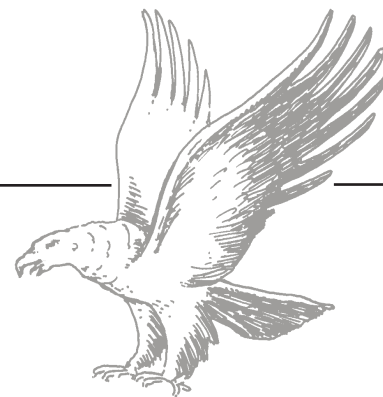


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



January 24, 2016

Plastic Fruit

A bowl of freshly picked fruit can look quite tasty—until we bite into a piece and discover it's only a plastic fake. Our character can be like that, too, if we're not careful.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23).

“Bearing fruit” is a common Biblical metaphor for what we produce in our lives. The quality of the fruit may vary, but the key principle underlying this figure of speech is the connection between *origins* and *outcomes*; that is, the quality of the fruit is determined by the quality of the tree from which it springs. Good trees produce good fruit, and bad trees produce bad fruit (Lk. 6:43-45).

That metaphor takes on an interesting twist with the modern invention of plastic fruit. Some of these imitations are quite realistic and serve as a credible stand-in for the real thing—so long as no one tries to eat them. They look the same on the outside, but are entirely different beneath the surface. One version grows on trees; the other comes from petroleum stock that has gone through an injection mold machine and a spray gun.

This contrast between real and plastic illustrates a danger in our spiritual life. Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit highlights the qualities that God wants us to grow in our lives. When people encounter love, joy, peace, patience, etc., in us, they admire what they see. We know that, and strive to add these qualities to our character.

But if we miss the tree/fruit principle that underlies this passage, we end up creating an artificial imitation. Like the plastic fruit, we concentrate on getting the external appearance just right, but neglect the more important inner qualities that make it the real thing.

Bystanders can tell the difference, too. It doesn't take long for people to recognize that these behaviors are contrived and unnatural—because they *are* contrived and unnatural. When our emphasis is on how we look to others, we will never achieve real spirituality. Our conduct may look like the real thing from a distance, but up close it shows tell-tale signs of being faked. No matter how much effort we put into making it look right, it's still plastic on the inside.

And that's the real problem, isn't it? If we don't change what's on the *inside*, the outward behavior is just a fancy paint job. Take love, for example. Love cannot be measured by dollars donated, or hours spent, or words of encouragement spoken. All those behaviors can be easily played to manipulate public opinion, without ever involving the heart. Genuine love is the product of a heart that is committed to serving others without expectation of payback or reward. Love gives (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 5:25), motivated only by a concern for what is best for another. It shows in tangible ways on the outside, yes; but it starts with a whole lot of work on the inside.

It's the same with all the other qualities. Each grows out of a state of mind that is rare among humans. Like real fruit, it takes a long time to cultivate and grow. But the end result is a godly character that is a tree of life to others.

Am I bearing the fruit of the Spirit in my life? Or am I just churning out a bowlful of worthless plastic imitations? The answer lies deep in my own heart. God and others can tell the difference.

— David King