and that we are growing to full maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:15)? How can we know that we are not grieving the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), or insulting the Spirit (Heb. 10:29)? Jesus introduced a standard in the *Sermon on the Mount* that can be used to determine the level of spirituality of any person, good or bad. Jesus told his audience that they could quite easily distinguish between true and false prophets by a simple observation: “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matt. 7:16). God uses this same means to measure our Christian progress. Our spiritual maturity and holiness are indicated by the spiritual fruit we bear. If we do not have the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we can never measure up to the expectations God has for us.

The Importance of Fruit: "By their fruit you will know them." (Matt. 7:20)

*Natural fruit* (fruit of the earth) is the product of plant growth that is useful to man or animals. Apples, bananas, mangoes, and coconuts are typical fruits that are consumed as food. Most natural fruits contain seeds that when planted will produce other fruit like themselves. The seeds from a single fruit could possibly become a forest.

*Figurative fruit* is any product or result of work, training, and habits. In this sense, fruit is the outcome or consequence of human thought and action. Jesus confirmed the connection between our hearts and our minds, which in turn affects our actions. In Matthew 15:19, he said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." Murder is a thought before it becomes an act. Theft starts out as an idea before it evolves into an action. Humans act out the condition of their hearts through deeds. We do and become what we think. Solomon put it simply: “As he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7).

*Fruits of the Flesh* are described by Paul as “works of the flesh” which are produced by the “desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16-17). He also points out (Rom. 7:4-6) that when we were "controlled by the sinful nature" we "bore fruit for death.” When we "serve in the new way of the Spirit," we "bear fruit to God." Clearly, different heart conditions lead to different kinds of fruit.

*Spiritual Fruit* is the result of spiritual thought and action. It is God's desire that we bear "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22), the "fruit of righteousness" (Philippians 1:11), a "harvest of righteousness and peace" (Hebrews 12:11), and the "fruit of the light" (Ephesians 5:9). Paul wrote that “through Jesus Christ the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). Paul summed up the idea of spiritual thinking when he wrote, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think on such things” (Phil. 4:8).

6

**Patience**

Text: Matthew 18:21-35

1. Looking through the passage, what contrasts do you find?

2. The rabbis taught that a repeated sin should be forgiven three times. When Peter asks his question (v. 21), he probably thought his offer seemed generous. In what ways can you identify with Peter’s question?

3. Think about someone who has hurt you over and over. How do you feel about Jesus’ answer (v. 22)?

4. Jesus’ reply to Peter is enlarged by the parable in verses 23-35. What is the first servant’s problem in this parable?

5. How was his problem solved far beyond anything he could have hoped for?

6. How does the master illustrate God’s patience and forgiveness toward us in verse 27?

7. How does the first servant treat his fellow servant in comparison to the way he himself was treated (vv. 28-30)?

8. Why do you think he failed to be patient or forgiving after having been forgiven so much?

9. If we fail to treat others with patience and forgiveness, how will God treat us (vv. 34-35)? Why is his judgment so harsh?

10. How can a deep appreciation for God’s patience and forgiveness help you to be patient with a difficult person?

*Pray that the God who has been so patient with you will help you be patient with others.*

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