

Lesson 7

Love, Joy, Peace

In Acts chapter one, Jesus had promised His followers that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. As you studied that book, you saw how the early church was empowered to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout their world and how they were strengthened in the face of persecution. Disciples who at one time had abandoned or denied Christ were enabled to speak the word of God with boldness. Paul of Tarsus was changed from a major threat to the spread of Christianity to its greatest missionary. There was a fundamental change that took place in the lives of people when they encountered Christ, placed their faith in Him and were filled with the Holy Spirit. But the gift of the Holy Spirit was not meant for them alone — it is also for you. What do these verses say about the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life?

Romans 8:9-14

1 Corinthians 6:19

2 Timothy 1:14

2 Corinthians 1:22

Ephesians 1:13

If we are Christians, God's Holy Spirit is already living in us. For the believer, then, the central issue is never whether or not we *have* the Spirit, but how much control we *give* the Spirit. God's plan is that we allow the Spirit to control our lives and that we live by the Spirit, thereby experiencing what some call "the fullness of the Spirit." As He controls our lives, we become more and more Christlike. What are the results of the Spirit-led life?

Galatians 5:16, 18

2 Peter 1:5-11

Galatians 5:25 says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with [or "walk in line with"] the Spirit." Much of a believer's life consists of learning to hear the voice of the Spirit and learning to respond in obedience. It's a skill that must be cultivated and developed. And as we grow in this area, we will see certain qualities — the fruit of the Spirit — become more and more evident in our lives. What is the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)?

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The word "fruit" in Galatians 5:22 is singular, which means there is only one fruit of the Spirit, which consists of the qualities listed. Every one of these qualities should be reflected to some degree in the lives of Christians. Possessing the fruit of the Spirit makes us "fruitful" — it enables us to produce "fruit" ourselves. What do these verses teach about the importance of fruit in the believer's life?

John 15:2

John 15:8

John 15:16

Matthew 7:17-19

Matthew 7:16, 20

Romans 7:4

Colossians 1:10

The goal of these lessons on the fruit of the Spirit is to help you better understand what qualities the Spirit should produce in your life and to help you examine yourself to see whether or not you are walking in step with the Spirit. You might find that you need to listen and obey a little better in some areas.

Love

When most of us think of “love” we envision a gushy sentimentality or a warm feeling of emotion toward others. But when the Bible speaks of love it is rarely referring to

something we feel on the inside. What do these verses teach about the real meaning of love?

John 3:16

Romans 5:8

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

1 John 2:5

1 John 5:3

2 John :6

The first principle you need to learn is: *"Love is not just a feeling; it is an action."* Love is how you treat others, the priority you place on their needs, your commitment to the relationship and your obedience and submission to those you love. Love motivates us toward, and is expressed in, action. Think of one person you really love (or should love). How do you treat him or her? Are your words kind and thoughtful? Are you compassionate and merciful? Do you give of yourself for that person's benefit? Do you place that person's needs above your own? Are you committed to continuing to do these things even when the feelings are gone? And what about God? Do your actions show that you love Him?

Sometimes our actions of love stem from our feelings. But true love isn't dependent on the feelings. The second principle of love is this: *"Love is doing what is right."* A lot of people rely too much on their feelings. They allow their feelings to determine whether or not they go to work in the morning or come home at night, whether or not they stay married or whether or not they give in to temptation. But the true mark of mature Christians — those who allow the Spirit to control every aspect of their lives — is doing what is right regardless of how they feel. What command is given in 1 Corinthians 10:31?

Our primary goal in life is to bring glory to God through what we do, no matter how trivial our actions might seem. If we love God, we'll obey Him and give our best even when we don't feel like it. If we love other people, we will continue to act in a loving way even when the emotional feeling is absent — because it is the right thing to do. This kind of love requires commitment. It also requires the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

The final principle of love is this: *"Love cannot be divorced from truth."* Sometimes we confuse love with acceptance, thinking that criticism and correction are incongruous with a loving attitude. Read Matthew 23:27-28 and Mark 11:15-17. Did Jesus shy away from correcting those who were in error? What did He do?

Love always stands on the side of truth. It speaks out against evil and injustice and corrects those who are in danger of falling into error. It was a heart of love that motivated Christ to condemn hypocrisy. What do you learn from these verses about the Christian's responsibility to share the truth in love?

Ephesians 4:15

1 Timothy 1:3-5

Revelation 3:19

Luke 17:3

James 5:20

Think for a moment. Do you know anyone who is claiming to be a Christian but is walking in blatant, defiant sin? Do you know someone who is about to make a serious mistake by breaking one of God's commands? Have you confronted them? Have you warned them? Do you care? Refusing to stand on the side of truth is not love; it's just the opposite. If we love others, we will share with them the truth of God's Word without wavering. It is only the Holy Spirit who can produce this kind of love in our lives. But we must submit to His control and allow God's love to flow through us to others: a love that is full of action, doing what is right and standing for the truth.

Joy

Like love, joy is often misunderstood. Those who don't know Christ think it is a feeling that can be bought or that can be found in something outside themselves, and so they try everything from accumulating material possessions to using drugs to achieve it. They measure their self-worth and their success by how much of this type of happiness they can obtain. Even Christians tend to interpret joy as a glib happiness, a spiritual "high" or a "mountaintop" experience, and they measure their spirituality by those feelings. Some even search for it: Thinking they must have it, they do anything to get it. For Christians, it might mean they spend their time hopping from church to church trying to manufacture or maintain some measure of what they consider joy. According to these verses, how do we obtain joy?

Acts 16:34

Romans 14:17

Romans 15:13

1 Peter 1:8

We must understand that joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit. If you're not living by the spirit, you won't have it no matter how wealthy you are, how many books you read or how often you go to church. You can manufacture a cheap imitation, but only the Spirit can give you a deep, abiding joy that will never fade. It is a direct overflow of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The first principle of joy is, "*Joy is a by-product of obedience.*" Read John 15:9-11. What is the result when we obey the Lord's commands?

Joy is not the objective of our obedience, it is the by-product. Joy naturally occurs when we obey the Lord.

Some people have it all backwards. They think that God's commands are burdensome and that they infringe on their pursuit of joy. But God says just the opposite. The only way to find true joy is to live a pure and holy life. That's how God designed us. When we're walking in the center of God's will, we find a joy that is inexpressible. Circumstances can't take it away. It won't waver along with our feelings. It becomes the constant, undergirding foundation of our lives. The fruit of the Spirit is joy because those who live by the Spirit and are in step with the Spirit practice obedience, and the result of that is joy.

The second principle is this: "*Joy cannot coexist with selfishness.*" In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he uses various forms of the word "joy" 16 times in four short chapters. Read all of Philippians to find out why Paul was so full of joy. Did you find the secret? Paul was so involved in the job of serving and ministering that he had neither the time nor the energy to focus on his own problems. Throughout this letter he is constantly encouraging and exhorting. He talks about how he prays often for the Philippians, longs for them and wants

them to grow in faith and love. He sees every predicament in light of spreading the Gospel. This is a portrait of a man totally immersed in his ministry to others for the glory of God. Paul was completely selfless. He was so busy with the Lord's work that personal cares and concerns seemed almost trivial and unimportant in comparison to what he had been called to do. You might remember that this was one of Paul's prison epistles. In Philippians 1:7 he says he is in chains, and in 1:20-24 it appears that death is a real possibility. If there was ever a time when we could excuse someone for wallowing in self-pity, or being preoccupied with his own circumstances, this would be it. But Paul didn't complain. He had a deep joy that only increased as he saw the fruit of his labor.

You see, joy cannot coexist with selfishness. When we're overly concerned about our own needs or wants, we lose our focus. Everything should pale in comparison to the goal: that others are saved, strengthened, encouraged, rebuked and helped to mature in Christ. Paul understood this. That's why he could have joy even in the worst of situations. What does Paul teach about our attitude in these verses?

Philippians 2:3

Philippians 2:4

Philippians 2:5-8

Paul found joy in ministry to others. God has also called you to be His servant, His messenger, His ambassador — and that must be your top priority. Only when you are submerged in His work, when "self" is completely out of the picture, will you find the joy that Paul did.

The final principle for finding joy flows out of the preceding one: *"Joy is received with the measure it is given."* What principle do these Bible verses teach?

Job 4:8

2 Corinthians 9:6

Luke 6:38

When we're more concerned about giving joy to others than receiving it ourselves, we'll find it. We'll never have joy until we start giving it away. What have you done this week to try to bring joy to another person's life? Have you shared a Scripture verse with someone? Have you prayed for a loved one? Have you refreshed someone who was weary? Have you shared with anyone about the joy to be found in Christ?

Joy is not something you can capture just by doing all the right things. Ultimately, joy comes from our relationship with Jesus Christ; it is part of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Christ must always be our focus. But as we grow in our obedience to Him and seek to bring joy to others through faithful ministry, our measure of joy will only increase.

Peace

Peace is a rare commodity these days. Throughout the world various countries are at war with one another; a multitude of families are filled with discord and strife; many individuals are looking to Eastern religions for some kind of inner tranquility or serenity. Though the world may look to peace treaties, psychologists or meditation for peace, where does true peace really come from?

John 14:27

Romans 8:6

Romans 15:13

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Jesus promised that He would give a peace unlike what the world gives — a peace that would never fade away. He wasn't necessarily talking about an absence of war, but of an inner peace that comes from a right relationship with God and submission to the control of the Spirit. How can we obtain this kind of peace according to these verses?

Romans 5:1

Matthew 11:28-29

Philippians 4:6-7

The peace that Christ offers influences every aspect of our lives. Because it is an overflow of a right relationship with God, it replaces the inner turmoil and uncertainty that come from not knowing your sins are forgiven or where you will spend eternity. But it goes much deeper than that. We are filled with a deeper peace as we learn to trust in God and share with Him the deepest concerns of our hearts. When we're bombarded with crisis and tragedy, fear and uncertainty, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). He gives us a peace that sustains us through the troubling times, a confident assurance that God is in control and all is well.

As we learn to submit to the Spirit's control, His peace reaches into other areas of our lives — areas of turmoil that we don't often notice right away. If you are struggling with a raging temper, uncontrollable anxiety, a relentless pursuit of success or any other inner conflict (including a war with temptation and sin), you can find peace through the Holy Spirit. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit and it comes from giving up — giving up control, that is. As long as we fight to be in control of our lives, there will always be conflict. But as we relinquish more and more control to the Holy Spirit, we begin to experience a greater level of inner peace than we ever thought possible. Without the Spirit we can have a form

of peace where everything appears calm on the outside, but only the Spirit can give us a deep, abiding peace that reaches into the depths of our being.

Are there any areas of turmoil in your life right now? Have you asked God to forgive your sins and do you know Christ as your Savior? Are you facing a difficult situation that causes you anxiety and fear? Have you prayed and trusted God to care for that situation? Are you struggling with a quick temper that flares up uncontrollably? Do you realize that it is possible to have peace? If you are struggling, stop right now and pray. God is always faithful to hear our prayers and to answer when our motives are right. God gave us His Spirit so that we might experience His peace.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace. Just as love and joy must be expressed in our actions, so must peace. It is not enough to just experience inner peace; it was meant to also flow through us. Because of the Spirit's work in our lives, we become peacemakers — we seek to promote peace between individuals and to lead them into peace with God. Look up the following verses. What do they say about our role as peacemakers?

Matthew 5:9

Romans 12:18

Romans 14:19

Ephesians 4:3

Colossians 3:15

Hebrews 12:14

James 3:18

1 Peter 3:11

As Christians, we should be actively pursuing peace among believers. That means we shouldn't gossip or cause division through our words or actions (or lack of them). We should be the ones who give others the benefit of the doubt, who try to diffuse hostile situations, who ask for forgiveness or make restitution and who act as arbiters between those who can't seem to agree. We need to stand up for what is right, but we must do it with an attitude of gentleness, respect and encouragement so that we build others up and do what leads to peace. Look up the following Bible passages. In what kinds of situations might we need to intervene, and how should we go about making peace?

Matthew 18:15-17

Philippians 4:2-3

There is a fine line between being a peacemaker and being a busy-body. The difference comes in the leading of the Holy Spirit. Our attempts at helping others attain peace must be the overflow of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, not our own desire to control others or to self-righteously meddle in their lives. We are only able to bring peace when we have peace. And we'll only have true peace when we are walking in step with the Spirit.

Think for a few moments about your relationships with other people? Is there anyone you need to ask for forgiveness? Do you need to make restitution to someone (repay them for something you have taken or

give compensation for some wrongdoing)? Are you contributing to discord by repeating gossip or displaying a poor attitude? Are there any situations where you can act as a peacemaker between other individuals? Don't wait any longer to begin living as a peacemaker. Do whatever the Holy Spirit prompts you to do today.

Through Jesus Christ we can have *peace with God, peace within* and *peace with others*. Love, joy and peace are the hallmark of the Christian who is keeping in step with the Spirit. Are they the hallmark of your life? As we begin to actively display the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and become fruitful, others will recognize that we belong to Christ. Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:20).