

143. The Gospel of John—15:1, 4-5

“The Vine and the Branches” Part 4

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In our verse-by-verse study of John’s gospel we have entered into Chapter 15 where we have ‘camped’ on the first 8 verses to do a series we are calling “*The Vine and the Branches*.”

John 15:1, 4-5 (NKJV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Here in John 15, we have one of the classic passages in the N.T. on the purpose and importance of fruit-bearing in the Christian life.

In this section Jesus uses one of His many illustrations taken from something they knew very well—agriculture. In particular—the cultivation and care of grape vines to communicate one of the most important lessons He ever taught on the *essential* relationship between Himself and His disciples.

Since the whole goal of agriculture is to bear fruit, something the disciples understood only too well—He uses this illustration to drive home the importance of bearing fruit in our relationship with Him.

Fruit-bearing is such an important part of the Christian life—that Jesus goes as far as to say that the only way we even know that we are one of His disciples (saved) is that we bear fruit.

When we as Christians think of spiritual fruit—we reflexively turn to Galatians 5:22-23:

Galatians 5:22-23 (NKJV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control...

Let me ask all of you a question—where is ‘*humility*’ in this list? Why isn’t humility listed among the fruits of the Holy Spirit? I mean, I can make a very persuasive argument that humility is at least as important as any of the fruits of the Spirit that Paul listed in Galatians 5:22-23—and probably more so—so where is it?

When Jesus walked on the earth, He bore all of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in His life—and yet, humility came *before* His incarnation upon the earth:

Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT2)

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

The humility of Jesus Christ predated His incarnation *and* the fruit of the Spirit that He manifested in His life while He walked on the earth. ***So again, why didn't Paul list it in Galatians 5:22-23?***

Before we answer that question—let me define for you what true humility is.

True humility isn't going around putting yourself down.

I say that because a lot of Christians think that being humble means that you go around putting yourself down all the time—*"I'm nothing, I'm nobody, I'm a worthless worm..."* Sometimes this is nothing more than pride *masquerading* as humility!

Jesus said, "*Learn from Me for I am meek and lowly in heart...*"

Jesus was the epitome of humility—but He certainly wasn't a worthless worm! He certainly didn't go around putting Himself down to everyone He came in contact with!

- Humility isn't self-loathing—it's not beating yourself up all the time.
- Humility isn't the same as low self-esteem.

Genuine humility doesn't focus on self at all—it doesn't put self down, and it doesn't lift self up—true humility simply ignores self *all-together* while it focuses on others.

- Humility has both a *vertical* and a *horizontal* dimension to it.

1. Vertical humility—our relationship to God

Vertical humility is simply the quality that understands—*"I am nothing and I can do nothing apart from God."* (John 15:5)

This causes me to depend on Him for everything—and my motto becomes, *"When I am weak, then I am strong!"*

This is a truth that takes humility to accept—without it, pride takes root and we become *'self-reliant'* and not *'God-dependent!'* The result is, God will put us on a shelf, and no longer use us in the work of building His Kingdom upon the earth.

2. Horizontal humility—our relationship to others

Horizontal humility simply says to those we come in contact with and minister to—*"You're more important to me than I am."*

That is exactly what Paul the apostle commanded believers in Philippians 2:3—*"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."*

At this point, some of you might be thinking—*"Pastor, where are you going with this? I thought the point of this series (Vine and Branches) was to teach us to bear fruit which is what the Father desires from our lives as His children—so why are you taking all this time to teach us about humility?"*

Well, the teaching of humility isn't a *separate* point, or even a *side* point in the discussion of fruit-bearing in the Christian life—it is the main point!

So then, why didn't Paul list humility in his list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23?

The answer to that is because—humility isn't a fruit—it is the 'soil' from which every other spiritual fruit grows in the garden of our hearts. In Galatians 5:22, when Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit, leading the list was *agape* love—the love of God.

Earlier in the evening (in the upper room celebrating the Passover in John 13)—Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment:

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Let me stop and say that the new commandment of the new covenant that Jesus gave to His disciples wasn't simply to *love* people—there was nothing *new* about that.

The Old Testament is full of commandments and exhortations to love others—Leviticus 19:18, "...*you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

The word "**new**" does not mean "*new in time,*" since God had commanded His people to love others in the Old Testament before Jesus came on the scene—this Greek word means "*new in experience— fresh.*"

In the Old Testament God had commanded His people to love others—"*as they loved themselves.*"

What makes *this* command new is that Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other—"**as I have loved you**" He told them.

How did Jesus love them? How did Jesus love us?—by going to the cross and dying for us!

That's how He wants us to love one another—by going to the cross and dying (not literally but figuratively) for one another—that's what's *new* about His command to love under the New Covenant!

Yes, the Old Testament is filled with commandments and exhortations to love—but Jesus here makes everything new when He says, "**Love one another as I have loved you**" or in other words—"*love others more than or above yourselves!*" (Phil.2:3)

That's how unbelievers will know we are children of God—

John 13:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love [agape love—God's love] for one another."

Loving people as you love yourself (Old Testament or Old Covenant love) implies placing them on an *equal* footing with yourself. But loving them as Jesus loved us means—to place them *above* yourself by dying to *your* needs and making *their* needs supreme.

This is the greatest kind of love—the love of God (sacrificial love) manifested in the lives of His people—

John 15:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

This is the main fruit of the vine and branches discourse that God wants to produce in our lives—agape love—God's love! But listen—God's love is a totally unselfish "others centered" love that will only grow and flourish in our hearts—when true humility is present.

As we just said, humility is both *vertical* (God) and *horizontal* (fellowman)—and you can't have one without the other—they *intersect* and are *interdependent*.

Andrew Murray in his book, "*Humility: The Journey toward Holiness*" says—

"It is a solemn thought that our love for God is measured by our everyday relationships with others. Except as its validity is proven in standing the test of daily life with our fellowmen, our love for God may be found to be a delusion.

It is easy to think that we humble ourselves before God, but our humility toward others is the only sufficient proof that our humility before God is real. To be genuine, humility must abide in us and become our very nature. True humility is to be made of no reputation--as did Christ.

In God's presence, humility is not a posture we assume for a time when we think of Him or pray to Him--but the very spirit of our life. It will manifest itself in all our bearing toward others. A lesson of deepest importance is that the only humility that is really ours is not the kind we try to show before God in prayer, but the kind we carry with us, and carry out, in our ordinary conduct.

The seemingly insignificant acts of daily life are the tests of eternity, because they prove what spirit possesses us. It is in our most unguarded moments that we truly show who we are and what we are made of. To know a truly humble person, you must follow that one in the common course of daily life.

This is what Jesus taught. He gave them an example when He washed their feet. He taught His lessons of humility by demonstration. Humility before God is nothing if it is not proven in humility before others."

It is sad that so much of the energy and work of the church is sapped away by having to deal with hurt feelings, resentments, murmurings, and retaliations among the people of God.

A lack of humility is the cause of all of the problems in the Body of Christ—because all the problems in the Church today can be traced back to a lack of spiritual fruit (mostly the fruit of love) being born in the lives of God's people—and why is that?

It's because of PRIDE!

Whereas *humility* is the good soil that allows the fruit of the Spirit to grow in our lives—*pride* is the thorny soil that chokes out and kills the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Instead of serving one another and esteeming others better than ourselves, the Church is caught up in the pursuit of self-esteem and has embraced the misguided teaching, "*I first have to learn to love myself before I can love anyone else.*" (see last week's message).

But self-love is never realized because self is never satisfied.

And if Satan can get us to spend all our time trying to learn to love ourselves more, we won't have any time (or desire) left to love anyone else—especially God!!

Jesus taught an important lesson on this very truth and that is—the more we love and think highly of ourselves, the less we will love and appreciate God for all He has done for us—which means that humility was at the heart of the lesson He gave to us.

Luke 7:36-47 (NKJV)

³⁶ Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. ³⁷ And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸ and stood at His feet behind *Him* weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw *this*, he spoke to himself, saying, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman *this is* who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." ⁴¹ "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the *one* whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." ⁴⁴ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. ⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. ⁴⁷ Therefore I say to you, her sins, *which are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little."

Of course, the underlying principle that was at the heart of this story is simply this—the more conscious we are of our unworthiness the more we will love Him for His grace and forgiveness He has bestowed on unworthy sinners such as we.

Our love and appreciation for God is directly proportionate to how little or how much we love ourselves.

This is why self-esteem teaching is so demonic and damaging to our relationship with God. (Elaborate)

Look, if this subject isn't interesting you, if it isn't resonating with your heart or seemingly relevant to your Christian life—may I challenge you to ask yourself—"Why?"

Let me answer that for you—humility is a quality the flesh looks down upon and hates because it is God honoring and others centered—and in that regard it's only valued by Spirit-filled people...(Finish)

Getting back to John 15 and our "**The Vine and the Branches**" series.

So far in this series the outline we've been working through has been:

I. The True Vine-Jesus Christ—verse 1a

II. The Vinedresser-the Father—verses 1b-3

A. The Work of the Vinedresser—verse 2

1. Cut off the branches that weren't bearing fruit—verse 2a
2. Prune the branches that were bearing fruit—verse 2b

B. The Tool of the Vinedresser—verse 2b

1. The pruning knife
2. The handle of the knife

That then brings us to the next sub-point under “The Vinedresser—the Father”:

C. The Goal of the Vinedresser—verses 2, 8, 16

As we have said repeatedly in this series—the whole goal of agriculture is to bring forth fruit—or else what’s the point of all the hard work?

Likewise, the whole goal of our Christian life is that we bear fruit.

John 15:5 (NKJV)

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

It’s interesting that “*vine wood*” is not good for anything—except for growing grapes.

I mean, it doesn’t burn well so it’s useless to use as firewood and it’s no good for making into furniture—so the one and only thing it is good for is bearing fruit!

Warren Wiersbe, “The 5 Secrets of Living” —

“*What and who am I?*” “*Why am I here?*” You must answer these questions correctly if life is to have meaning for you. The man who calls a wrench a screwdriver, and who tries to use it as a screwdriver, is heading for frustration and failure. The person who does not know *who* and *what* he is will experience the same kind of frustration and failure. It is this identity crisis that has threatened and even destroyed many people in society today.

The Christian need not have an identity crisis. Jesus tells us who we are and why we are here. We are branches, and He is the Vine. We are here to bear fruit. Once you accept this simple fact, you are on the way to making your life meaningful and useful.”

1. The Nature of Spiritual Fruit

a. What Christian fruit is not

With all the emphasis and importance that Jesus places on Christians bearing fruit—it makes sense to know what kind of fruit we are supposed to bear (and yes, God’s love leads the list).

First, let’s take a quick look at what Christian fruit is *not*—people shouldn’t get artificial fruit confused with the real thing.

1) **Success**

Nowhere in the Bible is Christian fruit synonymous with success.

We all have the tendency to think if a church is big or if a lot of people are coming to it that means it is bearing spiritual fruit— not necessarily.

A large, “*successful*” church or ministry could be the result of slick marketing and a lot of human effort—but not be bearing spiritual fruit at all (church of Laodicea).

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NKJV)

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Conversely, a pastor that has worked for 20 or 30 years faithfully teaching a small fellowship the Word of God, seeing the few people grow could be bearing real spiritual fruit, despite the outward lack of “success” (the church of Smyrna)

2) Emotionalism

Many Christians also tend to think that a high energy, emotionally charged service is proof that a ministry or a preacher is bearing fruit.

But it’s as the old saying goes, “*It’s not how high you jump but how straight you walk when you land that’s important.*” (Explain)

3) Artificial (phony)

Everyone who goes to church wants to look like a Spirit-filled Christian. All church goers who are not bearing *real* spiritual fruit know how to ‘tie on’ *artificial, plastic* fruit.

This is what is called ‘*hypocrisy.*’ Real spiritual fruit is genuine and lasts—

John 15:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain...

When Christians try to simulate, or imitate, somebody else’s fruit, they are tying on plastic fruit to themselves—it may look good from a distance, but it can’t provide spiritual nutrition to those hungry to know God.

b. What Christian Fruit is:

First of all, real spiritual fruit takes time and cultivation—a good crop does not come overnight. Again, we must also remember that the branches do not eat the fruit—others do.

We are not producing fruit to please ourselves or to feed ourselves—but to serve others. We should be the kind of people who “**feed**” others by our words and our works—

Proverbs 10:21 (NKJV)

²¹ The lips of the righteous feed many...

Next time, we’ll look at how God’s Word defines spiritual fruit. Since God desires our lives to produce fruit—how exactly does He define it?

What exactly are the things that God Himself calls the spiritual fruit He is looking for in His children’s lives?