

SPIRITUAL GIFTS & FRUIT

PART 6

EXPLORING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,”

Eph. 4:12-14 NKJV



Review of Study 22

Spiritual gifts, fruit of the Spirit, and natural endowments are summarized below. These three items come from the Lord, in one way or another. Knowing these three items, using your God-given common sense, and following the Spirit's guidance will enable you to better understand the human experience.⁶ Understanding these three items helps you to know what to expect, what not to expect, and to value what God is doing for you today.

- 1. Spiritual gifts** were given quickly and only to believers. The gifted person could immediately accomplish miraculous things. The gifts were designed to provide signs and to provide for the ministry; they did not change the person on the inside. They vanished away in the first century.
- 2. Fruit of the Spirit** is developed inside believers, through the renewal of the mind by the Holy Spirit. Mind renewal and the production of fruit are processes that take considerable time. Only believers have the fruit of the Spirit (unbelievers can have something that seems similar, but is of human origin and prone to failure). The Spirit's fruit is internal and apparently permanent. His fruit changes our innermost soul (mind), changes the essence of who we are, and enables us to be the person God wants us to be. The fruit of the Spirit is the manifestation of the Spirit in our lives, producing His attributes in us. His fruit enables us to mature into the likeness of our Lord, and makes our endeavors pleasing to God.
- 3. Talents, skills, and abilities** enable people today to perform and accomplish great things. Talents, skills, and abilities are natural endowments from God. These endowments often exist early in life, and they are given to all people (nurture and genetics may be involved). These endowments enable people to make great strides in the arts, literature, and science; provide help in daily life; enable individuals and families to prosper; help build civilizations; ensure the development of great institutions; promote the creation of extraordinary things; and lead to marvelous discoveries. The unsaved also have this endowment from the Lord, so they, too, can do great things. Talents, skills, and abilities help us occupationally and professionally; thus, they can help a person fill the office of pastor, teacher, evangelist, and so on. However, talents, skills, and abilities do not enable us, by themselves, to do great things; we

⁶ The human experience refers to all we have as a result of our relationship with God. The three items we have discussed are only the start, since that experience includes salvation, transformation, glorification, blessings,

must also study, prepare, and persevere. In addition, for ministry-related ventures and interpersonal relationships, a Christian's success is very much a function of the fruit of the Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

This study will delve into the fruit of the Spirit in detail. We will discuss how the fruit of the Spirit develops in the believer's life through the renewal of the believer's mind (transformation). Our resources in the renewal process are discussed, as are the results of a failure to thrive in the Christian life. Failure to thrive can lead to the diminishment of the Spirit's fruitful actions, and this is not something any of us wants.

BIBLE TRUTH

Fruit Growth

The Holy Spirit is fruitful as He works in our lives; however, His fruit does not grow or mature quickly. His fruit is the result of His transforming action in our lives. Transformation of the mind is a process that occurs over time as we walk with the Lord. In this process, we must ensure we augment fruit growth, that is, we must do all that is necessary for the Spirit to work in our lives. By way of analogy, the development of the fruit of the Spirit seems to follow the growth of natural fruit. Thus, rain is required for natural fruit to develop into edible form. In the spiritual realm, rain is the equivalent of worship and study of the Word. In the following list, the factors that enhance natural fruit growth are shown, followed by the corresponding factors (in parentheses) that encourage growth of spiritual fruit in our lives.

- a. rain or watering (worship, praise, study of Word)
- b. nurturing (Word, prayer, intimacy with Him)
- c. cultivation (removal of strongholds in the mind that crowd out godly values, putting on the new man)
- d. fertile ground (earnest desire, receptive mind, allowing the Spirit to work, openness, passionate desire to follow Him)
- e. pruning (cutting off self-interests in order to be closer to the Vine, leading our thoughts captive to the Lord, being close to the Lord)
- f. pest removal (Ephesians 6: spiritual warfare, and not allowing for false [wormy] fruit)

Discuss: What are some other things required for natural fruit development, and what would be the spiritual counterpart in our lives?

The production of fruit in our lives depends upon our consistent and determined yielding to the Spirit. Yielding could also be called following Him or walking in the Spirit; all the result of obeying the Word. Through the Word, we can know what He is doing or desires from us. As we adhere to the Word, we will not be quenching His actions, as though putting out a fire by dousing it in water (1 Thes. 5:19). Instead, we will be allowing Him to have a productive influence, thereby producing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Our Weapons

The fruit of the Spirit is the outgrowth (result) of His presence and work in our lives, transforming us. Transformation requires feeding on the Word, the primary means by which the Lord can speak to us so we know His will, and our part in the transformation process. The Lord gives us resources to help in the transformation process. Since we are in a spiritual warfare, these resources are often considered weapons. These weapons are spiritual and of a soulish nature (from our soul), far different than any other weapon.

The spiritual-soulish weapons the Lord gives us are truly unique. They are used against the worst enemy we will

ever face, our own non-regenerated mind, that is, our old selves. Salvation changes us spiritually, but now our soul/mind has to be changed. The Holy Spirit works to renew our minds, but there is a continuing struggle with our old minds and Satan.

Six of our weapons are listed below. Certainly there are more and your study of the Word will allow the Spirit to bring them to your attention. These weapons are called "mighty in God," which means they are very powerful because He ordained them and works through them for our benefit. The Scripture reads, **"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled"** (2 Cor. 10:4-6). While the following list is not exhaustive, it does reveal typical resources that are ours in the transformation process.

- **Weapon 1: Know sin.** You have to recognize if something in your life is a sin. Recognizing sin will require a close and intimate connection with Christ. Something may be a sin if it: violates God's clear commands, weakens your relationship with Him, controls your mind, harms your family, damages your health... Sometimes it is difficult to know what is sinful, but you know you cannot fool Him. You can fool yourself by allowing sinful behavior to have safe harbor in your soul. A sin can be something you do not want to give up, have long ago forgotten is a sin, something you excuse for convenience, and so on. You must be honest with Him and yourself. Something as simple as overeating may become a sin when it results in disease or the inability to carry on a normal life. Recognize sin, then confess it to the Lord, that is, acknowledge it is a sin. If you are saved, you are already forgiven for this sin; God does not hold our sins against us until we ask for forgiveness (all our sins, including our future sins, are forgiven when we were saved). As a note of clarification, 1 John 1:9 refers to the unsaved; it is not saying

Christians must confess their sins in order to be forgiven. However, acknowledging the sin (even though forgiven) makes it clear in your mind it is wrong, and it enhances your relationship with Him. Once you have acknowledged your failures, it will make you want to follow the Forgiver's directions in Romans 12.

- **Weapon 2: Break down strongholds in your mind** (2 Cor. 10:4). Strongholds are the former (characteristic of the old you) thought patterns, values, attitudes, and obsessions. These are wrong ways that have been implanted in your mind and that control your life and thoughts. Too often the past strongholds come back to recapture our minds and lead them captive again.

- **Weapon 3: Bring every thought and purpose into captivity to the obedience of Christ** (2 Cor. 10:5). This verse is referring to a willingness to allow the Lord to capture every thought and purpose in your life and change it. This will take determination on your part to allow that change to take place.

- **Weapon 4: Have a readiness to avenge/change behavior** (Phil. 3:16). We will reach a level of spiritual maturity, and we are expected to live accordingly. If we do not live according to what He has taught us, He will create within us a desire to avenge or change any behavior to make it conform to His will.

- **Weapon 5: Make no provisions for the flesh** (Rom. 13:14). We are commanded not to make preparations to satisfy our personal cravings, which satisfy the lusts of the flesh. This is so simple to understand but so hard to do. For example, a person with an alcohol addiction cannot have alcohol hidden in a secret place just in case of a strong craving. Make no provision means not to allow the provision to be accessible for use during a time of weakness. If you cannot get to the provision (because you made it unavailable), then you may be able to pass the hour of temptation successfully.

- **Weapon 6: Forget the past** (Phil. 3:13). This verse is not suggesting you can forget everything in your past.

It will be a terrible struggle but you must not allow yourself to think about any past event that causes you emotional upheaval, whether the event was true or not, whether the event was good or bad. If you were treated wrongly as a child, whoever did it was wrong. However, that person can still control you as an adult if you think about the past and get upset. You will have to put past events behind you and move on. You cannot allow yourself to think of them for one second. The moment the thought of hurtful past events comes into your mind you have to be prepared to change the thought. Eventually, as you are transformed, that event will still remain in your memory, but that memory will not elicit an emotional response nor will it control your life any longer. You will be able to recall the event without the emotional reaction; it will be just a memory, not the present day reliving of the pain and sorrow.

These tools (and others in the Scripture) are effective in allowing the Holy Spirit to be fruitful in our lives. To think God has not given us the required resources to attain what He asks and to succeed triumphantly would be inappropriate. As the fruit of the Spirit become part of our lives, we will demonstrate Christ-likeness to those around us.

Discuss: Why does God call the items in Galatians 5 "fruit"? (Consider: Christ is the Vine, the Spirit planted within us has a growing influence, and the word fruit often refers to the result of some action.)

Failure to Thrive

When our physical body parts lose connection to our head, those parts suffer (indeed the whole body does). Similarly, in the body of Christ, the body of all believers, each of us must maintain a close and intimate connection to our Head (Col. 2:19; Eph. 1:22, 4:15). When anyone loses connection with Christ, that person and the various members of the body of Christ begin to suffer loss of instruction, direction, and internal guidance. Individually, and as a body of believers, we fail to thrive spiritually.

Enjoying mature fruit in our lives is the goal of walking with Christ, a harvest of His attributes in our lives. Whether a Christian can ever lose the fruit of the Spirit is debatable; they seem to be permanent. However, we can push the fruit to the back of our minds, into near obscurity, much like Christians can have failures without losing their salvation. Those who have lost connection with their Head (Jesus Christ) (and that is possible for us all at some time in our lives) begin to go backward in personal transformation (Col. 2:19). The spiritual transformation advancements brought about by the Spirit are reversed, and we slip backward into soulish things (based upon our old minds), then further back to physical things. The reversal means our old minds are in charge, not the Spirit, and we end up with an outward appearance of godliness, but deny the power of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit's fruit is pushed back, the believer will begin to display the same human fruit as an unbeliever. Human fruit is defective—we could say wormy—and will decay because of its origin.

We become disconnected from our Head when we are not in the Word daily, not praying from the heart, not trying to live for the Lord, and putting other things before the Lord. When disconnected, the flow of information from our Head is diminished, and we lose direction and focus. Our spiritual fruit begins to wither, and eventually we can no longer hide the shriveled result. So we create false fruit as a substitute. What can we create using a mind that is reverting to the old self? Well, we can replace true fruit with: 1) what society thinks is good, based upon non-transformed minds, 2) what is politically or religiously correct, or 3) what best justifies our present lifestyle. Instead of fruit of the Spirit, we begin to champion emotional values (feelings), because feelings will always score high on the scale of societal and personal acceptance. As life spins downward, we may even resort to being the advocate of physical passions. This reversal in transformation is a serious form of Christian failure and resembles a physical body deprived of proper blood flow or nerve supply.

The simple chart below gives examples of how a person can become seduced by the world, self, and Satan, thereby allowing reverse transformation to take place. The spiritual fruit shown comes from Galatians 5:22-23. Notice that the transformation reversal flows from the transformed mind (with the fruit of the Spirit), to a degenerate state based upon non-transformed feelings and emotions (a soulish replacement), and then to the physical or carnal state. A person undergoing a transformation reversal can be deluded into thinking that

true agape love (spiritual) is not as important as strong feelings and affections (non-transformed soulish emotions) typical of phileo love. Given time, a person may slide far enough to think physical satisfaction (eros love) is God's ideal of love. You can see God is not honored, how rewards are lost, and how doctrinal confusion results. Becoming disconnected from our Head has serious consequences and staying in the Word is the best antidote.

Transformation's Reversal

Fruit of the Spirit

Love (agape)
 Joy
 Peace
 Longsuffering
 Kindness
 Goodness
 Faithfulness (loyalty)
 Gentleness
 Self-control

Soulish Replacements

affection/feelings (phileo)
 happiness
 performance
 coexistence
 tolerance
 morality
 acknowledgement
 passivity
 resignation

Natural or Physical Consequences

bodily satisfaction (eros)
 pleasure seeking
 legality, cultism, extremism
 short tempered, impatience
 indifference
 judgmental
 complacency
 violence/anger
 indecency

In the chart above, the reversal always flows from the left to the right, that is, from spiritual fruit, to soulish replacements, then to the baser natural or physical values. Notice how joy, a deep spiritual fruit, can be replaced by happiness (a more outward emotional expression). When happiness begins to fail, then pleasure seeking in general can be the goal of a person's life in order to provide the desired "feel good" condition (after all, it is reasoned, "God wants me to feel good"). Our peace with God becomes replaced by thinking our relationship with Him is performance based, which further devolves into legalism and cultism. As you read down the listing, longsuffering devolves into coexistence; there is a huge gulf between longsuffering and coexistence, the latter meaning putting aside your morals and beliefs in order to fit in with the politically or religiously correct crowd. Coexistence crashes downward into impatience and short temper. Kindness is replaced by tolerance (not kindness to all people because

of your compassion for them, but putting up with people because you have to). Then, tolerance eventually decays into indifference. Goodness is a fruit that, through human thinking, can devolve into morality (human morality, which is not the same as God's), and that can go downhill into being judgmental of those not following society's "correct" morality.

An interesting confirmation of this chart is afforded by the world today, in which tolerance and coexistence, the soulish replacements of longsuffering and kindness, are considered the epitome of a virtuous person. Notice what could come next, coexistence and tolerance can devolve into impatience and indifference (you go your way and I will go mine), which will not bode well for the body of Christ, society, or the individual. Of course, even unbelievers will find value in all three columns, but the main focus between believers and unbelievers will vary. The natural or physical consequences column is where

the unsaved mind will tend to focus. The middle column is where the religious mind (the person may be saved, or may be unsaved but religious) will tend to focus. The left column is where the Holy Spirit focuses, and that will be the focus of the believer trying to live a godly life. The physical consequences column will be the norm for the world as we approach the end of the Age of Grace, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3.

Your Thoughts: Have you had transformational reversals in your life? We all have, but we do not like to admit it. What have you found best helps you keep connected to your Head, Jesus Christ?

True Spiritual Fruit at Work

Spiritual fruit should not be confused with spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are things like instantaneously speaking in a language you do not know; thus, spiritual gifts enabled people to do unusual things. Spiritual gifts were given to Israel and the early church for a specific purpose and for a very limited time period. The Bible makes it clear the gifts would vanish away when their purpose was completed, and that is exactly what happened in the first century. The fruit of the Spirit (spiritual fruit) is the result of the Spirit working within the believer, developing His character traits and making the believer more like Christ. Spiritual fruit is what each believer has today; it is how God is operating in our lives.

The last study pointed out that unbelievers can have traits that resemble true spiritual fruit, but this type of fruit is of a human origin and can be subject to errors and wrong ideas. We will use an example of how true spiritual fruit generally works in our lives. We will consider kindness to see how this spiritual fruit differs from the false fruit of human origin. Our example is based upon the value of a human life. The spiritual fruit of kindness will make a person truly regard the dignity and importance of all human life, whether born or unborn. However, the kindness based upon human origin is often exposed as faulty. Kindness of human origin will often be skewed (for example, having an overemphasis on some lesser issue, while at the same time diminishing a more

important issue). Accordingly, human-based kindness will often approve of partial birth abortion (the murder of an innocent baby), and this is an important issue. The important issue is replaced by some other issue of lesser concern, such as an overemphasis on animal rights.

Continuing the example above, at some time in our lives, the Spirit will work to make us keenly aware of how we are to think regarding the important issue of the right to life. The Bible teaches an unborn baby has every bit as much value as any person that is born, **"If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life"** (Ex. 21:22-23). Giving life for life, eye for eye, and so forth, is a principle that does not change from age to age. If two men are in a fight and hurt a pregnant woman, such that the pregnant woman's child is born prematurely and is harmed in some way, or dies, the fighting man who harmed the woman will give eye for eye, or life for life. Clearly, the unborn child is a human life; it has the same value of any other person, and has equal rights and dignity. The Bible teaches there is a right to life, and an unborn child is equal in all ways to that of any person who is already born. Of course, we have to be careful in our evaluation of others because we all have blind spots, diverse experiences and values, and may be poorly connected to our Head at certain times. However, this principle generally will be championed by all who have the fruit of kindness from the Holy Spirit.

In addition to championing human life, **"A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel"** (Proverbs 12:10). A Spirit-led Christian will have regard for his or her animals, treating them kindly. However, regard for an animal is not of the same importance as the sanctity of an unborn human life, as verified by the punishment dealt out in Exodus 21. Human-based fruit will have the appearance of being of value, but it is faulty, wormy fruit. Thus, the unsaved will try to be merciful and

compassionate, but they lack true kindness from the Spirit. In the final analysis, they can even be cruel toward animals. Human-based fruit is generally riddled with

injustice and error, but this is only apparent to those led by the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit may be despised by the unsaved.

TAKE TO HEART

Summary

The fruit of the Spirit is the outgrowth (result) of His presence and work in our lives, which transforms us. The production of fruit depends upon our consistent and determined yielding to the Spirit. The Lord gives us resources to help us follow the Spirit, and since we are in a spiritual warfare, these resources are often considered weapons. These weapons are called "mighty in God," which means they are very powerful because He ordained them and works through them for our benefit. Six weapons were discussed: know sin, break down strongholds in your mind, bring every thought and purpose into captivity to the obedience of Christ, have a readiness to avenge/change your behavior, make no provisions for the flesh, and forget the past. These weapons (and others in the Scripture) are effective in allowing the Holy Spirit to be fruitful in our lives.

When a person loses connection with Christ, that person begins to suffer loss of instruction, direction, and internal guidance. Since the Spirit cannot be fruitful under such a condition, there is a failure to thrive spiritually. A person's spiritual fruit begins to wither, and eventually he or she can no longer hide the shriveled result. So, the person creates false fruit to "cover" the lack to true spirituality. This fruit is based upon a mind that is reverting to the old self, a basic reversal of the transformation process. The transformation reversal flows from the transformed mind (with spiritual fruit), to a degenerate state based upon non-transformed feelings and emotions (soul/mind based), and then to the physical or carnal state. The physical state will be the norm for the world as we approach the end of the Age of Grace. In contrast, keeping a strong connection with our Head enables the Spirit to be fruitful, that is, producing Christ-like character traits in us. The fruit of the Spirit is what

each believer has today, and that is how God is operating in our lives (along with natural skill, talents, and abilities).

Gospel

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Rom. 5: 8-10).

Encouragement

This series of six studies has shown that the spiritual gifts, given at Pentecost and to the early Church, have vanished away, as clearly stated in the Scripture. The indwelling Spirit provides us something far superior; indeed, God calls it the more excellent way (along with the completed Word). The fruit of the Spirit is a new way of God's working within the believer to produce Christ-like qualities, and it is much more excellent. The way God is working in the Age of Grace is very distinctive, that is, He is working in our lives in a unique manner that exists only in the Age of Grace. We have been blessed in a marvelous way, and the indwelling Spirit is here to comfort, encourage, and lift us up; all this is being done at the same time He is working in the depths of our being to make us more like our Savior. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ uphold you and encourage you in all ways.

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APPENDIX

Evidences the *till* of Ephesians 4:13 occurred in Paul's day

As noted in Adult Studies 20 and 21, Paul makes it clear the spiritual gifts were given to the early church for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. He clearly states the spiritual gifts would be active in believers' lives *until* three things occurred, after which, the gifts would vanish away: **"for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...."** (Ephesians 4:12-14). Again, the gifts were given as a resource for the emerging Church, and they would remain active until the believers were able to have three things. These three things are positional truths, that is, established realities in God's heart, based upon the believer's position in Christ. In addition, these realities relate to practical truth, that is, our practical, daily lives. The three things were:

- 1) the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
- 2) a perfect man, and
- 3) the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ

Paul was using these three things as reference points, landmarks, which would let the believers know the gifts would be active *till* these things happened. The three things correlate with what Paul said concerning the time when "that which is perfect had come," that is, when the Word of God for the Age of Grace was completed (1 Cor. 13:10). When the Word was completed, and when the three events related to *till* occurred, then the time for the spiritual gifts was over and they would pass away.

When the Word was completed, the Age of Grace was fully functional. Thus, our Age was fully functionality by the mid-first century AD. Our age could not be fully functional while there was a dependence on spiritual gifts, because what they offered was not complete, mature, or perfect.

After the Word was completed, the Age of Grace was fully functional; thus, the incomplete ministry provided by spiritual gifts was over. The ministry provided by the gifts was replaced by the perfect, completed, written Word. Once the Word was complete, the spiritual gifts pass away, according to 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.

The *till* of Ephesians 4:13 is important to understand, since the gifts were active *till* (until) the three things became a reality. The purpose of this Appendix is to substantiate the *till* occurred in Paul's lifetime, indeed, the reason he was called by God was to complete the Word, **"of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill (complete) the word of God"** (Col. 1:25, parentheses added).

The three things seem so lofty and unattainable that many people believe they cannot refer to this life; thus, they believe the gifts were intended to remain with mankind until the end of the age. This is completely opposite of the intent of the Bible; the intent is directly aimed at showing those lofty items would become a reality in Paul's lifetime. Paul's description of the end of the Age of Grace indicates there will be less faith and true spirituality as we approach end times. So, it cannot be referring to the time period at the end time, the Rapture. Indeed, at the Rapture everything

in the believer's earthly experience will come to an end. It would be absolutely silly for Paul to say we would have unity of faith after the Rapture; obviously in Heaven that is the case and universally understood. There would be no point in stating the gifts would cease after Christ come for His saints, but it is a tremendous point to state they would cease in Paul's day.

Paul's comments about no longer being children, being perfect, and the fullness of Christ, all refer to the believer's position in Christ. Becoming adults, being conformed to His image, and being perfect in God's eyes are not only possible, they are hallmark truths for our Age of Grace. In addition, all the things Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:12-14 are spiritual realities that became true in Paul's day; so from today's perspective, the three things are in the past. Thus, the gifts had to pass away in Paul's day.

In Adult Study 20 it was noted, the "**till we all come to the unity of the faith**" was already reached when Paul wrote Ephesians 4:3 (64 AD), as evidenced by his statement, "**endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**" Thus, the unity of the Spirit, with its one faith, was already in existence (item 1 above); it had been attained; now they were to keep it. It is necessary to remember that Ephesians 4:13 is within a flashback (verses 8 to 13) in time, and occurs before Ephesians 4:3. In the flashback, Paul says three things had to be occur, and when they did occur (verse 3, ~ 64 AD), the purpose for the gifts would be over.

Consider these truths in relation to the three things noted above. Incidentally, it is very helpful for understanding Scripture, and for correct doctrine, to know that all three things were met in the mid-first century. The phrase, "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God," is addressed in Ephesians 4:3-5, where it is stated the unity of the Spirit with its one faith already existed. The phrase, "to a perfect man" refers to our position in Christ, wherein we are perfect in Him upon faith. In this life, we are to allow the Holy Spirit to transform us so we have that perfection in our daily lives. The phrase, "to a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," refers to coming of age (adulthood) and/or reaching an adult height. Paul wanted the Ephesians to know the gifts would be active and remain until the believers' reached Christ's stature (figuratively). As those believers put on the new man, they (and we) were conformed to Christ; conformed in maturity and spiritually. The biblical admonition to be full grown, mature, etc., are based upon the fact it was possible to be that, by faith, at that time. Thus, in Paul's day it was possible, indeed expected, that believers understood their position in Christ at that time. Believers were not to think all the things Paul mentioned would be attainable only in the far distant future.

In reality, the three things are descriptors of one event in the Age of Grace, that is, the completion of the Word. In a similar way, a person could be a slave in America *till* the end of the civil war, the putting down of succession, and the emancipation proclamation. All three of these terms have a somewhat different meaning, but they all refer to the same general timeframe. Thus, slavery was in effect until those three things occurred, in one general time period. The teaching of Ephesians is the gifts were to be in effect until three things occurred, and those things refer to one general time period and event.

We may wonder how it is that grace believers (those who believe in the Age of Grace, the Gospel of the grace of God, and God's revelation of the mystery) miss the fact that the *till* of Ephesians 4:13 occurred in Paul's day. The truths represented by the three things in the *till*, are hallmarks, indeed defining characteristics, for our age. Believers miss the truth of this passage for the simple reason they have to protect their existing beliefs concerning spiritual gifts. Instead of using the passage to develop their belief on gifts, they develop beliefs on gifts first, then try to find

ways to bend or deny obvious truths. They believe the sign gifts passed away, but that the other gifts to the church remained, especially the gifts of being a pastor, teacher, and evangelist. Since they believe certain gifts remain to this day, they cannot allow for the simple truth the three items (noted above) already existed in Paul's day. This error is the result of not recognizing a ministerial office or church function can exist today, without the person filling it being gifted into it. Thus, the office of pastor can exist even though a person does not receive a gift to fill that office. Since it is presumed some gifts still are active, then the *till* has to be in our future. Accordingly, sometime in the future the three things will be met and the gifts will cease. But, if any or all the gifts to the early church are still active, those gifts would then be active to the end of our age. Accordingly, the *till* would then be fulfilled during the time when people will be departing from the faith, lovers of themselves, and giving heed to deceiving spirits (1 Tim: 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-7). The belief some of the gifts remained until the end of the Age of Grace does not correspond to Scripture, not at all!

We will examine a few passages to show that the three things mentioned above did occur in Paul's day. The fact they did occur, is reason to believe the gifts did pass away, just as the Bible said they would.

If the three things in Ephesians 4:13 did occur in Paul's day, then the gifts did pass away as stated in that passage. As a reminder, the three things are: 1) to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, 2) to a perfect man, and 3) to the measure of the fullness of Christ. Below are some passages from Paul, showing those three items became a reality in his day. Thus, the three things were possible in a person's life back then. As you compare the verses below with the three things in Ephesians 4:13, you will see the indisputable evidence the three we fulfilled, and that the gifts have passed (since they were only to be active till the three things came into effect).

1. **"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"** (Eph. 3:17-19). From this passage, we see it was possible in the mid-first century to know (with *epignosis*, full knowledge) the Son of God, and people could attain unto the fullness of Christ.

2. **"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power"** Col. 2:9-10). Being complete was a reality in the first century; being complete in Him is a very important grace doctrine for the Age of Grace.

3. **"Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you"** (Phil 3:15). Being mature in mind was possible in Paul's day. This relates to being a perfect man and full knowledge.

4. **"Finally, brethren, farewell, Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace...."** (2 Cor. 13:11). It would have been a very disingenuous for Paul to command the Corinthians to follow this verse, if it were not possible to be complete (perfect) and of one mind, at that time. Certainly, he was not suggesting something that could not be achieved until the Rapture.

5. **"...always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"** (Col. 4:12). The word perfect means full grown, full age, and complete, while the word complete means made full or complete. You can easily see that by the time Colossians was written (64 AD) the believers were able to stand perfect and complete.

6. **"having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself..."** (Eph. 1:5). Adopted, means to placed as full grown adults with all right and privileges of an adult; such an adoption cannot be interpreted as anything other than the Christian being perfect, complete, and an adult.

7. **"that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ..."** (Eph. 4:14-15). These verses explain why the saints in the early church had to be equipped with gifts. The gifts were needed until there was (referring to the previous numbering) 1) unity and knowledge, 2) perfection, and 3) fullness. When those three items were attained, then the believers would no longer be children tossed to and fro. They would then have grown up to a measure of Christ, the Head. The gifts were in part and childish, but the perfect Word of God thoroughly (completely) equipped the saints for the ministry. This was all true in Paul's day, it was something that was attainable, and the saints were told it was a present reality. The whole teaching by Paul to the early Church is designed to let believers know they would not remain children until the Rapture; they would be full grown adults as soon as the Word was completed.

8. **"But we have the mind of Christ"** (1 Cor. 2:16). **"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord"** (2 Cor. 3:18). These two verses make it very clear the believers in Paul's day either had the mind of Christ or were being transformed into His image. They knew Him and possessed the unity of faith produced by the Spirit. These verses relate to the three *till* items (shown above); thus, the believers in the first century could know Him, were already perfect in Him, and had a measure of the stature of Christ.

9. **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped or every good work"** (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Notice that Scripture allowed believers to be complete in Paul's day. While spiritual gifts were *in part and childish*, the more excellent way of the Lord indicates the Word of God was just the opposite, indeed, it *thoroughly equips* the believer for the work of the ministry.

Conclusion: The three things that marked the end of the spiritual gifts in the early Church became a reality in the mid-first century. Accordingly, all of the spiritual gifts passed away since the perfect Word of God was completed, and the Age of Grace was fully revealed. There was no longer a need for the "in part" ministry provided by gifts when the completed Word became available, the more excellent way. In place of gifts, the believer today has the fruit of the Spirit, a more intimate and personal outworking of the Holy Spirit than that provided by spiritual gifts. Offices of pastor, teacher, evangelist, and others exist today; however, those occupying the office are not instantaneously set into the office, as when a person in the early Church was so "gifted." Today, preparation and the fruit of the Spirit can enable a person to fill such offices, this more lengthy process is God's chosen method for today.