

BE DILIGENT TO BEAR SPIRITUAL FRUIT

15 I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. 2He removes every branch in me that does not bear fruit. But he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it may bear more fruit. 3You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4Remain in me, and I [will remain] in you. The branch cannot bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine; so neither can you [bear fruit], unless you remain in me. 5I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him, he is the one who bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing. 6If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch, and withers. They gather up [those branches] and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it shall be done for you. 8My Father is glorified by you bearing much fruit—and you will [truly] be my disciples. (Jn. 15:1-8)

Introduction

Suppose you were to take a trip to France. More specifically, suppose you were to visit the Gironde region in southwestern France. That region situated along the Bay of Biscay, is known for its vineyards that produce some of the finest French wines for export around the world.

Now suppose you were to observe the vinedressers as they prepared the land for the planting of the vineyards: First would come the backbreaking work of ridding the land of stones. Then would come the planting of the choicest vines. There would follow the months and even years of careful irrigation and cultivation.

Suppose that you were able to observe all of this painstaking labor as it took place over the months and even the years. Suppose further that you were now to inquire of the owner of the land, “Sir, why are you doing all this work? What do you hope to gain from your labor?”

Astounded by our failure to grasp the obvious, he would answer with one word, “Fruit!”

The vinedresser undertakes the hard work of preparing the land and the painstaking work of cultivating the vines for one reason: to gain a harvest of grapes from which to make some of the world’s finest wines.

Using the illustration of the vineyard, our Lord Jesus in this passage of John 15 informs us that the production of spiritual fruit is an essential part of the Christian life. Because the production of spiritual fruit is essential, we must see to it that we are, indeed, producing such fruit in our lives.

I. Be Diligent to Bear Spiritual Fruit, Because God Expects Such Fruit

In verse one our Lord Jesus Christ compares Himself to the grapevines that flourished in Israel, declaring, *"I AM the True Vine."* What is He saying? What does He mean?

In the Old Testament, the vine is a symbol of Israel; the people whom the LORD "planted" in the Promised Land of Canaan. Consider Psalm 80:8, *"You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it."* The vine is a symbol of Israel, the people whom the LORD expected would "bear fruit." But to the LORD's dismay and disappointment, that "vine" He had planted in the land of Canaan did not bear "good fruit;" on the contrary, it produced "bitter fruit and wild grapes,"

... he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit ... ⁷The vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his choice plant. He looked for justice, but [he found] oppression; he [expected] righteousness, but [he heard the] cries of distress. (Isa. 5:2b, 7)

With this Old Testament background in mind, the Lord Jesus declares, *"I AM the True Vine."* He is the only one who is faithful to God, the only one who bears good and pure fruit for God. Contrast the life of the Lord Jesus with the testimony of Jeremiah 2:21, a passage in which the Lord is addressing Israel: *"I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?"*

Can anyone join with Jesus who describes His life in such terms as the following? *"The one who sent me is with me, he has not forsaken me; because I always do the things that are pleasing to him"* (Jn. 8:29.) Addressing His enemies, Jesus challenges them, *"Which one of you can convict me of sin?"* (Jn. 8:46a.) Jesus asserts that the devil himself can find no point at which Jesus is vulnerable to temptation, and he can find nothing for which he can charge Jesus of being guilty of sin: *"the prince of the world is coming. He finds nothing in me"* (Jn. 14:30.)

In contrast to the Lord Jesus, the basic truth concerning us is summed up in such passages as the following:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way. (Isa. 53:6a)

All of us have become like one that is unclean ... we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away. (Isa. 64:6)

... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)

In contrast to all of us, in contrast to the whole human race, stands this one man, Jesus Christ; this truly righteous man of whom God His Father declared, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17.)

Having identified Himself as *"the True Vine,"* Jesus now identifies all those who bear His name and have a connection with Him as being *"the branches"* (vs. 5.) He emphasizes that the branches attached to the vine are expected to bear fruit—the production of fruit is mentioned six times in these eight verses, being summed up in verse 8, *"My Father is glorified by you bearing much fruit—and you will [truly] be my disciples."*

What is the "fruit" of which Jesus speaks? What is the "fruit" that God, the divine Vinedresser, demands? Philippians 1:11 defines this spiritual fruit as *"the fruit of righteousness"*—that is to say, the living of a truly Christ-like life, the life of righteousness. That passage also indicates that this fruit is produced *"through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."* Galatians 5:22-23 defines this spiritual fruit as *"the fruit of the Holy Spirit"*—that is to say, the righteous and loving character of God in its multi-faceted dimensions being reproduced in the Christian's life by the Holy Spirit: *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* Romans 8:29 speaks of God's design that those whom He has redeemed become *"conformed to the image of his Son"*—in other words, this spiritual fruit is nothing other than our becoming like our Savior who Himself is the True Vine. As the hymn writer, Albert Orsborn, prays in song to the LORD,

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All His wonderful passion and purity.
O Spirit divine,
All my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus
Be seen in me.

According to John 15:16, this spiritual fruit, the fruit of righteousness, may be used by God to produce the fruit of bringing others to Christ: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last."* James Stalker, in *The Four Men*, wrote,

Some years ago, during a widespread revival of religion, a friend of mine, a minister in Edinburgh, was visited by a young engineer belonging to his congregation, who informed him that he had come to a religious decision. My friend asked him how it had come about? Had he been attending the revival meetings? No. Had he been impressed in church? No. Had any companion been talking to him about the subject? No. How was it then? It was the way in which the foreman of the place in which he was employed did his work. He knew the foreman to be a Christian; and he wished to be a Christian of the same type. (*Great Commission Publications*)

This, indeed, is the “fruit” that God, the divine Vinedresser, requires: *“He removes every branch in me that does not bear fruit. But he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it may bear more fruit”* (vs. 2.) Note that in verse 2a Jesus speaks of some branches that are *“in me,”* but which do not bear fruit. In the case of such people there is only a formal connection to Christ; perhaps by means of baptism, church membership, or even the intellectual understanding and acceptance of the doctrines about Christ. But there is no living, spiritual connection to Christ. There has been no entrance into the life of Christ, there is no experience of having the life of Christ in them; there has been no surrender of the life to Christ and no reception of Christ into their life. In this context we must soberly take to heart the words of John 15:2a, *“He removes every branch in me that does not bear fruit.”* The reason for this is expressed in Jeremiah 5:10b, *“Strip off her branches, for these people do not belong to Jehovah.”* These words were spoken of that large part of Old Testament Israel that professed to know the LORD but in whose lives no spiritual fruit was to be found.

It is essential that we produce spiritual fruit, because God expects and requires such fruit.

II. Be Diligent to Bear Spiritual Fruit, By Yielding Yourself to the “Pruning” Work of God

Jesus declares, *“every branch that bears fruit”* is pruned by the Father, *“so that it may bear more fruit”* (vs. 2.) God the Father, as the divine Vinedresser, carries out this work of pruning by means of a variety of measures involving various forms of trial and affliction. Divinely appointed affliction can serve the purpose of “straightening” a wayward branch: *“Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I keep your word”* (Psl. 119:67.) Divinely appointed affliction can serve the purpose of increasing the production of spiritual fruit: *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, so that I may learn your statutes”* (Psl. 119:71.) Divinely appointed affliction is an evidence of God’s faithful and loving care for those living “branches” that belong to His Son, Jesus Christ: *“I know, O Jehovah, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me”* (Psl. 119:75.)

In verse 3 Jesus speaks to His disciples—and to each of His fruit-bearing “branches”—a word of assurance: *“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”* The same Greek word (καθαίρω) is used in both verse two (where it is rendered, “to prune”) and in verse three (where it is rendered with its usual meaning, “to wash,” “to be or make clean.”) In verse 3 our Lord Jesus is assuring us that the Father’s work of “pruning”—a work that involves the use of affliction and trial—is not some kind of probationary testing, which, if successfully passed, grants one admission into the Vine. The heavenly Father, as the divine Vinedresser, does not select “tender young seedlings” that appear to have spiritual potential, subject them to a period of probationary testing, and if they pass the test, He grafts them into the Vine, accepting them as a living part of

the Vine. On the contrary, the heavenly Father, as the divine Vinedresser, “prunes” fruit-bearing “branches” precisely because they **are** in living union with His Son, Jesus Christ the True Vine. Consider Hebrews 12:5-11,

... you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: My son, do not make light of the LORD's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he scourges everyone he receives as a son. ⁷Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. What son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5-11)

It is important to understand that this “pruning,” which is another way of speaking about disciplining; or, training by means of discipline, is something the heavenly Father administers to those who are fruit-bearing “branches” attached to Christ, the True Vine, in a living relationship. It is for the purpose of causing such “branches” to bear more fruit—that is to say, causing His children to become more like His own Son, Jesus Christ our Savior, which is one of the ultimate goals of salvation.

It is essential that we bear fruit; therefore, we may expect that God, as our heavenly Father and the divine Vinedresser, will “prune” us in order to increase our fruit-bearing capacity.

III. Be Diligent to Bear Spiritual Fruit, By Abiding in Christ

In verse 4 our Lord Jesus Christ instructs us as Christians to continue in a living relationship with Him: *“Remain in me, and I [will remain] in you. The branch cannot bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine; so neither can you [bear fruit], unless you remain in me.”* We cultivate our relationship with Christ through the study and practice of His Word; compare John 15:4, with John 15:7, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it shall be done for you.”* The hymn writer, W.D. Longstaff, exhorts us, “Take time to be holy, speak often with your Lord; Remain in Him always, and feed on His Word.”

Our Lord informs us that our continuing relationship with Him is the true and only source of fruitfulness:

The branch cannot bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine; so neither can you [bear fruit], unless you remain in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches.

The one who remains in me and I in him, he is the one who bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:4b-5)

Many Christians make the same mistake as did the Galatians: they realize that they are saved by faith, but they mistakenly assume that they must live out and cultivate the Christian life by their own efforts and power. But consider the Apostle Paul's question posed to such people: *"Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"* (Gal. 3:3.) Just as Paul sought to point the Galatians to the Holy Spirit as the Source for living the Christian life, so our Lord Jesus emphatically reminds us that He is the Vine and we are the branches—He is the Source of our spiritual life and nourishment and fruitfulness. We would do well to learn from the testimony of a Christian lady who declares, "I came to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, not only as my Savior from the penalty of sin, but also as my Savior from the power of sin in my life" (*POWER*, 2/3/91, p. 5.)

In verse 6 our Lord emphasizes the absolute necessity of our maintaining this communion, this relationship, with Him: *"If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch, and withers. They gather up [those branches] and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."* If we do not maintain a healthy relationship with Christ we will eventually drift away from Him. If one drifts away from Christ the result will be spiritual dryness, barrenness, deadness, finally to be consigned with the rest of the world to the judgment of God. In contrast to that course, let us follow the one prescribed for us by the Apostle Peter: *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet. 3:18.)

It is essential that we bear spiritual fruit, and we can only do so by remaining in fellowship and communion with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

It is essential that we bear spiritual fruit. It is essential that the life and character of our Lord Jesus Christ be increasingly reproduced in our lives. It is essential that we increasingly become more and more transformed into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ, the True Vine, the one truly righteous man, the man with whom God is well pleased. It is essential that we bear spiritual fruit, for such is a vital means by which we bring glory to God: *"My Father is glorified by you bearing much fruit"* (Jn. 15:8a.)