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The Fruit of the Spirit

Have you ever asked yourself, “where does human love come from?” I know, me neither; I had never thought to ask myself that question until about a year ago.

For the most part we grow up assuming that we understand basic human experiences like love, joy, peace and patience. None of us have perfect lives but we all experience such blessings in some measure. We also see it all around us. Mothers loving their children, families celebrating in joy, and peace among people that is truly amazing. Having experienced it we think we know what it is and conclude that it is “natural” or comes from our “hearts” or is simply “the way it is.”

We also all experience the opposite as well. Hatred, fear, warfare and other sins are our constant companions. We may ask “why is there so much evil in the world?” What many of us never stop to ask is “why is there so much good in the world?” In the midst of all the sin and evil how is it that we are still capable of rising above our own failures and loving others, finding joy, and making peace?

It is only in the light of Jesus, the Light of the World, that we are at last able to understand where goodness comes from. To know him is to know the source of love, joy, peace and patience in our lives. The Holy Spirit, who unites the Father and the Son, is the source of these experiences (Gal. 5:22.)

Love is the fruit of the Spirit, and there is no other “love tree” in the universe. If I see an apple, I know it came from an apple tree. If I see the fruit of the Spirit I know it came from the Spirit. If I see my Muslim neighbor loving her children it is not because she is naturally loving. It is because she lives and moves and exists in the Son of God (Acts 17:28) and he shares with her his Spirit, the Spirit who is love and who bears the fruit of love in our lives.

Does my Muslim neighbor understand that? Probably not, but then again, neither did I until recently and I’ve called myself a Christian all my life! Religious systems don’t give us the truth, they can at best only reflect the truth. Jesus is the Truth. To the degree that our religious systems reflect him accurately we are closer or farther from the Truth. We can label ourselves with different religions but we are all participants in the life of Christ, (Col. 1:17) whose Spirit is the source of goodness in our world, and whose Truth is the end of religious identity (Eph 2:15.)

The pain we experience from sin can blind us to the truth of who we really are and what the Father is really doing in the world. If we aren’t careful we can miss the work of the Holy Spirit because we are looking for him only in those places we have decided he should be: church, Christians, and flashy miracles, just to name a few.

The gospel is that our sinful human flesh has been cut away in Christ (Eph. 2:13) and now we can see the Truth for what it really is. We can see that love is the fruit of the Spirit and we are all included in the life he shares with the Father and the Son.

~ Jonathan Stepp