


# Gospel Christianity

Leaders Guide | Course 3



*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*

*Luke 9:24*

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# Gospel Christianity

## Gospel character

### Study 1 | Course 3

#### KEY CONCEPT - SPIRITUAL FRUIT

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

##### **The Spirit’s purpose**

The ultimate purpose of the Holy Spirit’s work in Christians is not just to give us general comfort or strength, but to change our character into that of Jesus.

- Romans 8:29 – *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*
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##### **The Spirit’s fruit**

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##### **Agape (Love)**

*Definition:* Happy to meet needs of others rather than your own.

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**The Unity of the Fruit**

The fruit of the Spirit always grow together, since they all proceed from the Spirit's work of applying the gospel to our hearts (Col. 1:6-8).

- For example, some are sweet and accessible (*gentleness*) but are not bold and courageous (i.e. they lack *faithfulness*). That is not, then, real Spirit-produced humility, but just a sanguine temperament.
- If the fruit of the Spirit are not *all* there (at least in some measure), they are not really there at all.

## 1. Which statements impressed you and why?

## 2. The last paragraph states that the fruit of the Spirit always grow together.

### a) Experience shows us that some people are very strong in some of these characteristics yet very weak at others at the same time. How do you account for that?

John says, "If a man says 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar." Notice that he does not say, "If a man loves God but doesn't love his brother, he is unbalanced." No, he says he is a liar. True love to God (*love*) goes along with love to others (*kindness*). If they are not both there, neither is truly there at all. When we look at the list of traits in the "fruit lists" (1 Cor. 13:4-7; Gal. 5:22-23), we notice that we are naturally stronger in some rather than others. If the fruit of the Spirit grow together, how can that be?

The answer is that there are two other sources of personal traits.

- First, there are traits from natural temperament. That is, traits that originate from your brain chemistry and/or very early training.
- Second, there are traits we learn out of self-interest. We discovered that certain behaviors paid off in our family or community and after a while they became virtually unconscious habits of being.
- Some people are temperamentally gentle and diplomatic (which looks like the spiritual fruit of *gentleness*.) But usually such people are not at the same time able to be bold or courageous when it is called for (the spiritual fruit of *faithfulness*).
  - a) This is a sign that the sweetness is either a matter of physiological constitution or is a pattern learned to survive in their family situation.
  - b) Because of what Paul says about the unity of the fruit, this means that the gentleness is not real spiritual humility, but just temperamental niceness and may even be revealed to be a form of cowardice.)
- Some people seem very unflappable and unbothered by anything. They never seem anxious or upset. This looks like the spiritual fruit of *peace*, but often such people are not extremely compassionate or sympathetic to others (the fruit of *kindness*.) They tend to say to people who are suffering, "Buck up!"

## BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

**1. In verses 1-2, Paul makes a list of talents or spiritual gifts. What are they? What does this tell us about the Corinthian church to which he is writing?**

- Paul speaks about *“speaking in the tongues of men and of angels”* which is a reference to the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues and of healing and miracle-working that he has just been discussing (1 Cor 12:28-31).
- Then he moves on to *“the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries.”* The gift of prophecy was a supernatural gift, in which the recipient got direct revelation from God, and then was given the ability to communicate.
  - a) It is important to notice that Paul is not talking about some sort of false or counterfeit prophet here. He is speaking of someone who is getting direct revelations from God and who is edifying people, changing people’s lives through the communication of God’s Word.
- Then he mentions *“faith that can move mountains.”* Most commentators believe Paul is not talking about what we would call *“saving”* faith — the faith that connects you to God. Instead, when he speaks of *“faith that moves mountains”* he is talking of a leadership gift.
  - a) It’s an infectious vision that enables a group of people to overcome hurdles they wouldn’t otherwise overcome. Paul is speaking of someone who has been an extremely effective leader.
- This is a picture of a church that is filled with very talented, able, brilliant people, people with great ability.
  - a) Prophecy is the ability to communicate — the talent of artistic people.
  - b) *“To fathom mysteries”* is a sort of academic gift — the talent of intellectual people.
  - c) To *“move mountains”* is a leadership or management gift — the talent of entrepreneurial people.

**2. What does Paul say in vv.1-2 is possible about such brilliant, talented people? Why is this so surprising?**

If you read the whole letter of 1 Corinthians you will see that despite the fact that it was filled with unusually gifted, talented and brilliant people, it was also filled with fighting and divisions. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is famous and is constantly ripped out of the context of the whole letter to be read at weddings

or put up on walls. But when you read verses 4 to 7 in light of the rest of the letter to the Corinthians, you will immediately notice that all of the words in these verses have shown up before as qualities that the Corinthian Christians *lack*.

- In other words, they were gifted, brilliant and talented, but they were nonetheless impatient, harsh, self-centered, irritable and fractious.
- The reason for this was that Corinth, like New York and really like almost any big city today, had a culture in which all the emphasis was on “doing” and not on “being.” All the emphasis was on performance, brilliance and ability, and not on inner heart character.
- There’s an old joke that goes: “At least he or she has a nice personality.” It is a way of saying “no looks, no talent, but a nice person.” In our culture, character is not marketable. You’ve got to be good. You’ve got to perform. You’ve got to produce.

But Paul is saying exactly the opposite of this and it is completely stunning to us. He says, “If you have all these brilliant talents but don’t have love, don’t have beautiful character of the heart — you are spiritually *nothing*. God doesn’t value it at all.”

- This is what he means when he says, “*I am just a resounding gong*” and “*I am nothing*” Paul is taking on a culture like New York City, where it is expected that the most revered people — the most brilliant, talented people — are filled with character flaws in their personal lives. They are belligerent, insecure, unhappy, addicted.
- But Paul says God doesn’t care how rich you are, how talented you are, how gifted you are, how successful you are, how accomplished you are. If you don’t have a heart of joy and love, if you don’t have inner grace and love and strength, if in spite of all your success and accomplishment and giftedness, you are impatient, irritable and self-pitying, self-absorbed and vain, anxious and driven — you’ve (spiritually speaking) got *nothing*!
- Don’t comfort yourself by saying, “I’m successful — I’ve just got some personal issues that I’ve got to work out.” You’ve got nothing!

It is stunning that Paul says God could be literally doing miracles through you, leading people to Christ through you, changing lives through you, and you can still be “nothing.”

- This is not some kind of rhetorical insult. It’s not like New York street language, saying, “You’re nothing!” He means that talent and ability is so distinct from character that it is possible to do miracles through the power of God even though you have never given your heart to God or only given your heart to God a little.

- You can give God your talents and not your very self and heart in faith and trust. You can try to do things for other people and for God without really evacuating the throne of your life and putting God there.
- Or you can do it very little so that you are an incredibly immature Christian though still prominent in the church through your talents and gifts.
- God can do miracles through you and yet you may not even be a Christian, so distinct is giftedness and talent from character.

**3. In verse 3, Paul makes another short list. This isn't a list of talents: what is it? What does Paul say is possible for these kinds of people?**

The two qualities in verse 3 are not talents, gifts or abilities. Paul says, *"If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames."* Notice that giving to the poor and surrendering your body to the flames does not take any talent at all. This is not a competency or skill list. Rather these are two forms of moral, virtuous behavior. What are they?

- First, there is *"giving all you possess to the poor?"* What does that require? It takes sacrificial generosity, thrift, willingness to make do for less, and hard work.
- Secondly, there is *"giving my body to be burned."* This refers to martyrdom, a willingness to die for your faith. What does that require? It takes utter commitment and integrity. It means standing for your beliefs no matter what the consequences. It is extreme moral courage.
- It is interesting to notice that this virtue list covers both the "liberal" and "conservative" virtues. Heading the liberal virtue list is caring for the poor and social justice. At the top of the conservative virtue list is dying for your faith and commitment.

But, amazingly, Paul does the same thing to the list of virtues that he does to the list of gifts! He says it is possible that a person be living an exemplary moral life and still be spiritually *nothing!*

- It's almost as if in verse three Paul is responding to someone who has listened to verses 1-2 and said, "Yes, Paul, I agree with you in verses 1-2. There's too much emphasis on gifts and talents and brilliance. But I'll tell you what is really important; not talent, gifts or ministry but plain, old-fashioned moral virtue. That's all that matters!"
- Yet Paul doesn't agree. He says that not only is inner Christian character not the same thing as talents and gifts, it is also not the same thing as moral behavior. We must not confuse these things, or think that because I'm leading an exemplary moral life that I am growing in Christian character.



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**a) Experience shows us that some people are very strong in some of these characteristics yet very weak at others at the same time. How do you account for that?**

**b) Think of some ways in which each of the spiritual fruit would depend on the others.**

**c) If the fruit of the Spirit really only grow together, what practical difference does that make to us?**



**4. Notice that Paul does not actually say “be patient, kind.” He personifies love in verses 4-7. He speaks of it as if it is a person. What is he trying to get across with this language?**

**5. How is Jesus Christ’s love for us on the cross the main means by which we grow into loving character?**