

Lesson 7

Teacher's Manual

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

READ & MEDITATE ON: Colossians 3:1-15

MEMORIZE: Galatians 5:22-23

INTRODUCTION

What are the distinguishing marks of a Christian? What are the evidences that someone is truly a follower of Christ? How do we know who is and who is not...and most importantly, how can we be confident we are? Our Lord gave us a simple answer for all of these questions. He said:

"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. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Matthew 7:16-20

Jesus taught us that the outward manifestations of a person's life gives an unmistakable representation of their inner condition--whether good or bad. A person may try to pretend, but sooner or later their speech or actions will betray them. Thorn bushes will not yield grapes! As a tree can be known by its fruit, others can know (and so can we), our relationship with God, simply by looking at our lives. The sum total of what we really are is reflected in what we say and do. Our WORDS and DEEDS are an outward sign to everyone revealing our inner character. This is why it is so important for every child of God to display "good fruit."

wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,
envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings,
and such like: of the which I tell you
before, as I have also told you in time
past, that they which do such things shall
not inherit the kingdom of God."

Galatians 5:19-21

According to the scriptures above, all of these things must be discontinued: sexual immorality, lustful impurity, lewdness, worshipping false gods, spells and enchantments, intense dislike, selfish ambition, jealousy, fits of rage, contentious arguments, cliques and rivalrous factions, coveting, destruction of human life, intoxication, orgies and other evil passions that God's law condemns, such as: sexual perversion, pride, laziness, unforgiveness, bitterness, revenge, gossip, slander, selfishness, mocking, lying, greediness, cheating and complaining. See also Romans 1:28-32.

The Bible says they that are truly Christ's disciples have, "...crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24). If we ever hope to make heaven our home, we must rid ourselves of these characteristics of our fleshly nature, for, "they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

B. A Good Tree With Good Fruit

A study of the scriptures immediately before and after the verses referring to the "old" and "new" man (Ephesians 4:17-5:11 and Colossians 3:1-15) reveal the outgrowths of a life transformed by Christ. These are: honesty, control of ill temper, trustworthiness, hard work, generosity, clean and edifying speech, kindness, forgiveness, love, and sexual purity. Note again the Apostle's instruction to substitute the bad conversation and conduct of the "old man" with the good conversation and conduct of the "new man." A further exhortation to bear good fruit in what we say and do is found in II Thessalonians 2:16-17:

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself...stablish
you in every good word and work."

The following references indicate how fruitfulness is equated with our words and works:

1. Love (Greek: Charity)

God is love. Love is an intense desire to please God and to do good to our fellow man. It issues forth in true compassion. God so loved that He gave. True love always involves a sacrificial giving of oneself.

2. Joy (Greek: Gladness)

Jesus wants our joy to be full. Joy is the exultation of the soul that comes from a Christian's knowledge that his sins have been forgiven and that he has a hope of eternal life. It is blessed happiness that shows itself in a shining countenance and a radiant smile.

3. Peace (Greek: Tranquility)

The Prince of Peace that calmed the storming seas of Galilee can speak peace to a troubled heart. Tranquility and a calm assurance that all is well is the quiet state of the soul that godly contentment brings. Our Lord gives peace, "...not as the world giveth...."

4. Longsuffering (Greek: Patience)

When we consider God's mercy and patience in dealing with us, it becomes less troublesome for us to bear with the frailties and provocations of others. We also learn to accept difficult circumstances and problems of life without bitter complaints.

5. Gentleness (Greek: Kindness)

This unoffensive, kindly disposition shows itself--as did the Master--in a soft touch when dealing with people. It is polite friendliness and courtesy that makes one easy to approach and talk to.

6. Goodness (Greek: Benevolence)

In the heart of a Spirit-filled person, grows this desire to do good to the bodies and souls of men. It can be detected when someone goes out of their way to try and benefit another or speak words to encourage or uplift. We should do good to all men; especially our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

III. CULTIVATING GOOD FRUIT

A. A Good Crop Required

1. The Consequences of Fruitlessness

We were united with Christ, "...that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:4). Jesus requires good fruit. It is the just expectation of dividends from His investment in us. He is very patient and will take great pains to see that we are productive. However, if we do not bear fruit after His continual efforts to help us, we will be "cut down."

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

Luke 13:6-9

Our Lord also said, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire," (Matthew 7:19).

2. The Result of Fruitfulness

If we do bear fruit, the Lord carefully prunes us that we can bring forth more fruit. Jesus said this of His Father, the husbandman:

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit...If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

John 15:2 & 6

The above letters represent the first letters of each of the ingredients listed in II Peter 1:5-7. Consider them carefully with their translated definitions:

FAITH (Assurance)

VIRTUE (Moral Excellence)

KNOWLEDGE (Understanding)

TEMPERANCE (Self-Restraint)

PATIENCE (Steadfastness)

GODLINESS (Devotion)

BROTHERLY KINDNESS (Affection for Brotherhood)

CHARITY (Love)

Certainly if we would apply ourselves to cultivating these things in our character, our lives would yield a very healthy crop of good fruit!

IV. FRUIT INSPECTION GUIDELINES

Sometimes, in our walk with God, it is difficult to know whether some things we are doing or saying are good or bad. It is not difficult to know that evil actions such as robbery, drunkenness, lies, rape or murder are wrong. These (and other obvious works of the flesh we have studied) are without a doubt, unlawful for us as Christians. However, there are some situation we are confronted with that present perplexing questions. How can we know God's will about our actions in those things the scriptures do not specifically mention? Some things that appear to be harmless, may, in reality, be very destructive. On the other hand, some things that might appear to be sinful could be quite appropriate for us as saints of God. What is the answer to this dilemma? Our Lord has not left us without answers for questionable activities. Although situations may vary, the Word of God has some principles that will allow us to judge every situation to see if it is right or wrong.

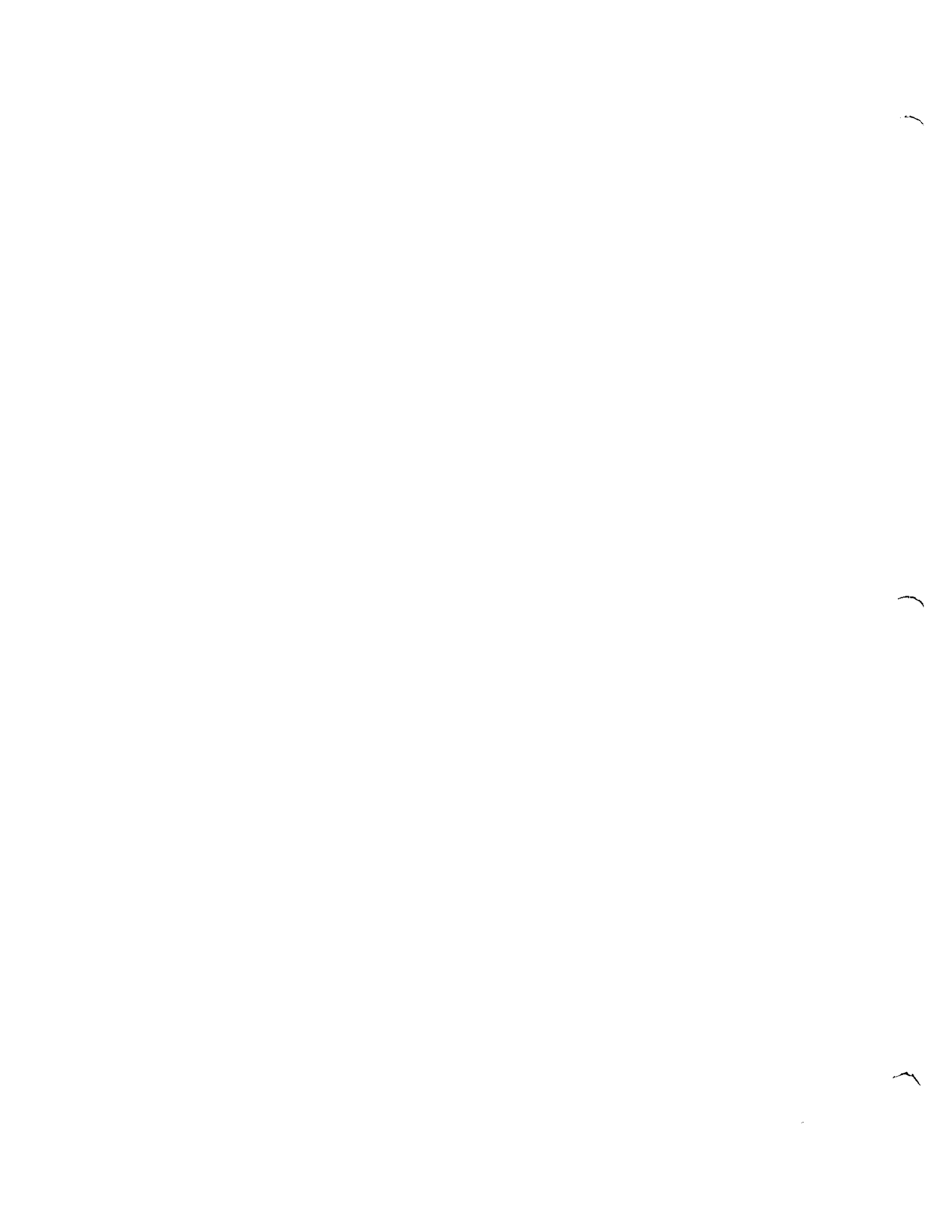
In the natural realm, fruit specialists have certain guidelines to follow when examining fruit. They are aware of certain marks on the fruit that indicate rottenness within. To the untrained eye, the fruit may appear good--but the expert often knows at a glance that it is not. Sometimes a fruit inspector can detect flaws by weighing, looking at

F. Is It What Jesus Would Do?

"He that saith he abideth in him ought
himself also so to walk, even as he walked."
I John 2:6

These scriptural guidelines should be of great help in determining whether a particular questionable action is right or wrong. If we will take heed and apply these principles, we will be among, "...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

Good character is the distinguishing mark of every true saint of God. Only "...by Jesus Christ..." can we be, "...filled with the fruits of righteousness" (Philippians 1:11). Good WORDS and DEEDS are signs to ourselves and everyone else that we are indeed followers of the Savior, who Himself said, "by their fruits ye shall know them." Our Lord has chosen and ordained us that we should bring forth fruit, and that our fruit should remain (John 15:16). Spiritual fruit-bearing is brought about by the power of the Word and Spirit of God. Abide in Him and you can know the joy of ever-increasing fruitfulness!



the color, or feeling the texture of the fruit. However, this ability comes only with training and experience. A person has to know what to look for. In the spiritual realm, we are also required to examine "fruit." That is, to discern good and evil. As in the natural, this understanding must develop. But above all, we must have some godly principles to go by. Then we can gain the ability to distinguish good and bad spiritual fruit. Here are some "fruit inspection" guidelines to follow:

A. Is It Good For Me?

"...all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."
I Corinthians 6:12

B. Is It Glorifying To God?

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."
I Corinthians 10:31

C. Is It Profitable and Upbuilding?

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."
I Corinthians 10:23

D. Is It A Stumblingblock?

"...take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak."
I Corinthians 8:9

E. Is It A Weight?

"...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us..."
Hebrews 12:1

Let us not neglect the Master's call to fruitful living! Jesus cursed a fig tree into eternal barrenness one day because it had leaves but no figs, (Mark 11:13-14,20). It had an outward show, but no fruit to display its real purpose for being. It was "preaching" without "practicing." Likewise, we can be cursed of God if we profess Christianity, but do not possess the fruit of a Spirit-filled life. Christ demands fruit--not just leaves.

B. Developing A Good Crop

Peter, the apostle, gives us a list of things we can progressively add to the "soil" of our experience with God. These "spiritual fertilizers" are guaranteed by this man of God to bear fruit. They will also keep us from falling and insure us a heavenly home--if we apply them generously.

"For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

II Peter 1:8-11

What are the virtues that will bring these things to pass? They are given to us in II Peter 1:5-7.

"...giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."

From the graces named here, comes Peter's "Formula for Fruitfulness":

F + V + K + T + P + G + BK + C = FRUITFULNESS

7. Faith (Greek: Faithfulness)

As distinguished from saving faith and the supernatural gift of faith, this has to do with being loyal, honest and trustworthy. A faithful person will keep their promises, be reliable, responsible in duties, thorough and on time.

8. Meekness (Greek: Gentle Humility)

This word does not mean spinelessness or cowardice. It speaks more of mildness and a balance of tempers and patience in regard to injuries and suffering. It is the opposite of anger and retaliation.

9. Temperance (Greek: Self-Control)

This final virtue in Paul's list has to do with self-government and moderation. It especially refers to control of sensual passions and natural appetites. This could include curbing negative emotions and overindulgence in eating or sleeping.

B. How To Have It

Notice that it is the fruit (singular) of the Spirit. This beautiful array of virtues comes from Jesus (the Light of the World) as He shines forth through a pure Christian's life--much like natural light diffuses into a rainbow of colors when it is reflected through a prism. We should also be careful to realize that the fruit is of the Spirit. That is, the Holy Ghost (not us) produces a harvest of these graces. It is the work which His presence accomplishes (not our efforts) that causes these divine qualities to be evident in our lives. In other words, spiritual fruit is totally dependent on our union with God. We can bear it no other way. Jesus explains it like this:

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

John 15:4-5

1. Good Words

In some straight teaching on the potential evils of speech, James asked God's people this question: "Can a fig tree bear olive berries or a grapevine figs?" The obvious answer is, "No." In the same way, says he, our tongues ought not to speak both bad and good. He goes on to explain that godly wisdom is full of good fruits and by sowing seeds of peace with our lips, we can reap fruits of righteousness (James 3:1-18). Paul said, "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." We should never speak evil about anyone (Titus 3:2).

2. Good Works

Although we cannot be saved by good works, Paul told the preacher Titus to constantly affirm, "...that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." (Titus 3:8). He also told the Galatians, "As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10). Paul continually prayed for the saints in Colossae that they, "...might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work..." (Colossians 1:10).

II. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

A. What It Is

The Bible says, "...the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth..." (Ephesians 5:9). The Apostle Paul tells us, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). That is, if we profess to have a spiritual life, we should possess in our walk with God, virtues that characterize a child of the king. There is no reason we cannot have the following virtues in our lives, for there is no law in heaven or in earth that would prohibit a person from having them (Galatians 5:23). Galatians 5:22-23 says, "...The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Let us consider each of these godly characteristics in their fullest sense. The following gives the literal meaning of the fruit of the Spirit from the Greek language and corresponding comments:

I. TREES AND FRUIT

In a sense, the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-23) could be represented by fruit from two different trees: one yielding good and the other yielding bad fruit. The productions of each tree are according to its nature. The tree of the flesh brings forth all manner of evil fruit. The tree of the Spirit brings forth various sorts of good fruit. Let us examine some evidences of the "old man" (our fleshly nature) and compare it with the evidences of the "new man," (our spiritual nature)-- so we can discover what God expects of us as born-again Christians. Paul told the Ephesians and Colossians to "put off," the old nature's fruit (behavior) and "put on" the new nature's fruit (behavior) in the following passage:

"Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Ephesians 4:22-24

"...put off the old man with his deeds; and... put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

Colossians 3:9-10

The Word of God requires that we rid ourselves of the sinful habits of our fleshly, carnal nature and that we take on the graces available to us in Christ.

A. A Bad Tree With Bad Fruit

Our old nature, without Christ, was incapable of producing good character, much like a bad tree is incapable of producing good fruit. In bold contrast to the fruit of the Spirit are the works of the flesh. Because its works are a result of the fallen state of the soul, the flesh exhibits the following vices:

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations,