, and regenerating grace.
* In a garden is a great variety of plants, herbs, and flowers—so in the Church there are members differing much from each other, yet in all there is that which is delightful to their Lord.
* In a garden the plants and flowers do not grow up naturally of themselves; they do not spring forth spontaneously from its soil, but have to be set or sown, for nothing but weeds grow up of themselves—so in Christ’s Church, those excellencies that are found in its members are not natural to them, but are the direct product *of the Spirit’s operations*, for by nature nothing grows in their hearts but the weeds of sin and corruption.
* To be healthy and productive a garden must be well watered, otherwise its delicate plants will quickly wilt and wither; the same being true of trees and all vegetation: a plentiful supply of water is indispensable. Consequently, in keeping with the fact that believers are likened unto plants and trees, and their graces to flowers and fruits, the quickening, renewing, reviving, and fructifying operations of the Spirit are spoken of as “dew,” as “showers,” as “streams in the desert,” etc.

**Point:** The glory rendered to the Triune God is seen in the fructifying ministry of the Spirit.

* First, the object of the fruitfulness in the Christian is ever toward God the Father. God is glorified by the fruit we bear (John 15:8).
* Second, the graces and example we live by are those of God the Son in us.
* Third, the fruit which is born in the believer is expressly called “the fruit of the Spirit.”

**Regarding the Holy Spirit Cultivating Christlikeness**

The Holy Spirit not only imparts life and holiness, but He sustains the same in the soul; He not only communicates heavenly graces, but He cultivates and develops them.

***Isaiah 61:3, 11— 3***“***That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified... 11 For as the earth brings forth her bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”***

* The same One Who “***planted***” those “***trees of righteousness***,” will also “***cause them***” to “***spring forth***” to grow and bear fruit.
* As Hosea 14:8 states, ***From me is thy fruit found.”***

***Isaiah 44:3-4— 3 'For I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, and My blessing on your descendants;***

***4 And they will spring up among the grass like poplars by streams of water.'***

* Just as surely as a drought brings famine, so the absence of the Spirit’s working leaves all in a state of spiritual death.
* But just as heavy rains renew a parched vegetation, so an outpouring of the Spirit brings new life.

Why is this term, “fructifying,” such a perfect term to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us?

 The fructifying images used in Scripture . . . flowers and gardens and orchards and vineyards . . . serve several purposes.

* **First**, the images they bring to mind are vivid. We all know what a beautiful garden of flowers and orchards of fruit-bearing trees looks like. When you think of fruit trees and vineyards, images of trees heavy with fruit and vines heavy with grapes immediately come to mind.
* **Second**, the image of flowering and fruit-bearing is very descriptive of the Spirit’s work in believers. For those who are in Christ, the evidence of their salvation is testified to by the “fruit” that they bear. In the sermon on the Mount the Lord uses the image of fruit-bearing . . .

***Matthew 7:16-20— 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.***

* **Third**, the work of the Spirit is very descriptive of how “fruitfulness” grows in believers. For those who are newly saved, their fruit is only “budding.” But over time the fruit grows through the watering and nurturing of the Spirit until it grows to maturity.

Twice in this chapter Pink states that “the Spirit fructifies the regenerate by conforming them to the image of Christ—first to His graces, and then to His example.” When Pink speaks of Christ’s “graces,” what “graces” of Christ is he referring to?

 It is important to remember that while the Holy Spirit is causing spiritual fruit to grow in believers (the fruit of the Spirit), the fruit itself is found in the One in whose image these graces originate. **In other words,** the Holy Spirit is causing that to grow in us which originates in and unites us to Christ, not the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who causes Christlike fruit to grow in us.

* “The Spirit’s fructifying of the believer is the conforming of him into Christ, first in his heart, and then in his life.
* By nature we are totally unlike Christ, being born in the image of Adam and dominated by Satan; or, to revert to the figure in the opening paragraph, so far from resembling a beautiful and well-kept garden, we are like a barren desert, where nothing but useless shrubs and poisonous weeds are found.”

 Pink uses the terms “fruit” and “graces” almost synonymously. He suggests three possible reasons why the spiritual “graces” of the Spirit are termed “fruit.”

* “**First**, because all grace is *derived* from the Spirit as fruit issues from the life of a plant.
* **Second**, to denote the *pleasantness* of grace, for what is more delightful than sweet and wholesome fruit?
* **Third**, to signify the *advantage* redounding to those who have the Spirit; as the owners are enriched by the fruit produced from their gardens and orchards, so believers are enriched by the fruits of holiness.

 The use of the term “fruit” paints a vivid picture of what the Spirit is “growing” in each of God’s children. He is the “Master Gardener.”

***Galatians 5:22-23— 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control;***

In this chapter it appears that the “graces of Christ” and the “fruit of the Spirit” are referring to the same thing. Why the difference? Why are the nine graces listed in Galatians 5:22-23 not referred to as the “fruit of Christ” or the “graces of the Spirit”?

 The term “graces of Christ” emphasizes that Christ is the one from whom these graces originate and are modeled on.

* They appear first in Christ and are then communicated by the Spirit to those who are “in Christ.”
* The term “fruit of the Spirit” is a perfect term because the Holy Spirit communicates, or causes to grow and flourish, those “graces of Christ” in the new believer.
* Just as Christ is the vine, so we are the branches. And the Holy Spirit is the means by which the nourishment and graces of Christ are communicated from the vine to each of us.

Why is the word “fruit” in the phrase “the fruit of the Spirit” in the singular instead of the plural, “fruits”?

* “In the use of the singular number, “the fruit [rather than fruits] of the Spirit,” emphasis is placed upon the *unity* of His operations: producing one harmonious whole—in contrast from the products of the flesh, which ever tend to discord and chaos.
* These virtues are not like so many separate flowers in a bouquet, as the variegated petals of one lovely flower exhibiting different shades and forms. A rainbow is one, yet in it all the primary colors are beautifully blended together.
* These graces that the Spirit imparts to a renewed soul are distinguishable, but they are inseparable. In some believers one grace predominates more than another—as meekness in Moses, patience in Job, love in John—yet all are present and to some extent active.”

**Three leading passages on the subject of the fructifying work of God**

 Arthur Pink points out that there are 3 leading passages on the subject of the fructifying work of God—

* John 15:1-17 names the *conditions* of fruitfulness
* Galatians 5:22-23 furnishes a *description* of the fruit itself
* 2 Peter 1:5-8 states the order of fruit or the *process* of its cultivation.

***John 15:1-16— 1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away*; *and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean* *because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone* *does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.***

 ***12 This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another.”***

Due to interpretive errors, this passage is commonly misinterpreted and, therefore, misunderstood. Consider the following points.

In v. 2, Jesus states, ***Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away (“lifts up”; secures to a trellis to stimulate growth); and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes (not “cut,” but “cleans” of disease and parasites) it so that it may bear more fruit.***

* It is commonly believed and held up by Arminians that when Jesus states, ***every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away***, that Jesus is stating that a person can lose their salvation.
* The error in this interpretation comes from the translation of the Greek word *airō*.
	+ This word is translated ***takes away***, implying that it is removed.
	+ But the word *airō* can also be translated “to lift up.”
	+ If the translators had translated the phrase to read, ***every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He lifts up***, the meaning would refer to how a vinedresser “lifts up and secures to the trellis those vines that have come lose from the trellis.” Such actions by vinedressers are common. In so doing, a vine is secured back onto the trellis and is stimulated to growth and produce fruit.
	+ Why would a vinedresser prune a vine simply because it has come loose from the trellis He would re-attach it and enable it to grow and produce good fruit.
* A second, similar error comes later in v. 2 when Jesus states, ***and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit***.
	+ Again, there is an interpretation that comes from translation of the word ***prunes***.
	+ The Greek word that is used is *kathairō*, from which we get the English word, **catharsis**, meaning “to cleanse or purge.”
	+ Here the meaning of *kathairō* does not imply that the Lord ***prunes*** or “cuts” branches, but that He “cleans” branches of disease and parasites to stimulate good, healthy growth in the vines.
* Further evidence that *kathairō* means “to clean” is found in the following verse . . .

***John 15:3— 3 You are already clean*** (same word, *kathairō*) ***because of the word which I have spoken to you.***

* So, now when you read this verse you see a different meaning emerge that shows the tender loving care God the Father has for His children, not a judicial removal . . . ***every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He lifts up; and every branch that bears fruit, He cleans it so that it may bear more fruit.***
* Does this change the way you view this verse and its meaning? In John 15:2-3 the Lord is describing how God the Father, through the fructifying ministry of the Spirit, causes those who are in Christ to bear fruit. The Lord is not warning of judgment, but is exhorting His apostles to bear more and more fruit through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

 In Galatians we have the familiar passage that describes what the fructifying ministry of the Holy Spirit produces . . .

***Galatians 5:22-23— 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control;***

* In Galatians 5:22-23 we see a **description** **of the fruit** that the Holy Spirit produces in all believers.

 In 2 Peter 1:5-8 the apostle Peter describes the progressive work of the Holy Spirit in **cultivating** the fruit that is produced in God’s children.

***2 Peter 1:5-8— 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

* In a way, this passage describes how the fruit of the Spirit grows to maturity or “ripeness.”
	+ The fruit described in 2 Peter 1 begins, or “blossoms,” in ***faith***, and then proceeds to grow and mature, resulting in ***moral excellence,*** then ***knowledge,*** then ***self-control,*** then ***perseverance,*** then ***godliness,*** and then ***brotherly kindness*** until it finally matures into ripe fruit that results in ***love*** . . . the greatest spiritual fruit, as Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 13:13 . . .

***1 Corinthians 13:13— But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.***