

# "The First-fruits of the Spirit"

## - Your Proof of Salvation

By

Elder Enoch Ofori Jnr

(Sabbath School, 11<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2012)

### **What is your Assurance of Salvation?**

This could be the most important salvation message I have ever taught in this church. It's about your assurance of salvation in Christ. Christ is our Saviour, He has done it all. But what is the proof that you will actually be saved on His return? What personal evidence do you have?

Do you want to be assured of the "salvation to be revealed in the last time" when your perishable body will finally be redeemed? That personal evidence is to see in yourself "the first-fruits of the Spirit"; they are the proof that you will be part of the *latter harvest of the Spirit*, which is your bodily resurrection, transformation and ascension to heaven. We read in Rom. 8:23: "And not only they [the whole creation in bondage v. 19-22], but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body".

The "first-fruits of the Spirit" stated above include the baptism of the Spirit itself (Acts 2:38) and the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23). With these, one's resurrection from the dead and the actual receipt of eternal life are a foregone conclusion. Romans 8:11 says, "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11 *ESV*).

### **The Great Spiritual Truth of the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot)**

In the Old Testament, the great spiritual truth and significance of "the first-fruits of the Spirit" was symbolically enacted yearly during the Feast of Weeks. As in this present dispensation of spiritual worship, the yearly ritual of the offering of first-fruits to God had two sides to it: an offering of a sheaf of the first ripened ears of the harvest waved before the LORD accompanied by food and animal sacrifices and, seven weeks later, an offering of baked bread also waved before the LORD, similarly accompanied by food and animal sacrifices:

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest:

"And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

"And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the LORD.

"And the meat [food] offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin.

"And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

"And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:

"Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.

"Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD.

"And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the LORD, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the LORD.

"Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings.

"And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest.

"And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations" (Lev. 23:10-21).

From the text, we note an exciting progression: After the sheaf of the first fruits of the harvest is waved before the Lord in their raw state right after redemption Passover, perfected products of the same first fruits— 'two loaves of bread' —are waved before Him 49 days later on the day of Pentecost! The new ears of grain presented to God must mature into perfection- baked bread- to be presented before the Lord *again* as a testimony to the ultimate goodness He had in mind in granting His people a bountiful harvest.

The spiritual lesson for us N.T. believers—as far as the ceremonial yearly feasts are "a shadow of things to come" (Col. 2:16-17)—is that a GREATER blessing of grace is ahead of us: We have been redeemed from sin by the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:24-25; Eph. 1:7), our Passover Lamb sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7-8), and yet we await a greater redemption which will bring us to perfection. That perfection is the redemption of our bodies from death, the cry of the "wretched" human race: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

Because the Holy Ghost in us is the guarantee of our redemption from death, we have been warned in Ephesians 4:30, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which ye have been sealed for the day of redemption" (*Darby Bible*).

Once again, the "day of redemption" cannot be a reference to the believer's redemption from sin which is present and ongoing, but a latter redemption assured and accomplished through the agency of the Spirit. It's to this 'second redemption' that the Apostle Paul again directs our attention in Ephesians 1:13-14, where he says that, having trusted in Christ for our salvation through obedience to the Gospel of truth, we "were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest [down payment or guarantee] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory".

The "until" tells us we will not come to the second stage of the wave offering until we have completed "seven weeks" of our earthly sojourn in dedication (holiness) to God, after having been redeemed by the Passover blood. This journey entails continual sowing to the Spirit to reap the greater Pentecost harvest of salvation summed up as "everlasting life". We read in Galatians 6: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8). Again, we read in Hosea 10:12: "Sow to yourselves in

righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till He come and rain righteousness upon you".

The harvest of "life everlasting" corresponds to the 'perfected' fiftieth-day wave offering of bread, in which what God ultimately determined for us in Christ is fulfilled. In Hosea, this harvest of "life everlasting" is called "rain of righteousness" from the LORD, and it follows our own sowing of righteousness! Same as at the Feast of Weeks: the sheaf of the first ears of grain waved before Yahweh anticipated the waving of the bread of the same first-fruits fifty days later on Pentecost! In this sense, the 'rain of righteousness' should be understood as the manifestation of God's justice or salvation scheduled "to be revealed in the last time" to those who lived in obedience to His righteous will (1 Pet. 1:5; Isa. 59:20).

### **"The Fruit of the Spirit", the Evidence of our Sowing to the Spirit in Righteousness**

As every credible sowing produces fruit, so our sowing to the Spirit must equally bear fruit. The fruit produced by our spiritual sowing is called the "fruit of the Spirit". It's a nine-fold virtue as visible and demonstrable as its opposite, "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23).

These are traits each and everyone who has "the first fruits of the Spirit" must show. If so, why not do an honest self-examination to find out if you really have "the fruit of the Spirit"? That will confirm your status as someone who possesses the "first fruits of the Spirit", of which the "fruit of the Spirit" is a vital component along with the gifts of the Spirit.

To start with, ask yourself, '**do I have love**, the first element of the "fruit of the Spirit"? If the answer is 'yes', you will love God with all your being by keeping His commandments (Mark 12:30; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3), and you will love your neighbour as yourself expressed in concrete acts of kindness and the eschewing of ill-will towards him (Lev. 19:9-18; Rom. 13:8-10). Love fulfills your highest duty to God: it's the fulfillment of all His law as far as love for God is expressed through the keeping of His commandments and "love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Rom. 13:10 *ESV*; Matt. 22:37-40; 1 Cor. 13:1-3, 13).

Second, ask yourself, '**is my heart filled with joy** instead of with bitterness and sorrow?' If yes', it will not be the sensual joy the world giveth but "joy in the Holy Ghost": "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17, cp 1 Thess. 1:6). This a joy none other than the saints of God have and will always have: "You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound" (Ps. 4:7 *ESV*). Because it's a joy that springs from the very throne of God, whatever circumstances you find yourself in, however humanly depressing, cannot detract from it. When David took off to the wilderness to escape his son Absalom's treachery, the joy of the LORD was with him in all its pristine purity in that dreary place, and he verbalized it in song:

"O God, You are my God; I earnestly search for You. My soul thirsts for You; my whole body longs for You in this parched and weary land where there is no water.

"I have seen You in Your sanctuary and gazed upon Your power and glory.

"Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise You!

"I will praise You as long as I live, lifting up my hands to You in prayer.

"You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise You with songs of joy.  
"I lie awake thinking of You, meditating on You through the night" (Ps 63:1-6 *NLT*).

And that was not the king on his royal throne in Jerusalem but in a gloomy desert place! This joy is otherworldly; it's heavenly. Thus with this joy we rejoice in tribulation, rejoicing in hope when we should be sorrowful (Jam. 1:2; Rom. 12:12; 2 Cor. 6:10; 2 Cor. 7:4; John 16:33). It's the river that makes the city (people) of God glad amid affliction and persecution (Ps 46:4; 1 Pet. 1:6; Matt. 5:12). If you would bear the full complement of "the fruit of the Spirit", rejoicing in God is a command to obey: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4 *ESV*; cp Ps 149:2). The joy of the LORD is your strength (Neh. 8:9-10).

Next ask yourself, '**do I have peace?**' This peace is not the absence of war or a conflict situation, but an inward state in which one is at peace with himself and with God (see Rom. 5:1). The LORD says in Isa. 48:18: "Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (*ESV*).

The basic truth is that "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked" (Isa. 48:22). It's only the righteous who are blessed with peace: "Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble" (Ps 119:165 *ESV*). That is a key characteristic of the kingdom of righteousness to which the righteous belong: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but **righteousness**, and **peace**, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17). And righteousness begets peace: "The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever" (Isa. 32:17 *ISV*).

So then, "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful" (Col. 3:15 *ESV*). This "peace of Christ" which should control our thinking as a Christian body does not happen in a vacuum; it's bound up with and flows from the godly virtues the Apostle Paul earlier mentions in vv. 12-14:

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,  
"bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.  
"And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (*ESV*).

These are the ingredients of the peace Christ gives. Imbibe them with the God's help. "The peace of Christ" is without equal; it speaks of a soul at peace in God, not in turmoil. "The peace of Christ" is about inner peace, manifesting in a worry-free life:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.  
"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds [from worry] in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7 *ESV*).

This is not the peace the world gives: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Note the references to "My peace" and "let not your heart be troubled". There is a causal relationship. The peace "the Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) brought into the world as the calmer of

troubled hearts and raging storms lives on in the hearts of His people by His indwelling Spirit keeping their hearts from fear and anxiety (see Rom. 8:15). Surely, "the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy on the Holy Ghost". If you are part of this Kingdom, here's the Sovereign God's promise to you:

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You; because he trusts in You" (Isa. 26:3 *MKJV*, cp Prov. 1:33).

As we have seen so far, all the virtues covered up to this stage, except to some extent love, have had to do with mostly inward attitudes that give God's Spirit-filled people emotional and spiritual equilibrium. It's in this frame of mind that we are able to positively affect the lives of people around us, as seen in the next set of virtues.

The first 'out-flowing' virtue is "**longsuffering**"! As its name suggests, *longsuffering* is "that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old And New Testament Words*, 1996, p. 377). Longsuffering is closely related in meaning to *patience*, "the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial; it's the opposite of despondency and is associated with hope, 1 Thess. 1:3" (*ibid.* p. 377).

In its noun form, "longsuffering" literally means "long temper" in Greek, comprising the adjective '*makros*' (long) and the noun '*thumos*' (temper, i.e. 'a state of calm or self-control') to form the word '*makrothumia*' (Strong's #3115).

And that's the sense in which "longsuffering" is used in Gal. 5:22. Instead of short temper, believers in exhibiting the "fruit of the Spirit" should have 'long temper' in the face of all provocation!

So, it's time to ask yourself, do I have the virtue of longsuffering? If yes, you will 'bear long' with your brother, your co-worker or even a mere acquaintance even though he/she is getting on your nerves so badly. If you have truly mastered love, the first element of the "fruit of the Spirit", you will not find it too difficult to practise longsuffering. It's a natural outcome of the true Christian love defined for us in 1 Cor. 13:

"Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;  
"does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;  
"does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;  
"bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (vv. 4-7).

Love then is the bedrock of longsuffering. Hence the command to love is often accompanied by a complementary command to suffer long through the exercise of *forbearance* (also inspired by love) to promote peace and unity. Longsuffering is a virtue to demonstrate to give meaning to one's Christian calling and election by God. The Apostle Paul establishes such a connection in two of his epistles.

Ephesians 4:1-3:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,  
"With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,  
"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*NKJV*).

Here, the writer Paul is a prisoner for the sake of Christ's gospel (3:1, cp. Phil. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:9) and yet pleads with fellow Christians living outside the confines of prison to live up to their holy Christian calling by demonstrating humility, gentleness and longsuffering exercised in love. The irony cannot be more glaring. A prisoner, given the harsh conditions of his confinement, is naturally inclined to be acerbic and less forgiving than a free man, but not one having "the fruit of the Spirit". The Spirit makes all the difference. Thus Spirit-filled 'prisoner' Paul, instead of exuding bitter feelings and resentment, exhorts the brethren to be of a humble and gentle spirit and bear with one another as a manifestation of their diligent effort to preserve the Spirit-created unity of believers which is maintained as long as it's tied up with peace (i.e. "the bond of peace").

The other text is Col. 3:12-14:

"Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;  
"bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.  
"But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (NKJV).

The status imposes the lifestyle: you are chosen and holy and beloved. You cannot live your life anyhow. You must be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, and longsuffering which is *demonstrated* when you bear with one another and forgive your brother even if you have a genuine complaint or grievance against him. The forgiveness you received from Christ is the yardstick--in its depth, breadth, and completeness! Especially bear in mind that Christ forgives never to remember the complaint anymore. All because His forgiveness is so genuine and love so deep.

On the cross of Calvary, He prayed to the Father for His persecutors amid all the unbearable pain and shame of the crucifixion, " Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Christ had exceptionally 'long temper'! Now, think about the far, far lesser evils people have done against you for which you refuse to forgive them and judge for yourself how far off you are from the longsuffering of Christ.

As carnal men, it will not be easy to emulate His longsuffering spirit. But then, we are talking about a component of "the fruit of the Spirit", and so it's to the Spirit that we must look to, to have 'long temper'!

Next comes "**gentleness**". After all, what follow-up attitude would you expect from a person who bears long with others' provocation? Prov. 15:1 connects the two: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (NASU). Like all the other virtues that make up "the fruit of the Spirit", gentleness is a character trait of Christ. The Gospel of Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah as having prophesied about Him:

"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.  
"He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;  
"a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope" (Matt. 12:18-21 ESV).

Can you lay claim to such a pristine gentle spirit? Not until you have the Spirit of Christ and live by "the wisdom from above":

"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

"This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

"And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (Jam. 3:13-18 *ESV*).

What message does the apostle James seek to convey to us?

In a nutshell, his point is that true wisdom is only seen in good behaviour that manifests in deeds performed with the meekness that wisdom produces.

- A. Therefore, any contrary behaviour such as jealousy and selfish ambition (in contrast to meekness) comes not from the (true) wisdom that comes from above but is earthly, sensual and demonic (vv. 14-15).
  - 1. As evidence of their demonic, earthly origins, all that jealousy and selfish ambition breed is confusion and evil activities (v. 16).
  - 2. This is in stark contrast to the wisdom from above which is first of all "pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (v. 17 *KJV*).
    - i. A positive result that comes from applying the wisdom from above is "a harvest of righteousness" obtained by making peace (v. 18).

As the scripture clearly shows, it's imperative that we operate by the "wisdom from above" or it's next to impossible to be gentle towards others most of whom will be using the opposite earthly wisdom which does not lend itself to gentleness. Notice what the Word instructs men of God in a world that lives by the earthly sensual wisdom inspired by demons:

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

"And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Against the 'natural' human tendency to be forceful and aggressive, believers are expected to be even more gentle at this end-time leading to the Lord's return. We read in Phil 4:5: "Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near" (*NASU*). And this in the context of the "perilous times" of the "last days" when "men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-4).

There is no running away or excuse from the spiritual virtue of gentleness. It must be demonstrated conspicuously and ubiquitously. So be gentle at your workplace and at the market; be gentle to your

neighbour (Prov. 3:29); be gentle to your spouse and children (Eph. 6: 4; Col. 3:21); be gentle to all manner of men in all circumstances. Even if all the people around are aggressive, overcome the temptation and the urge to be equally combative. The Lord is near as your coming Judge (Jam. 5:7-9). If you have to explain a point or do, state it gently and earnestly in a pleasant tone "seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). The Lord is near!

After "gentleness" comes "**goodness**", in the continuing manifestation of our spiritually refined and mellowed temperament. Again, our model of goodness is God as seen in both the Father and the Son. We read in Ps 145:9: "The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works" (see also Ex. 34:6; Ps 31:19; Nah. 1:7; Rom. 2:4). In His earthly life, good was all that Christ did in emulation of His Father. The Apostle Peter reminded the household of Cornelius who would become the first Gentile converts to *Yeshua Messiah*:

*"You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38 NASB).*

"Doing good" defined Christ's life and was indeed noted for that: "And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak" (Mark 7:37 ESV).

The lesson is that we should be "full of goodness" (Rom. 15:14) as a natural outcome of the "fruit of the light" which also produces righteousness and truth (Eph. 5:9).

But what is the right approach to doing good, and who should we especially show kindness to? We read in Gal. 6:9-10:

"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.  
"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (NASB).

Though brief, the text tells us several important things about how we should do good as believers in order to please to God and to reap His abundant blessings.

The first important point is that we must not get fed up with doing good, especially in this end-time climate of selfishness and ingratitude (2 Tim. 3:1-2) where it's easier to be discouraged from doing good than to be motivated to do good to others (see Matt. 24:12). This is because there is a sure reward for doing good "if we do not grow weary": "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again" (Prov. 19:17).

And how will the LORD effect the repayment of the seemingly *free loan* of goodness?

He, who is the Master of all the earth and everything therein, will cause men to pay back with large interest the loan you gave to Him when you gave to the poor: "Give, and it shall be given unto you", the Lord Jesus exhorts us, "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).



And it's all because God works by the 'golden rule'—"do for others what you want them to do for you" (Matt. 7:12)--as well as by the principle that a person reaps exactly what he sows (Gal. 6:7) as the following scriptures make clear:

Prov. 21:13:

"Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered" (ESV).

Prov. 12:14:

"From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hand comes back to him" (ESV; see also Job 34:11).

Prov. 11:24-26:

"One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

"Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

"The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it" (ESV).

The second point is that we should do good to all manner of people as and when we are in a position to do so especially to those closest to us in the church family of God. And in fact, there will never be a time as long as the world exists when others will not stand in need of our help; the opportunity always exists to do good in so far as those who readily qualify for our acts of kindness are not hard to find or identify. They are called "the poor". The Lord Jesus Christ said of them after Judas Iscariot out of malice criticized a woman for anointing Jesus' feet with costly ointment: "You will always have poor people with you" (John 12:8 GNB; also Matt. 26:11).

Because the poor will always be among us, God instructed the Israelites to treat them with justice and benevolence. In Deut. 15, He identified two areas of critical importance in the lives of the poor in which they were to be kindly and justly treated:

- I. Borrowing and lending
  - A. Don't keep the poor permanently in debt:
    1. Cancel the debts of a brother or neighbour who owe you at the end of every seventh year (vv. 1-2)
    2. Don't demand repayment of the debts, because
      - i. The LORD has declared them cancelled (v. 2) (as part of a general release from hard labour into rest every seventh year [Lev 25:1-7]).
    3. The only ones excepted from this seven-year cycle of release from debts are foreigners (v. 3).
    4. However, know that the debt release regulation holds true only if some of you become poor because you fail to keep God's commandments.
      - i. God's plan is that none of you remain poor, but His blessings are contingent on obedience to His commandments which is able to make you so prosperous as to lend to others (v. 4-6).
  - B. Having foreseen Israel's failure to have a poverty-free community because of unfaithfulness, God further instructed Israel on adopting a godly attitude towards the needy in society:

1. Don't turn a blind eye to the plight of your poor brother, unmoved by his situation (v. 7).
2. Manner of giving to the poor:
  - i. Give willingly and generously to the poor as to be sufficient for his need (v. 8; see Prov. 3:27-28).
  - ii. Don't give grudgingly because the seventh year of release is near when the loan will have to be cancelled (v. 9).
  - iii. Refusal to give to your poor brother out of meanness is recorded as sin against you when his cry of desperation and groaning get to God (v. 9b; see also Prov. 28:27).
  - iv. Generous giving with a willing spirit is a divine command to obey for blessings as long as the poor live among you (v. 10-11; cp Prov. 22:9)
  
- II. The engagement of the poor as domestic servants or workers
  - A. Recognize that your poor brother is in your service as a servant or labourer, not because he was born so or is inferior to you, but because of his indebtedness or other unfortunate situation (v. 12).
    1. His situation is therefore no license to keep him in perpetual servitude or poverty:
      - i. Set him free in the seventh year after serving you for six years (v. 13)
      - ii. Don't send him away empty to live as a pauper but handsomely reward him so he can be self-sufficient in his new life (v. 14; cp Jam. 5:1-7).
      - iii. This divine command of goodwill towards the poor is a matter of moral obligation to the LORD meant to reciprocate His kindness in saving you from a similar pitiable situation as a slave in Egypt into an independent life of prosperity (v. 15; see Ex. 11:1-3; 12:33-38; Gen. 15:13-14).

In the final analysis, goodness is not something we do on a whim or as and when we feel like doing it; it's a divine command because we are obliged to reciprocate God's goodness demonstrated in our own lives by showing kindness to other children of God in less fortunate circumstances. For this reason, it's a matter of grave dishonour to God (as with all disobedience to Him) when we refuse to help the poor. Prov. 14:31 warns: "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors Him" (*ESV*).

All kindness honours God because it helps to better the life of a child of His to His ultimate glory (see Job 31:13-15). This explains why God never forgets our acts of kindness (Heb. 6:10). Provided they are done in sincerity and not to win cheap popularity with men (Matt. 6:1-4), they await His reward of honour on the day of judgment (Matt. 25:34-40). Until then, do remember that God loves "a cheerful giver" and that He rewards our kindness out of His boundless store of 'grace' according to the sincerity and cheerfulness of our heart (2 Cor. 9:6-10).

Whenever possible, do good to the needy (according to your God-given ability, 1 Pet. 4:11) as your gesture of appreciation to God for all His goodness in your life. Delay no further, heed the prompting of the Spirit and manifest its fruit of goodness. Starting from today show love to the less privileged. They are not hard to find--as Christ said, the poor will always be with you (Matt. 26:11; John 12:8; cp Deut. 15:11).

So, if only you will, there surely is a poor widow and her family in your neighbourhood who will be so thankful to God and to you for your kind donation of used clothing or food or money. What about the child who comes to church with frayed clothes every Sabbath? Her face will light up and heart rejoice at a nice new 'church dress' for her. We must be "ready to share" whatever blessings God has given us as part of our spiritual sacrifices as the NT priests of God or our priesthood will be deficient (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:16; 1 Tim. 6:17-18).

Done with goodness, we move on to "faith". In context, "faith" here is not faith in the sense of belief or trust but in its sense of 'faithfulness' or 'fidelity'. While the believer must continue to have faith or trust (Heb. 10:37-39), it's a beginning principle (Heb. 6:1) he should have mastered by now as a Spirit-filled person. So it's **faithfulness** that's meant.

But what is 'faithfulness'?

To understand and apply faithfulness as expected of God's Spirit-filled people requires that we first understand the faithfulness of God Himself.

According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Faithfulness is one of the characteristics of God's ethical nature. It denotes the firmness or constancy of God in His relations with men, especially with His people. It is, accordingly, one aspect of God's truth and of His unchangeableness. God is true not only because He is really God in contrast to all that is not God, and because He realizes the idea of Godhead, but also because He is constant or faithful in keeping His promises, and therefore is worthy of trust. God, likewise, is unchangeable in His ethical nature. This unchangeableness the Scripture often connects with God's goodness and mercy, and also with His constancy in reference to His covenant promises".

The following scriptures throw more light on the characteristics of God's faithfulness:

Gen. 24:27:

"And he said, "Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master from His mercy and His truth. I, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren."

1Kings 8:23-24:

"And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

"Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

Ps 89:1-2:

"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever;  
With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.  
"For I have said, "Mercy shall be built up forever;  
Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heaven" (NKJV).

Ps. 119:75:

"I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me".

Act 13:32-33:

"And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,  
"God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Rom. 3:3-4:

"What if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? "Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged'" (NKJV).

So then, faithfulness as we are to learn of God is basically being truthful at all times and in all circumstances, as was said of Moses and perfectly exemplified by Christ (Num. 12:7; Heb. 3:2-6). So, are you faithful as a believer who has the "first fruits of the Spirit"?

If yes, you will be truthful in the service of God (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 1 Cor. 4:17; Col. 1:7; 2 Chron. 31:12), in bearing witness (Prov. 14:5, 12:17, 19:5,9; Ex. 20:16, 23:1; 1 Kings 21:13), and in the teaching of His Word if you are minister (Jer. 23:28; 2 Cor. 2:17, 4:2). Other instances where you will display faithfulness is when you are reproving others (Prov. 27:6; Ps. 141:5; cp Prov. 14:25), when you are in a position of trust (2 Kings 12:15; Neh. 13:13; Acts 6:1-3), when you hold confidential information (Prov. 11:13, cp 25:19), and when you carry messages on others' behalf (Prov. 13:17; 25:13). Indeed, you will be honest in all things (1 Tim. 3:11) in both great and small matters (Luke 16:10-12). Such was Daniel (Dan. 6:4).

But note that without the Spirit, faithfulness is hard to find in any carnal person (Prov. 20:6; Ps. 5:9; 12:1-4). However, one proof of the presence of the Spirit in our lives is that our basic nature--our heart-- is changed to conform to all that God wants us to be. This is how the heart of a believer is changed from one of unfaithfulness to faithfulness (Ez. 36:26-27; 11:19-20). While this was true of "faithful Abraham" (Neh. 9:8; Gal. 3:9), with the Apostle Paul it was nothing short of a 'dramatic miracle' given his background. In 1 Tim. 1:12-17, he testifies:

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,

"even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;

"and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus.

"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.

"Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (NASB).

Quite a leap! Although Paul was "a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent aggressor" and indeed the worst of sinners, God considered him faithful enough to put him into His service. Because He changed him out of His great mercy!

God delights in the faithful and blesses them. He said through King David:

"My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me;

He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me.

"He who practices deceit shall not dwell within my house;

He who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his position before me.

"Every morning I will destroy all the wicked of the land,

So as to cut off from the city of the LORD all those who do iniquity"(NASB).

Proverbs 28:20 says, "A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent" (see Ps. 31:23; 1 Sam. 26:23). In the *Parable of the Talents*, the two servants who put their monies to profitable use were honoured with promotion and entered "the joy" of their Lord (Matt. 25:20-23) to teach us we will similarly be blessed if we stay faithful to the Lord occupied in His work (Matt. 24:45-46).

But the faithfulness we are called to is not limited to our relationship with God; it's faithfulness in "all things". To your spouse, your friends, your family, your co-workers, and to your nation. That's the kind of all-encompassing faithfulness the Spirit produces in us!

The 8th virtue in the ranking of "the fruit of the Spirit" is "**meekness**", a character trait also associated with Christ (Ps. 45:4; Matt. 21:5; 2 Cor. 10:1). His words define and His life epitomizes for us true meekness. In Matt. 11:28-30 He combines both in calling us to emulate His meekness:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

"For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

"Lowly in heart" is the key to meekness. It's where meekness or humility begins, enabling one to esteem his fellow better than himself in line with the attitude of Christ (Phil. 2:3-5; Col. 3:12-13; cp Acts 20:19). Such a meek person does not overrate himself in his self-delusions of grandeur for which he lacks the capacity to substantiate with deeds. Whatever he claims to be is actually so. The Apostle Paul tells us in Rom. 12:3: "I say to every man that is among you, through the grace given unto me, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith". The high opinion of self is vain if it's not in accordance with one's allotted measure of faith; it's only so in the mind, not in actual fact.

That is why we are told in 1Pet. 4:11: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen".

So then, one of the blessings of meekness is contentment, which is 'peaceful satisfaction' with your status in life or whatever you possess (Ps. 37:16). God says to us in Heb. 13:5: "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (ESV).

So, are you meek? If yes, you will show humility toward God and man as Christ demonstrated in His mission of salvation to earth (Phil. 2:5-8). While such humility will characterize everything you do, it will especially manifest itself in the following ways: you will receive the Word planted in you with meekness (Jam. 1:21; Acts 17:10-11); you will conduct your affairs in the meekness that wisdom brings (Jam. 3:13), you will answer the adversaries of the faith with meekness and respect to offset their aggressiveness (1 Pet. 3:15-17; 2 Tim. 2:24-26); you will restore an erring brother in "a spirit of meekness", not in a supercilious manner (Gal. 6:1). Indeed, you will "show meekness to all men" in demonstration of "the wisdom that comes from above" (Tit. 3:2; Jam. 3:17) and as an important part of your Christian walk (Eph. 4:1-2; 1 Tim. 6:11).

Meekness is a virtue God takes great delight in, for a "meek and quiet spirit is of great price in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 3:4). The reward of blessing Christ pronounces on the meek is "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5; see also Ps. 37:11). Others include the following promises:

Ps 22:26:

"The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever".

Isa. 29:19:

"The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel".

Ps. 149:4:

"For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation".

Meekness is a command to obey if we are to learn of Christ (cp 1 Cor. 11:1) and to put on His character.

The ninth and last element of the fruit of the Spirit is "**temperance**" or self-control. This quality speaks of a life that has tamed the wild passions of the flesh. This is the individual who does not give in to the promptings or demands of the flesh but is led by the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:14). Instead of being at the beck and call of the flesh, he lives a life of freedom from the desires of the flesh which expresses itself in obedience to God's law of love (Gal. 5:13-17).

Self-control is imperative for the believer who sees himself as a stranger in a world filled with incontinent people (those without self-control), one of the prophesied trends of the "last days" (2 Pet. 2:11; 2 Tim. 3:1-3).

So are you self-controlled?

If you believe you are, you will conform to God's law (Rom. 8:2, 7) and will not be in the dilemma of the 'unspiritual moral man' in Rom. 7:15-24 who knows good but cannot do it because he is enslaved to sin (v. 14). As every Holy Spirit-filled person has been set free from the power of sin, you will live in conformity to the righteous requirements of God's law being of the same essence as the Spirit in you (Rom. 8:2-4, 7:14).

The resultant spiritual life flowing from your Spirit-empowered obedience to God's law will characterize your everyday life to the extent that your very body parts will be 'unresponsive' to situations that would ordinarily arouse evil passions and desires. Such is the obedient life of holiness God's grace produces:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

"God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1-2).

You are "dead to sin" because your body parts have been "destroyed" or "put to dead" as far as sin is concerned (Rom. 6:6-7, 12-13; 8:13; Col. 3:5). So why will you be excited by a man or a lady you are not married? Job declared:

"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust at a young woman.

"For what has God above chosen for us? What is our inheritance from the Almighty on high?

"Isn't it calamity for the wicked and misfortune for those who do evil?

"Doesn't He see everything I do and every step I take?

"If my heart has been seduced by a woman, or if I have lusted for my neighbor's wife,  
"then let my wife belong to another man; let other men sleep with her.  
"For lust is a shameful sin, a crime that should be punished.  
"It is a fire that burns all the way to hell. It would wipe out everything I own" (Job 31:1-4, 9-12 *NLT*).

The consequences of a life lacking in self-control is dire—"it's a fire that burns all the way to hell"!  
The Lord Jesus Himself said in His *Sermon on the Mount*:

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';  
"but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.  
"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.  
"If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matt. 5:27-30 *NASB*).

Christ tackles the problem at its source—lust (Jam. 1:13-15), and the solution is Spirit-enabled self-control which spiritually "cuts off" or "puts to death" all offending body parts!

Self-control, then, is the restraining of the lusts of the flesh to the end that sin ceases to have any more place in your personal and social life (1 Pet. 4:1-5). And it's all because you will have crucified the flesh and its passions and evil desires and now walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:24-25).

As a direct result of living in the Spirit (in which the lusts of the flesh are curbed), you will also demonstrate self-control in your social relations (Gal. 5:26). You will tame all your organs of communication and interaction with others. You will control your emotions, your hands, and your tongue; your words will not break but build up people, and you will exude tender feelings of forgiveness, instead of bitterness (Eph. 4:25-32).

In the end, there will be peace in your own life and between you and others. Prov. 26:20 says, "For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases" (*ESV*).

This is however not the case with a man who lacks self-control; he's at the mercy of all sorts of insults and negative reactions hurled at him in retaliation for his tantrums and abuses thrown at others: "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls [and so open to attack]" (Prov. 25:28; cp 16:32).

Such is not the way we have been called to live; we have been called to emulate our Saviour's exemplary life "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

His life is the perfect composite of the different qualities that make "the fruit of the Spirit". Christ is our perfect model for faith and practice as God's children. By bearing "the fruit of the Spirit" with the help and power of His Spirit, we become more and more like Him in character "until the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). Indeed, we show absolute proof of having "the first fruits of the Spirit" and therefore 'qualified' to experience our second adoption as the children of the Highest on His return. That's how vital is it to bear "the fruit of the Spirit"!

**'He who Begun the Good Work shall Complete it'**

By now, we should fully realize that "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21) and "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23) are opposite attributes which cannot co-exist. There's no spiritual middle-ground; you either manifest the "fruit of the Spirit" or "the works of the flesh". But the great part is that you don't have to exert yourself to bear "the fruit of Spirit"; it is borne naturally by the Spirit in you, being the fruit of your regenerated being in the likeness of the Father whose seed we carry by the implantation of the Spirit (1 John 3:9, 2:29). In Jam. 1:18, we read: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (ESV). Thus the baptism of spirit is all important. So do not quench the Spirit's fire not nor grieve Him through prayerlessness and disobedience (1 Thess. 5:19; Eph. 4:30).

The "first fruits of the Spirit" produced by spiritual rebirth should logically culminate in the Pentecost harvest of transformation, to wit, our second "adoption" where we no longer bear the image of the earthly but the image of the heavenly fashioned after the glorious spiritual body of Christ (1 Cor. 15:49, 42-45; Phil. 3:20-21). Spiritual rebirth occasioned by the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the first phase of divine adoption (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:16-17); our transformation into glorious body of Christ is the second adoption when we will resemble Him in exactitude (1 John 3:1-3; Ps. 17:5). It's at this point that the good work Christ begun in us with the impartation of His Spirit to us at our conversion is perfected (Phil. 1:6).

This is the 'loaf stage' of salvation (in the jargon of feast of weeks), the 'mark of the high calling' which Paul pressed towards and all of us should. He wrote in Phil. 3:10-14 of his single-minded ambition to "know" Christ and "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (NASB).

That's the spirit. Until the Lord Jesus Christ brings the great Pentecost harvest of the resurrection and ascension on the fiftieth day, we must press on through the 49 days of our earthly sojourn, moving towards perfection day by day by bearing "the fruit of the Spirit". May the God of all grace fill us with His Spirit for the fulfilment of His perfect will. Amen!

Pastor Enoch Ofori Jnr

Seventh Day Pentecostal Assemblies (Esreso)

P.O. Box 481, Kumasi, Ghana, W/A

Tel: 233-322095507 Mobile Phones: 233-02-7499933/233-24-4235015

Websites: [www.asdpagh.com](http://www.asdpagh.com); [www.enochangelism.org](http://www.enochangelism.org). Email: [info@asdpagh.com](mailto:info@asdpagh.com)