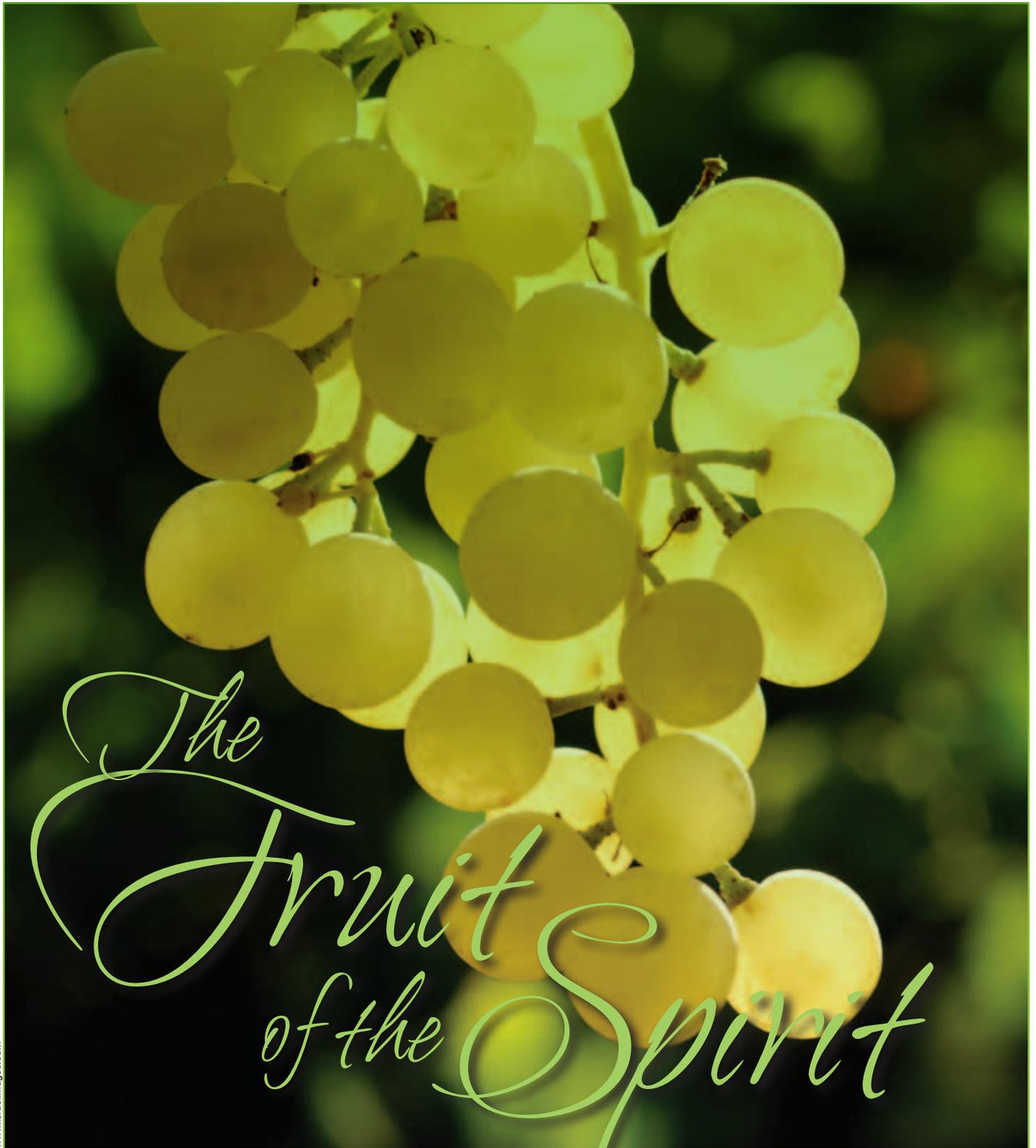


ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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The Fruit of the Spirit

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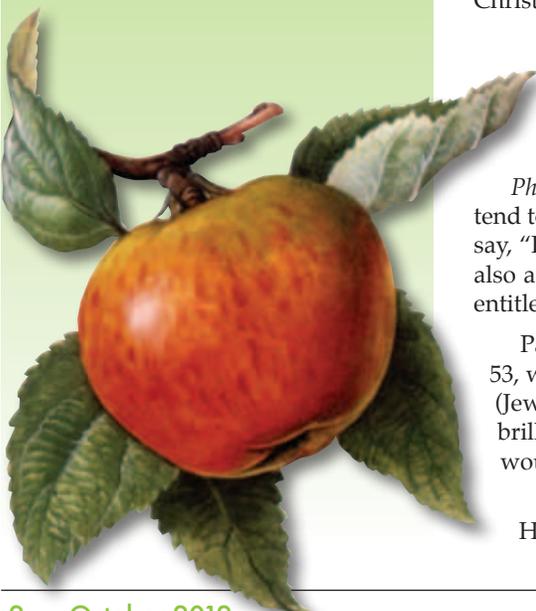
IN THIS TEACHING LETTER, I would like to take a look at the fruit of the Spirit from a Hebraic point of view. Most of us read our Bibles with our own cultural understandings overlaid on the Scripture. We are influenced by our culture, language, experiences, and nearly 2,000 years of Christian theology and tradition. I wonder, what did these words mean to the Apostle Paul?

Most Christians think about Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Some think of him as repudiating Judaism and the Law. Many scholars view him as starting a new religion—Christianity. I doubt that most people in the Christian world think of Paul as a Jew. But, is that accurate? What does the biblical text say? Paul, in describing himself, says this, "...circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the law, a Pharisee..." (Phil. 3:5).

In Acts 23, we find Paul speaking before the chief priests and all the council (Pharisees and Sadducees), saying, "...Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" (v. 6). Since we tend to view Pharisees in a negative light, that statement is shocking. Notice, Paul doesn't say, "I used to be a Pharisee." He says, "I am a Pharisee," and by the way, "My father was also a Pharisee." (For a more exhaustive study of the Pharisees, find our teaching letter entitled "Yeshua and the Pharisees" on our Web site.)

Paul was taught by the famous Rabbi Gamliel (or Gamaliel). Gamliel, who died in AD 53, was a highly respected Pharisee, who held a position of leadership in the Sanhedrin (Jewish court). He was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel who is renowned in Judaism as a brilliant Second Temple Period spiritual leader (110 BC–AD 10). Paul, as a devout Jew, would have been well schooled in the Hebrew Bible, as well as the Oral Law.

If we are to understand Paul, I believe we must take into account that he was a Hebrew-speaking, devout Jewish man, trained under the most learned rabbis of his



day. He was not from a Hellenized family (one influenced by Greek culture and thinking). Remember, he describes himself as a “Hebrew of the Hebrews.” What does that imply? Paul was not a newcomer to Judaism. He was not a proselyte. He was born into a family that defined themselves as Hebrew not Hellenistic. He would have grown up studying the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), keeping the feasts, and observing the biblical food laws. Paul’s incredible encounter with Yeshua (Jesus) on the Damascus Road radically impacted his life, but Paul would have continued to look at the world through the cultural eyeglasses of the Hebraic worldview that he grew up with.

A quick review of some of the differences between Hellenistic and Hebraic thinking reveals the following:

Hebraic Thinking

- Strong emphasis on function
- Asks: “How should it be done?”
- Emphasis on righteous action
- Asks: “How do you live this Scripture?”
- Theocentric (God-centered)
- Monotheistic
- Spirituality
- Learning to prepare oneself for a life of service

Hellenistic Thinking

- Emphasizes structure and appearance
- Asks: “What do you think?”
- Interested in religious theory
- Asks: “What do you think about this Scripture?”
- Anthropocentric (man-centered)
- Polytheistic
- Sensuality—beauty is worshipped
- Knowledge for knowledge sake

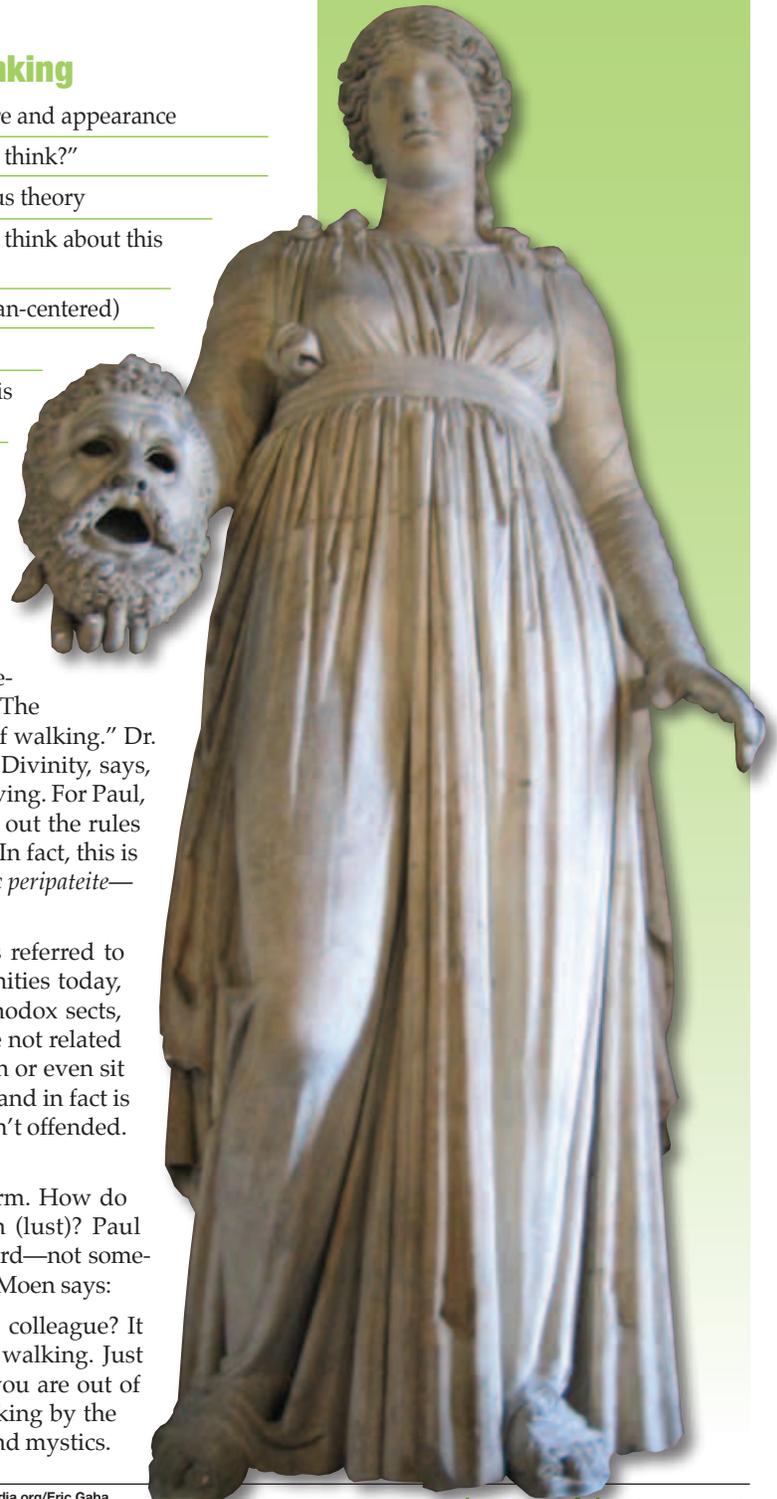
The Spirit versus the Flesh

Our focal passage starts by saying, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Immediately my mind thinks of the Hebrew understanding of walk. The word is *halakah*, which literally means “the path” or “the way of walking.” Dr. Skip Moen, academic dean at Master’s International School of Divinity, says, “It means to conduct yourself according to a particular way of living. For Paul, this is following *Torah*. But that doesn’t mean we blindly carry out the rules and regulations. *Torah* obedience requires walking in the Spirit. In fact, this is so important that Paul puts it *first* in the Greek text (*de pneumatic peripateite*—“in Spirit walk”).

The lust of the flesh is a human problem. In Hebrew, it is referred to as *yetser hara* (evil inclination). In the religious Jewish communities today, there is a constant effort to overcome *yetser hara*. In some Orthodox sects, religious men will avoid contact with women to whom they are not related in order to avoid lustful thoughts and actions. They won’t touch or even sit on the bus next to a woman. This seems extreme to our culture, and in fact is something that we help new volunteers understand, so they aren’t offended. But temptation is not limited to religious Jews!

Paul would no doubt have been very familiar with this term. How do you overcome this human inclination for selfish gratification (lust)? Paul says you do it by walking in the Spirit. Walking is an active word—not something that passively happens to you but something that you do. Moen says:

How do I make this monster within me into a cooperative colleague? It doesn’t take meditation, incantation or invitation. It takes walking. Just start taking the steps of obedience. Find that place where you are out of alignment with God’s instruction book and correct it...Walking by the Spirit is not some deep, secret mystery reserved for angels and mystics.





“BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, LONGSUFFERING, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL. AGAINST SUCH THERE IS NO LAW.” (GAL. 5:22-23)

With open heart, each of us just starts following God’s directions. And life begins to change. No excuses, please. No rationalizations, alterations or exceptions. Walking is a way of life. It is practice, practice, practice. We all make mistakes. So what? Keep going and you will find that the Spirit has been prodding you all along. Passion becomes your partner in the practice of godly perfection.

In Galatians 5:19–21, Paul lists actions that come from yielding to the *yetser hara*. These include adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and so on. Paul ends this section by saying, “As I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21).

Notice the word “practice.” This is another action word. Just as we should practice righteous living, we can also choose a lifestyle of the flesh. When I was growing up, the things on this list were almost universally recognized as wrong, even for those who weren’t Christians. Today, while everyone would still agree that murder is wrong, almost everything else on the list is tolerated in our modern societies. Our world is walking (practicing, living) a life after the flesh. Tolerance is the religion of our day. Even in the Church, we see a lowering of standards in an effort to be tolerant and socially inclusive. But the Bible says that those who practice such things “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” That should be a sobering thought.

God’s Good Fruit

Immediately after Paul’s list of the works of the flesh, he contrasts them with the familiar list of the fruits of the Spirit. First, let’s consider the idea of fruit. My husband Tom and I have a small garden apartment in Karmiel. In our garden are several fruit trees, and we enjoy their delicious fruit. I marvel at the goodness that comes from them. A good tree bears good fruit. Sadly, we had one tree that produced copious amounts of bad fruit. We kept hoping that the fruit would improve, but when it didn’t, we cut the tree down. Fruit comes from within the tree. When the tree had bad fruit, we knew something wasn’t right with the tree.



Yeshua tells us that we can determine the difference between sheep (believers) and wolves who are masquerading in sheep’s clothing in order to look like sheep! “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit...Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:15–17, 19–21).

So, it seems that bearing fruit is an outward evidence of an inward reality. Yeshua says that those who enter the kingdom of heaven will be those who *do* the will of the Father. When Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, he is saying that those who have God’s Spirit at work in their lives, and who are obediently yielding to

“...YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.”

(MARK 12:30)

the direction of the Spirit, will have the fruit of the Spirit evident in their lives. Yeshua also indicates that we, as His sheep, will be recognizable by our fruit!

When we go into our garden, we don't have to guess whether there is fruit on the trees. We can see the fruit! The purpose of bearing fruit is to bless others, not ourselves. And let's not forget that the seed of the fruit contains the potential to produce more trees. The fruit of the Spirit are all characteristics of God Almighty that He wants to reproduce in us. So, when we are filled with His Spirit, our lives will exhibit His character. Don't make the mistake of thinking it is a passive thing! It isn't forced on us! We use our own will power to make choices, which influence the fruit-bearing that the Spirit is able to do in us.

Love: Many have said that there is really only one fruit—love, and all the others flow out of this characteristic. 1 John 4:8 says, *“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”* Yeshua, when He was asked about the greatest commandment, answered: *“And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these”* (Mark 12:30–31). Paul agrees when he says, *“And now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love”* (1 Cor. 13:13).

Psalm 18:1 says, *“I will love You, O LORD, my strength.”* Jewish sage Radak says:

Love means when a person makes every attempt to draw as close to God as is possible in this material world. Fear of God precedes love. Only after a person grows accustomed to fearing God can he ascend to the level of serving out of love without desire for reward...I love HaShem [literally, The Name] because He allows me to be His servant and He gives me the strength to overpower my evil inclination [*yetser hara*] which wishes to interfere, as the Sages of the Talmud [Jewish commentary] (Kiddushin 30b) said: *“A man's evil inclination seeks to overwhelm him every day and desires to slay him. If not for the assistance of the Holy One, Blessed be He, no man could withstand the test.”* (Alshich)

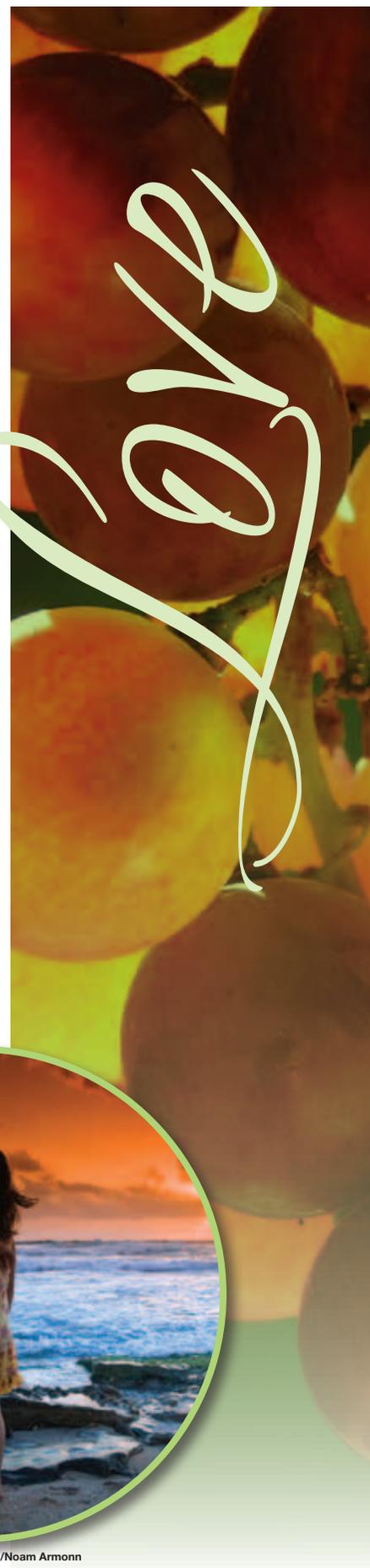
Rabbi Hillel who was still living when Yeshua was growing up said, *“What is hateful to yourself do not to another. This is the whole Torah; go and study it; the rest is commentary”* (Shabbath 31a). Love is not merely an emotion; it is a decision. The person who allows God to work in their lives will grow the fruit of love in their life, and that love will be apparent to others.

Joy: Paul would have been very familiar with Scriptures like: *“Be glad in the LORD and rejoice...shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”* (Ps. 32:11). *“... In Your presence is fullness of joy...”* (Ps. 16:11). A Jewish source says that “fullness of joy” is a joy that has no limits.

When Paul and Silas sang after being whipped and put in prison, they must have remembered, *“Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength”* (Neh. 8:10b). Joy is not happiness. Happiness is dependent on circumstances. The joy that is the fruit of God's Spirit is inexplicable joy even in the midst of difficult trials.



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“IF I FORGET YOU, O JERUSALEM, LET MY RIGHT HAND FORGET HER SKILL! IF I DO NOT REMEMBER YOU, LET MY TONGUE CLING TO THE ROOF OF MY MOUTH—IF I DO NOT EXALT JERUSALEM ABOVE MY CHIEF JOY.” (PS. 137:5–6)



Jewish weddings are times of great joy, but in the midst of the happy occasion, the groom takes a glass and crushes it under his foot. This is because of Psalm 137:5–6: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.” Thus, at the happiest time in life, the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem is remembered.

Peace: *Shalom* (peace) is a Hebrew word that is recognized all over the world. From the root (שָׁלוֹם) comes the word *shilem* (wholeness or completeness). As with the other fruits, peace should be an action in our lives. “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14). How do you seek peace? Rashi says, “Where you live. One who spreads slander creates conflicts and quarrels. The holy Ari promises that one who does not slander others will merit, measure for measure, that others will not speak about him. Thus his life will be peaceful.”

“Great peace have those who love Your law [Torah], and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps. 119:165). God’s Word is the source of peace to His followers. Radak says, “Those who love Your Torah will never falter or stumble, because the path of life is smooth and straight. They live with inner peace, tranquility, and contentment because they are satisfied with their Divinely ordained portion in the world...These humble people savor the most delightful of all blessings: peace of mind!”

Patience: The Hebrew word for patience is *savlanut*, which comes from the verb *lasavel* (to suffer). James tells us to “...count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (1:2–4). Joyce Meyers says, “I’ve heard patience defined as a fruit of the Spirit that can only be developed under trial. Really, you cannot develop patience any other way...Be patient with yourself; be patient with your spiritual growth. Be patient with God if He’s not coming through at the time you’d like Him to. Be patient with people; be patient with circumstances; be patient because in patience you possess your soul. And James 1:4 says that the patient man is perfect and entire, lacking in nothing!”

Kindness: The Hebrew word for kindness is *hesed*, which is also translated as mercy. “What is desired in a man is kindness...” (Prov. 19:22). “‘With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,’ says the LORD, your Redeemer” (Isa. 54:8).

According to Judaism 101 on www.jewfaq.org, “A large part of Jewish law is about treating people with kindness. The same body of Jewish law that commands us to eat only kosher food and not to turn on lights on Shabbat [Sabbath], also commands us to love both Jews and strangers, to give tzedakah [charity] to the poor and needy, and not to wrong anyone in speech or in business. In fact, acts of kindness are so much a part of Jewish law that the word mitzvah [commandment] is informally used to mean any good deed.”

“LET NOTHING BE DONE THROUGH SELFISH AMBITION OR CONCEIT, BUT IN LOWLINESS OF MIND LET EACH ESTEEM OTHERS BETTER THAN HIMSELF.”

(PHIL. 2:3, 4)

Goodness: In Scripture, God is repeatedly described as a good God! “*Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You...*” (Ps. 31:19a). A Jewish translation reads, “*How abundant is Your goodness.*” Psalm 25:8 says, “*Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He teaches sinners in the way.*” In a Jewish commentary, Radak comments on this Scripture: “*Because He is good and upright, He does not despise and utterly reject the sinners. Rather, if they wish to repent, He will accept them and guide them on the straight path.*”

The Psalm 68:10 emphasizes God’s goodness to the poor. When we have God’s Spirit working in our hearts, we will emulate His character of goodness and mercy to those around us. Every day at Bridges for Peace, we are instruments of God’s goodness to the needy, to new immigrants, to widows and orphans, and to those in difficult life passages. Scripture says that it is the goodness of God that draws men and leads them to turn to Him (Rom. 2:4).

Faith/Faithfulness: The Hebrew concept of faith and faithfulness is from the Hebrew word *emunah*. In Hebrew thought, the one who has faith will exhibit a life of faithfulness, which is demonstrated by fidelity, steadfastness, steadiness, and a commitment to fulfill promises. God is the perfect example of this kind of faithfulness. His promise-keeping character is on display today as He keeps ancient prophesied promises to His people Israel.

In the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts*, author Philip Birnbaum says, “The term *emunah* now denotes absolute belief in divine providence, in God’s unfailing goodness, in His aid and deliverance in time of distress. This is expressed in the Jewish hopefulness for a better world and optimistic outlook on life.” Moses Mendelssohn says, “Among all the precepts of the Torah, there is not one which says you shall believe this or you shall not believe it, but rather you shall do, you shall not do.”

Remember Yeshua said, “*by their fruits you shall know them.*” A Jewish person once said to a friend of mine, “Don’t tell me what you believe. Let me follow you around for a week. Then after observing your life, I will tell you what you believe!” If we really believe, it will change our actions! Our lives will bear fruit.

Gentleness/Humility: The Hebrew word for gentleness is *anva*; it also means humility or meekness. Humility is the opposite of pride, which God hates! Joyce Meyers reminds us of God’s words to Saul through the prophet Samuel, “*When you were little in your own eyes...did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel?*” (1 Sam. 15:17). God honors those who know that without Him they can do nothing.

“*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 2:3–5). False humility doesn’t fool anyone anymore than if we tried to tie fruit onto a tree and expected people to believe it was growing there. So, those who try to convince others that they are humble cannot sustain the image. The true person of gentle humility will consistently portray an attitude of service and humility.



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Self-control or Temperance: It has been said that love and self-control are the bookends that hold the fruit of the Spirit together. Self-control is achieved through self-discipline. Remember our comparison of Greek and Hebrew thinking. The person who is man-centered rarely exhibits self-control. It is the person who is Hebraic-minded who understands that God is the center of life and community. That person realizes the value of self-control for the glory of God and the betterment of the community.

Paul, with his Jewish background and Hebraic mindset, was giving us the wonderful promise that the Spirit of God would work with us in partnership to enable us to grow good fruit in our lives. God knows that we all struggle with “evil intentions,” and it is His desire for us to reject the lust of the flesh and to embrace the work of the Spirit in our hearts in such a way that we will produce good fruit which is visible in our actions and our lifestyle as we relate to God and those around us. My prayer for us all is that we will submit to the work of the Spirit in our lives.

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Bridges for Peace is a Jerusalem-based, Bible-believing Christian organization supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews worldwide through education and practical deeds expressing God’s love and mercy.

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