

Small Group Session 2.3

Faithfulness, gentleness, self-control



The remaining three varieties of fruit of the Spirit are central to the character of Jesus: He is steadfastly faithful both to His Father in heaven and His followers, He is gentle in His dealings with us, and during His earthly life He exhibited a degree of self-control unsurpassed by any person before or since. As we shall see today, these three aspects of Jesus' character are interrelated, and the last in the list is vital to the growth of the other fruit.

Let God Speak First

Open your Bible to Psalm 37. Sit comfortably, close your eyes and invite the Holy Spirit to fill you. Read Psalm 37:1-9 quietly to yourself, and take note of any words or phrases that may stand out to you. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you about these words and phrases. Be open and willing to hear what He has to teach you. Share this with the group if appropriate.



Faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

We come now to consider how the final three varieties of fruit of the Spirit (faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) are deeply embedded in Jesus' character.

What does it mean to be faithful?

Read Luke 22:39-62. How does Jesus' faithfulness contrast with that of His disciples?

Read John 4:4-27. How does this story speak of Jesus' gentleness?

Read Matthew 4:1-11. Is Jesus exhibiting self control in His response to the temptations the devil brings to Him?

Actually, the answer to this last question is almost certainly 'no'. Jesus is not summoning every ounce of self control in resisting the devil's temptations. It simply was not in His character to do the things the devil was tempting Him to do. This is because self control had been foundational to the formation of Jesus' character from His very earliest days.

Tom Write in *Virtue Reborn* puts it this way: "The key is this: the 'fruit of the

Spirit" *does not grow automatically*, the nine varieties of fruit do not suddenly appear just because someone has believed in Jesus, has prayed for God's Spirit, and has then sat back and waited for "fruit" to arrive. Oh, there may well be strong and sudden initial signs that fruit is on the way. Many new Christians, particularly when a sudden conversion has meant a dramatic turning away from a lifestyle full of the "works of the flesh", report their own astonishment at the desire that springs up within them to love, to forgive, to be gentle, to be pure. ... But this doesn't mean that it's all downhill from there. These are the blossoms; to get the fruit you have to learn to be a gardener. ... (surely, thinks the easy-going romantic Christian, all these things will just happen by themselves now that the Spirit is within me!), we note the final characteristic in the list: self-control. If the "fruit" were automatic, why would self-control be needed? Answer: it isn't, so it is: it isn't automatic, so it is needed." (pp168-169).

If we are to have any hope of becoming like Jesus in His Character and bearing the fruit of the Spirit we have been looking at, then self-control will be crucial. We will return to this subject when we look at spiritual transformation in Stage 5 of Mathetes.

Before you go ...

Read through The Daily Disciple together. This is the end of Stage 2. The next Mathetes meeting will be a group session introducing Stage 3 "Understanding Ourselves".

Report Back

Remember that you are to hold each other accountable in your small group. This is crucial to your growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is not only with making sure that you take seriously the Daily Habit tasks, but more importantly that you build up an atmosphere of encouragement, trust and confidentiality, so that individuals in the group can talk about things without fear of being judged.

Go through your memory verses from last week together.

Have you been able to say Psalm 23 and the Lord's prayer regularly over the past couple of weeks?

Did you sense God speaking to you as you said these words?



The Daily Disciple

Colossians 3:1-17



In last week's Daily Disciple you started to memorize verses from Colossians 3:1-17. These verses give an excellent summary of where you are heading as a disciple of Jesus and how to get there. Tom Wright in *Virtue Reborn* describes them as "... a primer in Christian virtue" (p126). Memorizing these verses and taking them into your depths will be enormously helpful to you in your growth towards Christlikeness. In the following extract from *Virtue Reborn* Write explains what some of these verses mean:

*What then is Paul saying in Colossians that Christians must do? Answer: he is telling them to develop, in the present, the **character** which will truly anticipate the life of the coming age. ... What we need to grasp, as being of essence of his summons to Christian virtue, is the **moral effort** involved. "Put to death..." (3.5), "put away..." (3.8), "put on..." (3.14)- these are the points of particular interest.*

The main thing to note is that none of these things "comes naturally". Even for the Christian this is not going to be so, certainly to begin with. The point of virtue, as we have seen, is that eventually, as a person's character becomes more fully formed, such things may indeed begin to "come naturally". But the steps it takes to get to that point involve hard decisions and hard actions, choices that run counter to the expectations, aspirations, desires, and instincts with which every human being comes equipped.

Paul does not mince his words at this point. He does not say, "You might like to try giving up a bit of this" or "If it feels all right to you, think about doing without some of these things." He says, "Put them to death". If you don't kill them, they will kill you (3.6). This is not, we

must stress, because God will suddenly invoke some arbitrary and tyrannical divine prohibition to cramp our style, stop us having a good time, or punish us if we step out of line. Rather it is because these styles of behaviour lead directly, as a matter of necessity, into corruption, decay, and death and hence away from the new creation where heaven and earth come together and resurrection results. ...

Some things, then, are to be "put to death." Others are to be "put away," placed out of reach, pushed away with a sense of revulsion. Indeed the development of that sensitivity—the recognition and sustained awareness that these negative aspects of character (anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, evil speaking of every sort) really are dehumanizing—is a vital part of the development of character. If these things, or the list in verse 5, have become habits, ... then the first new habit to acquire is that of breaking the old ones. ...

*Paul then turns to the positive side. "Put on, then, as God's chosen ones..." The point, once again, is that **this doesn't happen automatically**. ... sooner or later, preferably sooner, each individual Christian must make the key choices to "put on" the things which genuinely anticipate, in the present, the life we are promised in the future, the life we have already been given in Christ. And, having made those key choices, each Christian must acquire the habit of making them over and over again.*

We often use the phrase "putting on", of course, in terms of people pretending to be something they are not. ... "You're just putting it on," we say to someone apparently feigning deep emotion. ... But part of Paul's point ... is that you have to go through that stage if you're going to get anywhere. ... "Putting on" is of course also a metaphor referring to what happens when you get up in the morning and decide which clothes to wear. ... The new clothes—which, to be sure, will feel unnatural and uncomfortable to

begin with—are the list we find in verses 12-17: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and above all love. ...

This is how virtue works. Keep your eye on the goal of a "complete" character ... Practice the skills in the present which will gradually enable you to do and be what will go to make up that complete character. This will seem "unnatural" at first, but eventually it may, if we stick at it, become "second nature". When you do this, he says, you will be turning into a genuine, God-reflecting human being." (pp123-128)

In this second stage of Mathetes, we have glimpsed this "complete" character in the person of Jesus Christ. You have already begun to develop the new habits that will help you to break the old ones and lead you towards this complete, Christ-like character: practicing the presence of God and scripture memorisation are vital first habits of discipleship. But there are other helpful habits which we will work together at developing as we continue through Mathetes.

Memory Verses

Colossians 3:6

Colossians 3:7

Colossians 3:8

Colossians 3:9

Colossians 3:10

Week 1

Matthew 5:13-26

Matthew 5:27-48

Matthew 6:1-18

Matthew 6:19-34

Matthew 7:1-23

Week 2

Matthew 7:24-8:13

Matthew 8:14-34

Matthew 9:1-17

Matthew 9:18-38

Matthew 10:1-20