

144. The Gospel of John—15:1-8

“The Vine and the Branches” Part 5

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As we have been pointing out, John’s Gospel, Chapters 13 through 16 constitute Jesus’ final words to His closest men before His crucifixion—His farewell address if you will.

The evening began in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem where Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the Feast of Passover together. Before the meal began, Jesus washed His disciples’ feet giving them an example of servanthood rooted in sacrificial love that He hoped they would imitate.

It was after that, that He gave them a new commandment to obey as those who would be soon taking up the ministry after His departure back to His Father—

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.”

That became the main theme of His final discourse before the cross—a theme He then elaborated on as we enter into Chapter 15 and the discourse we are calling—*“The Vine and Branches”* discourse.

As the Lord Jesus teaches this extremely important discourse on the subject of bearing fruit in the Christian life—remember, the main fruit He has in mind is agape love.

At this point, Jesus and His disciples have left the upper room (end of Chapter 14) and making their way through the streets of Jerusalem and the Temple precinct—they come to the two large bronze doors that led out of the city. These doors were made of bronze but in the light of the sun they looked like shimmering gold—which is why together they were called—the *“Golden Gate.”*

This gate was the one they needed to exit the city to get to the **Mount of Olives** and in particular to a certain garden located on that mount—the **Garden of Gethsemane** where Jesus would spend the remainder of the evening in prayer before being arrested.

As they come to the **Golden Gate (a.k.a. the ‘Eastern Gate’)**—Jesus stops and in the light of the full moon He draws their attention to the grape vines that were carved into these two bronze doors.

I believe it was then that Jesus launched into the teaching we call—the **vine and branches discourse**.

John 15:1-8 (NKJV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Last time in our study we started looking at—

1. **The Nature of Spiritual Fruit**

a. **What spiritual 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.

However, before looking at the *kind* of spiritual fruit the Father wants us to bear (as defined in the Word of God)—we took 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 the size of a church or ministry—or how prosperous it is. In our study in the Book of Revelation Chapters 2 & 3 we saw how Jesus commended a small, poor and persecuted church called Smyrna—while rebuking a large and prosperous church called Laodicea.

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.

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 as we pointed out last time—**emotionalism and raw energy isn't a fruit of the Spirit—it is often a work of the flesh.**

3) **Artificial (phony)**

Everyone who goes to church wants to look like a spiritual Christian. So, those church goers who are not bearing *real* spiritual fruit become very good at putting on a spiritual façade.

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

(Think of the Pharisees who put on a façade and looked spiritual and holy, but Jesus likened them to 'whitewashed' tombs...)

REFLECTION: Think of some examples of what spiritual fruit is not:

b. **What Spiritual Fruit is:**

First of all, real spiritual fruit takes time and cultivation (spiritual disciplines and devotions)—a good crop does not come overnight.

We must also remember—
that the branches do not bear fruit for their own benefit—
but for the benefit of others.

>>> We are not producing fruit to please or to feed ourselves but to serve others.

Since God desires our lives as Christians to produce fruit—it becomes vitally important that we know how God Himself defines the spiritual fruit He is looking for in His children’s lives.

1) **Christ-Like Character**

The fruit of the Holy Spirit listed in Galatians 5—are really the attributes of God:

Galatians 5:22-23 (NKJV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

“Against Such There Is No Law” (verse 23)

In other words, you can’t pass a law ordering people to have divine ‘love’ or ‘joy’ or ‘peace’—or any other fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The law of Moses couldn’t mandate that people have these attributes—because they are only found in God Himself.

They are a part of His divine nature—**and the only way for us to have His attributes in our lives is to be born of God (born-again)** at which time God moves in and we are made partakers of His divine nature (2Peter 1:4).

You see, fruit is life—yes, it sustains life (nourishment), but it also contains seeds that have life within them—which means that **when these seeds are planted, they produce more fruit (more life).**

You need life to produce life.

Man can't produce fruit in the energy of his flesh—that's why Paul calls it the **"fruit of the Spirit!"** in Galatians 5:22-23. In contrast to the 'fruit of the Spirit', right before that in Galatians 5 he listed the **"works of the flesh"** (fallen nature)—

Galatians 5:19-21 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

These are the corrupt and wicked things our fallen sinful nature produces in our lives—again, referred to as the works of the flesh. The fruits of the Spirit are the attributes of God or more specifically we could say they are the character traits of Jesus Christ.

>>> They will only be produced in our lives when Jesus lives inside of us through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This is the whole point of the 'vine and branches' discourse—to contrast the 'true' with the 'false'—the 'Judas branches' with 'Jesus branches.' As born-again Christians, God desires to reproduce the life of Christ in us as we abide in the Vine (Jesus).

Once again, **the way to fruitfulness in the Christian life is through the Holy Spirit living within us.** One of the most frustrating endeavors in the world is to try to bear the fruit of the Spirit through our own strength and raw determination!

Jesus taught us in this passage that spiritual fruit will be born 'naturally' when a person is truly connected to Him through the new birth.

>>> So, **Christ-like character** is the first fruit that the Father wants to produce in our lives as His children.

REFLECTION: What must we "do" to gain and develop "Christ-Like character?"

2) Personal Holiness

Romans 6:22 (NKJV)

²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

Holiness comes from a Greek word that means to be "set a part"—and is often translated 'sanctify' or 'sanctification' in the New Testament. In a practical sense it simply means moving away from the world and drawing closer and closer to God.

2 Corinthians 7:1 (NKJV)

¹ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Holiness is another attribute of God—possibly the *defining* attribute of His nature.

I say that because as we see a vision of heaven through the apostle John’s eyes in Revelation 4, we see (read) how around the throne of God are the 4 living creatures called seraphim and how—“...*they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"* (verse 8)

**The angels don’t say, “Love, love, love” or “Mercy, mercy, mercy”
they say, “Holy, holy holy...”**

So, holiness is another attribute of God—in other words, it is only found in His nature.

What that means for us is that **we can’t manufacture holiness**, it isn’t something we can replicate through the work of our flesh—the Pharisees tried to do it and Jesus called them ‘*hypocrites.*’ **Holiness is a spiritual fruit that grows in and through our lives once we are connected to Jesus in salvation and then every day thereafter as we abide in Him (the Vine).**

That’s why we read in Hebrews 12:14—

Hebrews 12:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

Since true holiness can only come to our lives when the Holy Spirit lives inside of us (**born-again**)—you might say it is the Christian’s “passport” that gets us into heaven (way better than a COVID passport that gets a person into a bar or concert)!

REFLECTION: Why can’t we manufacture holiness?

3) Christian Giving

Romans 15:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.

Paul was referring to an offering he gathered from the Gentile churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

1 John 3:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? [The main fruit of the Spirit—as manifested in giving—John 3:16]

REFLECTION: Think of some examples of Christian Giving:

4) Christian Service

Colossians 1:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

We have been saved to serve—

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We are not saved by good works—but we are saved for good works.

This then becomes one of the spiritual fruits that demonstrates we are connected to Christ—that we now desire to serve the Lord (it is our joy, not our job)! Can this ‘fruit’ be *counterfeited*? Yes, of course.

There are many men and women who are hucksters and con-artists who are in ministry—some even calling themselves “apostles”.

Paul called them out in 2 Corinthians 11 when he said:

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NLT2)

¹³ These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve.

Ministry is a call not a career—it is a fruit of our relationship with Jesus (the Vine)!

REFLECTION: What makes Christian service different from any other service?

5) **Praise And Thanksgiving To God**

Hebrews 13:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.

The Old Testament worshiper brought the fruit of his *land* to offer to God as worship—the New Testament worshiper offers the fruit of his/her *lips* to God as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Let’s be honest, how many of you went around singing praise songs to God *before* you got saved?

(We all thought those “Jesus freaks” were weird for doing those kinds of things)

The praise you offer God now is one of the fruits that flows from your heart now that the Holy Spirit lives within you. The psalmist expressed this beautifully and simply when he said, “*My heart is overflowing with praise!*” (Psalm 45:1)

REFLECTION: How can we praise God?

6) **Winning Others To Christ**

Romans 1:13 (NKJV)

¹³ Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

John 4:35-36 (NKJV)

³⁵ Do you not say, 'There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! ³⁶ And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

Again, how many of you here had a heart to evangelize before you got saved?—None of us!

We didn't, because a concern for the lost and a desire to reach them with the Gospel is a fruit of you being connected to Jesus—Jesus, the One who said—*"for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10)

A burden for the lost is a fruit of God's heart having been 'transplanted' in you when you were saved and being manifested in your life now that you're connected to Christ through the new birth.

REFLECTION: How have you won others to Christ?

In closing and with regard to all these 'fruits' we have talked about—

Warren Wiersbe—

"Many of these things could be counterfeited by the flesh, but the deception would eventually be detected, for real spiritual fruit has in it the seeds for more fruit. Man-made results are dead and cannot reproduce themselves—but Spirit-produced fruit will go on reproducing from one life to another. There will be fruit—more fruit—much fruit."

So, this morning we've looked at:

The Nature of Spiritual Fruit—next week we'll continue by looking at: **The Necessities of Spiritual Fruit** - or what is needed on a practical level for spiritual fruit to be produced in our lives.

We'll do that primarily by looking at the "Parable of the Sower"—which more than any other parable Jesus taught gives us a look at the kind of "soil" (heart) produces fruit and what kind doesn't allow for spiritual fruit to be born.

No subject is more important in the life of a Christian than bearing fruit (verses 1-2, 8)—we need to know this!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).