

Bearing Fruit In Jesus

One of the most intriguing parts of Holy Scripture is the fifteenth chapter of the Book of John, where Jesus discusses the relationship between the Father, Jesus, and those who believe in Him. He uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to illustrate this relationship. Beginning in verse 1, He says, "I am the vine and my Father is the vinedresser." In verse 5, He says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." In verse 8 He says, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

The Fruit We Bear In Jesus

What fruit is Jesus discussing here? Using His comparison, we know the fruit of a vine is grapes, and depending on their usage, the grapes desired are the tasty, juicy grapes good for eating, or in the case of vintners, good for making wine. Each grape strain has its own characteristics, depending on the end result desired.

Actually, this was not a totally new simile that Jesus used, for the prophet Isaiah had spoken under inspiration in a parallel vein in Isaiah chapter 5. In verse 7 he says, "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress." Here we see a clear parallel to what John records, for in verse 4, Isaiah is quoting Yahweh, or the LORD, "What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?"

This same way of illustrating the relationship between

the LORD and His people is used other times in the Old Testament, but this reference in Isaiah is sufficient to establish the precedent of these terms. We noticed that Isaiah describes the fruit that Yahweh was seeking as righteousness and justice.

In the New Testament, this fruit of the vine is described in far more detail in Galatians 5:19-23. First the Apostle Paul describes the bad fruit, the works of the flesh: "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God."

So, we see the nature of the bad fruit, that which displeases God. Now in verse 22 and 23, Paul tells us what kind of fruit will make God happy: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; Against such things there is no law." These are the fruit that the Father wants to see us bearing. This brings Him glory.

Producing The Fruit Of The Spirit

Now the question arises, how do we produce these fruit of the Spirit? Do we grit our teeth, shore up our resolve, make resolutions and tell ourselves, "Bear fruit?" Can you get apples from an apple tree by going up to it and ordering it to grow apples? Can you walk up to a vine and tell it to grow grapes and expect it to happen?

No, we know that the vine will grow grapes if it is

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planted in good soil, it gets sufficient water and sunlight, and is protected from pests and blight. If the roots of the vine can extract nutrients from the good soil, and the branches of the vine are intact, the vine will produce grapes. The same for the apple tree: Deep roots in good soil, with an adequate supply of water will produce good apples.

Now, let's go back to John 15 and take a closer look at what Jesus is saying here. Beginning in verse 2, Jesus says, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

So, just as the branches of the grapevine cannot produce fruit unless they are an integral part of the vine, so we must have a healthy, bound relationship with Jesus if we are to bear the fruit He wants manifest in our lives. Just as the protoplasm of the living vine must circulate in the branches of the vine, so the very life and Spirit of Jesus must dwell and flow in us to make us into His image, reflecting His nature and will. As Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." There is no real, true godly nature which we can produce in ourselves if we are not one with Jesus and the Father by the Holy Spirit.

Please note: This is not just an illustration, this is reality. When we are one with Jesus and the Father in a new, born-again relationship, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in us and His presence flows in us so as to produce godly fruit.

At this point, I would like to share something I recently read in a publication entitled, "The NIV Reconsidered" by Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges. The authors were discussing verse 2, where it says, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away..." Here, the NIV (New International Version) uses the term, "cuts off" instead of "takes away." The word here translated, "takes away," is the Greek word *airo*, and in its most basic meaning it means to "I lift up, take up or pick up." It carries with it the concept of something being separated from where it had been located. This same word is used when Jesus tells the paralytic, "Pick up your mat and walk," at Matthew 9:16.

A Lesson From The Vineyard

The above mentioned book describes something I had never heard of before. "In Israel, in contrast to the United States, the stalks of grape vines for the most part are down on the ground during the non-productive season -- not bearing fruit. But when the time comes for fruit, the vinedressers begin to lift them off the ground....They get a rock (about eight to ten inches high), pick up the stalk and put the rock under the top end of the stalk. Then they go to the next one and do the same thing.

"Several days later they come back and move the rock back a little further toward the root and do the same to every stalk in the vineyard. Several days later they will repeat the process until they get that stalk positioned properly for fruit-bearing. In the process, the branches have been 'taken away' or 'lifted' from the ground. By doing this they control the exposure of the grapes to the sun. The further they lift the branches, the more exposure to sunlight the fruit gets.

"Furthermore, if they leave the stalk on the ground,

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the branches will shoot tiny roots directly down from the branch into the top surface of the earth where there is very little moisture. They will produce grapes -- little hard, sour grapes. But if they lift that stalk off the ground, those branches will get their sustenance from the stalk whose deep roots go into the rich moisture of the earth, and then they will produce the succulent fruit for which Israel is known."

This draws a whole new picture of God the Father and His dealings with us, the branches in the vine. The mere fact that we are not bearing the fruit He wants in our lives does not mean He cuts us off and discards us, but since we are "in the vine" He lifts us from those places, those situations, those frames of reference which are preventing good fruit, into a position where we can catch the "Sonlight" and get our nourishment from the true Vine, Jesus.

We Need To Be Lifted.

Some of us are down in the dirt. We have friends, associates, work environments, habits that keep us down, not drawing our nurture from Jesus, but from the base things in life. As a result, even though we may profess Jesus and know Him a little, our lives are not sweet to those around us, and certainly not to God. We are producing sour grapes, a bitter experience that pleases no one who matters. Our parents, our children, good friends are hurting because our lives are not based on the "whole counsel of God," but on the emptiness of a worldly mind set.

Instead of dwelling in prayer, communion with God, we spend our time watching TV; listening to music that depicts a perverse lifestyle; seeing movies that glorify sex, violence and drunkenness; visiting with people who never want to hear about the goodness of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead of

seeking God by studying His Word, The Bible, and asking for the Holy Spirit to open it to us, we pick up the newspaper, or a steamy novel and let it take us into a realm that pushes out the knowledge of God while building more on an empty, worldly consciousness.

God Is Going To Lift Us.

According to the verse we are developing, "Every branch in me not bearing fruit, he lifts it up, and every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." When we give our lives over to Jesus, confessing our sins and asking God to come into our hearts and begin to mold us into the image of Christ, God goes into action. Even before that occurs, God works in our lives as we have described. He reaches down, and begins to lift us away from those things in life which are keeping us from knowing Him in His Son.

Seemingly inexplicable things occur when God begins to work in our lives. Usually this is because someone has been praying for us, that we would come to know Jesus. Whatever the cause, whether the prayers of a loving parent, or just God's knowing that changing circumstances will drive us to Him, He starts changing things. We lose the job we were counting on. A drinking buddy gets busted for DUI and is no longer available. A pot-smoking acquaintance moves away or is taken away and is no longer there to help us get high. Or maybe we are the ones who are taken away into a prison cell. It's all part of God's moving in our lives.

In our new situation, becoming more acutely aware of our need, we turn to Jesus and His Word, and seek help finally from the only real source of help. Separated from our unhealthy environment, we

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begin to pray, to ask God for help, to read and study His Word. We sense His presence and His love, and are comforted in the security He implants in us as sons and daughters of God.

Remaining In Him.

The experience of being reborn into a new life in Christ is a glorious one, and often quite emotional. When we take Jesus as our Savior and Lord, there is a real "season of refreshing" as Peter called it. The coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts and begin leading us into greater truth is truly reassuring. We feel secure in His love and His promises. But if we are to bear fruit, we must go deeper. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

The word here translated "abide" is the Greek word *menos*, "I remain." Its usage here means to stay, to remain, to dwell, to lodge. In other words, we aren't going anywhere else. If the branch is broken off and does not stay as part of the unity of the vine, what happens to it? Jesus says in verse 6, "If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned."

We must maintain our oneness with Christ to bear fruit and to keep a vital relationship with God through Jesus. While it is true that Christians sometimes stray from the right path and weaken in their faith, even fail to serve God for years and then finally come back to God and are restored, this is playing with fire. We need to feed ourselves on Jesus by remaining in Him. How can we do that?

We first need to recognize our total dependence on

Christ and seek Him to keep us strong. We need to ask Him to develop in us habits which will assure us of a constant diet of the truth. We need to cry out to Him to fill us with the Holy Spirit and power, so we can live for Him and reach out to others in love. We need to feast on the Word of God, asking the Holy Spirit to shine the light of truth on that Word. We need to spend time in prayer, just basking in the presence of God and letting Him love us in holy association with Him. We need to meditate on His Word and try to understand how it applies to our lives.

Another vital part of remaining in Him is keeping fellowship with the Body of Christ, the family of believers. If we believe that we are branches in the vine, surely we know that the branches are hanging out together. As it was written to the Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 25, "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Some try to minimize the importance of meeting with other Christians, thinking "God is everywhere, and I can worship anywhere." Well, that is true, but if that means that one isolates oneself from the Body of Christ and intends to just "go it alone," then this is simply rebellion against God's will and deprives one of the full blessing God wants to bestow on His children. Yes, "He makes it rain on the righteous and the unrighteous," but refusing to fellowship with other Christians puts you in the category of the unrighteous, for such fellowship is His express will for you.

Putting Off And Putting On

Part and parcel with this reality of remaining in the vine and bearing fruit is the matter of identifying negative and positive character traits, repenting of

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and deserting the former, accepting and pursuing the latter. Here is where consistently spending time in God's Word and asking the Holy Spirit to make you alert to His will is so important. The reason it is so important is given in Isaiah 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" Our thoughts run in the way of human logic, led by our own ego-serving lusts. We need His Word to keep us on a true path.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, whom he had introduced earlier to the person of Jesus Christ, mentioning the society they were living in and the fact that they had "given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." (Ephesians 4:19) He continues on in verses 20-24, to say, "You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to *put off* your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be *made new* in the attitude [or, spirit] of your minds; and to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Paul again strikes up the same theme in Colossians 3:8-12. "But now you must *rid yourselves* of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have *taken off* your old self with its practices and have *put on* the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, *clothe yourselves* with compassion,

kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

As branches we can bear rich, pleasing fruit to the Father, as we remain in Jesus, the Vine, . We do that by keeping our relationship with Christ healthy and vibrant through prayer, time in the Word, seeking the power of the Holy Spirit, meditating on the truth he shows us, confession of sin and repentance, and maintaining fellowship with our Christian brothers and sisters.

So that we may be lifted up and bear fruit, God will move in our lives to separate us from people and places that hold us down. We must be sensitive to Him and cooperative by accepting the necessity for that and establishing new relationships that bolster our faith, not weaken it. The reward? One day to hear the Savior say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master."

We invite your response to this message. If you have prayed to receive Christ, please let us know, and seek out a church where *Jesus* is the focus of attention. If you feel led to contribute to this effort, send correspondence to:

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