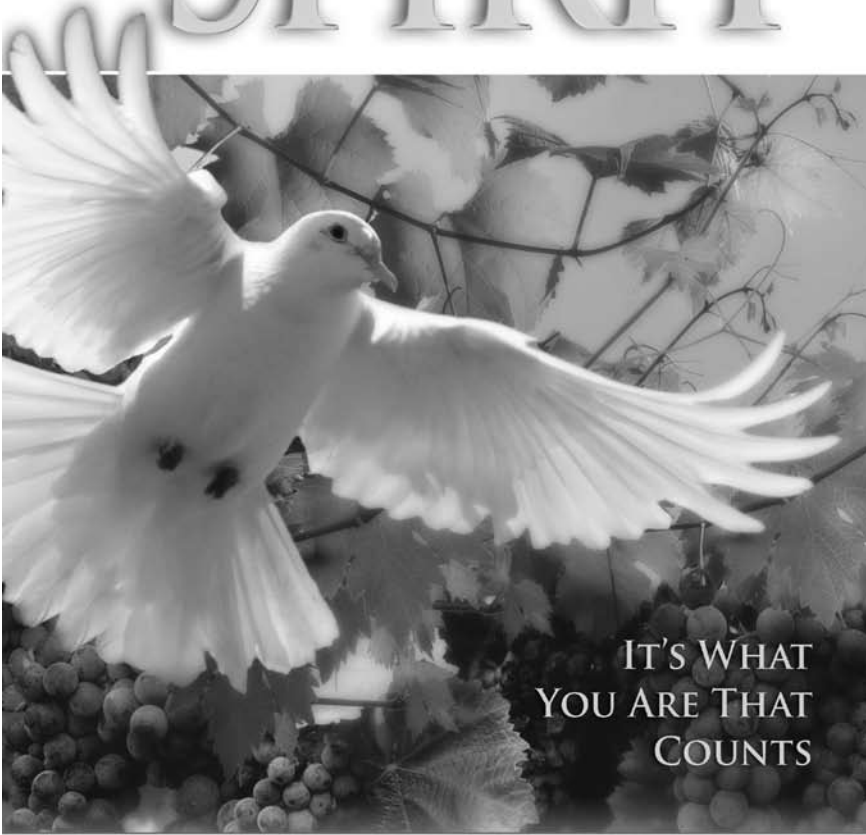


THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT



IT'S WHAT
YOU ARE THAT
COUNTS

R I C H A R D W . O ' F F I L L



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1 CHAPTER

IT'S WHAT YOU ARE THAT COUNTS

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; . . . I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

—Ezekiel 36:26, 27

It was Sabbath morning, and I was a visitor. The Sabbath School teacher was talking about the Holy Spirit. She said, “Let’s pray that the Holy Spirit will be poured out.”

With a smile, I raised my hand. “He’s already being poured out,” I offered. “Let’s pray that we will receive Him!”

In recent years, the ministry of the Holy Spirit seems to have become the patrimony of the charismatics, who have taken it upon themselves to be the ones to decide who has the Holy Spirit and who doesn’t. To them, it’s all about the *gifts* of the Spirit. They have prioritized the gifts, and if a person doesn’t have the gift they deem most important, then they declare that person doesn’t have the Holy Spirit at all. I like what my dad used to say: we shouldn’t talk about the gifts of the Spirit until we talk about the fruit of the Spirit.

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Many—myself included—are longing for the Savior to come and are anxious to do anything that will hasten His coming. Yet there's a danger that what is intended to be a means to an end becomes an end in itself. More than that, it can become a litmus test distinguishing between those who have arrived in the Christian life and those who haven't.

I often hear people express the conviction that we ought to be healing the sick, casting out devils, and doing other supernatural acts that were performed by members of the early church. I've noticed that some who want to perform miracles basically want to get power. Power is a good thing, but it belongs to God and not to us. We can desire it and pray for it, but we cannot demand it when and where we want it. God decides the time and the place. Jesus promised, " 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' " (Acts 1:8). Evidence indicates that the Holy Spirit is already being poured out. And we are told that God's giving will crescendo as we approach the close of probation.

Jesus confronted those who wanted to see signs and wonders as a condition for believing in Him. When some of the scribes and Pharisees asked Him for a sign, He answered, " 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah' " (Matthew 12:39). Jesus taught that there is something more meaningful than miracles, something more superb than the spectacular.

I am the son of an Adventist minister. I remember what it meant to be a Seventh-day Adventist when I was a child. Being an Adventist then was a lifestyle. We were thought of as a people who didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't wear jewelry, didn't go to movies or dances, and who kept Saturday as the Sabbath. And keeping the Sabbath meant we didn't listen to the radio, didn't watch television, didn't read

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newspapers, didn't go to work, and didn't buy or sell.

Dad wouldn't let us read the comics, we couldn't listen to jazz or murder programs on the radio, and we were serious about health. We didn't smoke or drink alcoholic beverages. Coffee, tea, and Coca-Cola were not allowed. We didn't use mustard, vinegar, or black pepper. Of course, we ate no meat.

I had the good fortune of attending church school, academy, and college. In those days, a student could be expelled or suspended for going to movies, holding hands with a date, not honoring the dress codes, and, of course, for smoking or drinking. In other words, if you had asked me back then what it meant to be a Seventh-day Adventist, I would have given you a long list of the things we didn't do, because that was pretty much the way we saw it.

Having said this, I would like to state that I have no regrets about living that lifestyle. I don't think we were wrong when we taught that we shouldn't eat pork. But looking back, I see we should have emphasized being kind.

We weren't wrong in preaching that the Sabbath is the seventh-day of the week and that God expects us to honor Him by keeping it holy. But we should have also emphasized not being mean.

No, we weren't wrong—narrow and shallow maybe, but not wrong.

BELIEVING, DOING, AND BEING

When one became a member of the church then—and often now as well—it seems to have been taken for granted that one had been born again. In the good old days, a person could be an Adventist in good and regular standing and not be born again. Adventism was about believing and doing; not much emphasis was given to being. All you had to do was to conform to the rules. Baptist parents will say how happy they are that last Sunday Johnny “got saved.” Adventist parents usually say how

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happy they are that last Sabbath Jennifer was baptized.

When the essence of the Christian life is perceived to consist in not doing things, we're in trouble. While getting victory over sin is foundational to a life in Christ, it's critical that there be even more. Jesus cautioned,

“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man [the man is baptized], he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. [The man’s life is clean outwardly but not filled with the things of God.] Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Matthew 12:43–45).

Although the first work of the gospel in the life must be a cleansing from sin, this work is only a preparation for what comes next, and that is the infilling of the Holy Spirit. “ ‘I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh [the new birth]. I will put My Spirit within you’ ” (Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

The promise in these verses has two components. The first is that God will give us a new spirit—that is, a new us. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus, we must be born again (John 3:3). The rest of the promise states that when we've been born again, God will put His Spirit within us, to dwell in the new us. The apostle Paul wrote, “If anyone is in Christ, he *is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17; emphasis added).

If God is to dwell with us, He must have a habitation. Before He

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could breathe the spirit of life into Adam, He had to create a body to hold it. Israel had to build the tabernacle and later the temple before God could come down and dwell with them. Similarly, God created human hearts for His dwelling. He has given us new hearts and put a new spirit within us as the indispensable condition of His dwelling in us.

Sadly, God's original plan for humanity was frustrated. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were meant not only to break the power of sin but to re-create a dwelling place of which it could be said, " 'The kingdom of God is within you' " (Luke 17:21).

When Jesus walked this earth as a man, He was personally with His disciples. However, it was not until Pentecost that the promise of John 14:16, 17 was fulfilled: " 'I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.' " Another wonderful and sobering thought is expressed in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

While abstaining from smoking and drinking and going to movies and dancing, and omitting mustard, vinegar, and black pepper from one's diet, and worshipping on the seventh day, and following a dress code are laudable, none of these things requires that one be born again—or, for that matter, even that one be a follower of Christ. Most Hare Krishnas are vegans. A true Christian is one whose heart is not only swept and clean but is filled in a wonderful and mysterious way with the Holy Spirit. If and when we can comprehend this truth, the effect on our personal lives, our families, and, subsequently, on the life of the church, will be immediate.

As we welcome the Holy Spirit and He begins His work, spiritual

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fruit will begin to grow in our lives, producing, in essence, the very character of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are well acquainted with the spiritual qualities listed in Galatians 5:22, 23: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” This list, however, is not exhaustive. There are other spiritual qualities as well, such as those enumerated in 1 Timothy 6:11, Romans 5:3–5, 2 Timothy 3:10, and 2 Peter 1:5–7.

THE DECIDING FACTOR

Those who claim to be followers of Jesus but who do not produce this fruit will be plucked up and taken away (John 15:2). Jesus also declared that because many will profess to be His followers (Matthew 7:21, 22), the deciding factor will not be what they profess to believe or even the works they do, but rather the kind of people they are (Matthew 12:33).

For example, a text generally used as a guideline for how women should dress contains much more than a dress code. It assures us that the Christian life doesn't begin on the outside but rather on the inside: “Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:3, 4).

Considering our emphases as Seventh-day Adventists in days gone by, Jesus might say to us, “These things ought you to have done, but not left the other undone.” Our lifestyle did not so much require a change of heart as a change of mind. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit doesn't lessen the impact of the letter of the law in our lives, but it will assure that we have the spirit of the law. While people can keep the letter of the law without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, those who truly have the Spirit in their hearts will not only keep the letter of the law but the spirit of the law as well.

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To some extent, we may be reaping the backlash from a superficial gospel that appears to change the outside but leaves the heart vulnerable to being occupied by attitudes that, as in the case of the Pharisees, can make our message a heavy yoke and expose a certain hypocrisy.

It will be those who not only have been “swept” and “cleaned” but who also have become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and, as a result, have manifested His fruit in their lives who will receive the seal of God. While we pray for the outpouring of the latter rain, we must be aware that this gift will be given for a special purpose—it will be given to prepare a living people to meet a living Lord. And it will be given only to those whose lives exhibit love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This realization should inspire us to contemplate and pray for the fruit of the Spirit.

THE TRUE VINE

I have noticed that when some people get around the table and begin to discuss spiritual things, they talk about an arm’s-length gospel, or perhaps how to live a Christian life by the numbers. There are often heated discussions about the nature of Christ, the health message, the meaning of grace, or how to meet felt needs; yet there is usually little reference to the fruit of the Spirit and what the fruit means in the life of a born-again Christian. The fruit of the Spirit is not Heaven’s wish list for the believer. Rather, it is what is given to a person who abides in the Vine, and it will be the deciding factor for those who will finally be saved. Jesus left little room for discussion when He declared:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear

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fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:1–6).

A potato chip commercial famous in the past challenged, “Bet you can’t eat just one.” So it is with the fruit of the Spirit. A person can’t have just one. It will help us to think of these spiritual qualities as petals on a flower. Although the blooming of the flower is a process, the petals unfold together. We may not come to maturity in these qualities all at once, but they will develop in tandem with each other. For example, a kind person will not be impatient or proud.

You probably have noticed the many ads for products that claim to do away with wrinkles, develop abs, or otherwise make a person look at least ten years younger. The magic may come in a lotion or as an exercise machine. Buy it, use it, and—*voilà*—you have it. However, we don’t need Botox but something much better—a new heart. The Christian life is more than meets the eye.

When I was a student at Washington Missionary College (now Washington Adventist University), I took a class in natural history. The course required us to be able to identify a tree branch without its leaves. I’m sorry to say (and my grade in the class reflected it) I never caught on. But I wouldn’t have had any problem if I could have seen the leaf or the fruit. While the Christian life is about *doing* (bearing fruit), this doing will be hollow and meaningless unless it is driven by *being*. And this means being transformed by the indwelling Spirit of God, whose first work is to convict us of sin, who then gives us ongoing victory over sin, and finally, who fills us with the most wonderful gift of all, the fruit of the Spirit—which, in a word, is the mind of Christ.

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When we see God's plan for our lives, we might at first be thrilled and challenged, but later feel overwhelmed. Not to worry. The promise is that He who has begun this good work—fruit-bearing—in us has promised to complete it (Philippians 1:6). The Holy Spirit doesn't do things halfway!

At the end of all but the last of the following chapters, there will be an assignment entitled "Thinking It Over." This is meant not only to stimulate your thinking, but also to challenge you to envision what will develop as you cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your life wherever you happen to be in the process.

As you read this book, please resist the thought that everyone needs this but you. Think of the needs of your own heart. This point is expressed by the words of the old song "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." The fruit of the Spirit must manifest itself in the church on a one-by-one basis. And you must be that one.