

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #59

John 15:1-11

We live in a time in which many believers are discouraged and depressed; even those who are supposedly older in their relationship with God. Even though there are many admonitions in Scripture which teach that we are to rejoice, very few comparatively speaking, actually do. Many sit around thinking about how bad things are for them and rarely, if ever, crack a smile, bear fruit or have any joy. Yet, when I read a text like Psalm 92:14 which says, “They will still yield fruit in old age,” the Word of God clearly teaches us that we are supposed to bear fruit and have joy even as we get older. That is what God wants. But that doesn’t seem to be what is actually happening.

The final night that Jesus spent with His disciples was not all that joyful. In fact, sorrow filled their hearts (16:6). He was about to die and leave them and He needed to give them a cram course in doctrine and theology. When you are about to see the One you love die a brutal death and He has just told you that one of them would betray Him, one of them would deny Him three times and the rest of them would abandon Him; the room was not filled with a great deal of happy joy.

On His way to His own betrayal, Jesus told these depressed guys how they could have full joy no matter what was happening and the formula for it was to stay close to Him and His Word so that there could be a good deal of fruit production. What Jesus tells His disciples is this:

IF YOU STAY IN CLOSE FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST YOU WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT AND EXPERIENCE MANY POSITIVE THINGS AND HAVE FULL JOY AND IF YOU DON’T STAY IN CLOSE FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST YOU WON’T BEAR FRUIT, YOU WILL EXPERIENCE MANY NEGATIVE THINGS AND YOU WON’T HAVE JOY.

We have been saved to bear fruit and you will not be happy until you and I are bearing some fruit. This is a key to our own joy in this life.

As part of the Upper Room Discourse, the Lord Jesus used the figure of the Vine and the Branches to describe His relationship to His disciples. It is very possible that He had left the Upper Room and was heading to Gethsemane. Many have observed that at the base of the Mount of Olives is a vineyard and it is very possible that Christ pauses here to give them these final challenges.

The point of the illustration was to portray to His disciples the conditions for them to bear fruit and have full joy after He was gone. Now there are a series of ten revelatory points that Jesus wanted to make as part of His final message to His disciples:

REVELATORY POINT #1 – Jesus Christ is the true vine. 15:1a

Now a vine always has as its sole purpose and use to bear fruit. You cannot use a vine for anything else. You cannot build a house or furniture with a vine and it doesn’t even make good fuel for burning. The whole purpose of the main vine is to bear fruit.

In the New Testament the noun “vine” (αμπελος) is always used in a context of bearing fruit (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; James 3:12; Revelation 14:18-19) and the adjective “true” (αληθινή) is used in the sense of that which is real, actual and true to fact. This is just the opposite of what is false and what is a lie (Smith, p. 20).

The first point Jesus is making here is that He is the only real vine capable of linking us to God and the only true vine that can enable us to bear fruit. The disciples weren't the vine, we aren't the vine, no religion is the vine, our works aren't the vine, **Jesus Christ is the vine!** Any other thing that says it can link you to God and cause you to bear fruit and have full joy is false. Jesus Christ is the only true vine. True fruit for God will come from the true vine.

REVELATORY POINT #2 – God the Father is the vinedresser . **15:1b**

Now this was new information to these disciples. In the Old Testament, God was the owner of the vineyard, that was Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1; Luke 20:9-16). But now, He is the vinedresser. In this Church Age, His role has somewhat changed. Jesus is the life force vine who produces fruit and God the Father specifically watches over the branches that are connected to His vine, which of course is God the Son. God the Father closely watches over God the Son and anything and everything connected to Him. He is the vinedresser.

REVELATORY POINT #3 – Every branch has the potential of bearing fruit or not bearing fruit. **15:2**

Now you will notice that this text is addressed to believers, “every branch ‘in’ Me.” This point is further supported by **verse 3**, which says they are “already clean.” **The issue that is being discussed in this context is not one of union with Christ because every branch here is in Christ; it is one of communion with Christ or abiding in Christ in a way that bears fruit.**

Now the promise in this verse is that every branch that is in Christ that does not bear fruit, God the Father will “take away” and every branch in Christ that does bear fruit, God the Father will “prune” so that it may bear more fruit. Sometimes believers ask God to make them more fruitful, but then they don't like the pruning process God uses which will make them more fruitful. If we want to bear fruit at a high level, we will need to be pruned just right to do it.

Now both of the participles “bear” are present tense so this is referring to the continual and habitual pattern. In other words, every in Christ branch that continually does not bear fruit will be taken away by the Father. Every in Christ branch that continually does bear fruit will be pruned by the Father to continually bear more fruit. What fruit? Fruit of Spirit in life (Galatians 5:22); fruit of deep knowledge growth and service (Colossians 1:10); fruit of seeing others saved and growing through your outreach (Romans 1:13); fruit of victory over sin (Romans 6).

Now the word “take away” (αίρω) is one that means to raise up, to lift up, to carry off or remove (Smith, p. 13). This is the first of some very negative things said about one in Christ who does not bear fruit - God the Father will take it away (**15:2**); throw it away (**15:6a**); dry it up (**15:6b**) and gather it and burn it (**15:6c**). **It seems to me that this first negative promise “take away” means that the non-fruit bearing believer will either be raised up or lifted up to become a fruit bearing believer or he will be removed from this earth and taken home to heaven.**

On the other hand, the fruit bearing believer will be “pruned,” that is, further cleaned up and trimmed by God the Father to bear even more fruit. **Bearing fruit is critical to this context** . There is the concept of bearing no fruit (**15:2a**), bearing some fruit (**15:2b**), bearing more fruit (**15:2c**) and bearing much fruit (**15:5, 8**). In order for this “fruit bearing” to take place, God the Father must Personally do a pruning work in the life of the believer. The specifics of the pruning are in regard to the vine. So the Father will prune the branch so that the vine may produce more fruit through the branch. Without God’s pruning work, no one bears fruit. We need to quit whining about our troubles and trials, especially when we know that God is using them as a pruning process to make us much more fruitful.

REVELATORY POINT #3 – Those in Christ are already judicially clean. **15:3**

The issue here is the judicial washing clean of sin that comes through the Word of God which produces faith in Jesus Christ and causes one to be born again. This is exactly what the Apostle Peter taught in I Peter 1:23. At the moment one believes on Jesus Christ he is born again and free from all possible condemnatory judgment. You never need worry about hell once you believe. This text is not discussing the need to be saved, it is discussing the need to bear fruit. Once you believe on Jesus Christ you are forever saved from your sins and that is what the Word of God says. Jesus now wanted His disciples who had been saved from their sin, to bear fruit and that is what He also wants for us.

REVELATORY POINT #4 – Those who abide in Christ will bear much fruit. **15:4-5**

You will observe that in **verses 4-11** that word “abide” occurs 10 times - **v. 4** (3 times); **v. 5** (1 time); **v. 6** (1 time); **v. 7** (2 times); **v. 9** (1 time); **v. 10** (2 times). It becomes easy to see Christ’s main point here.

Now the branches of a vine are useless for anything other than bearing fruit (Ezekiel 15:2-5). This is the purpose of the branch and only as a branch produces fruit, does it fulfill its purpose. **The challenge given to the unbeliever is to believe on Christ and the challenge given to the believer is to bear fruit for Christ. In order for a believer to fulfill his purpose, he must abide in Christ.**

Dr. John Walvoord said “abiding in Christ describes the relationship in which a believer has the full benefit of a union with Christ” (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct-Dec. 1964, p. 298). By staying close to Jesus Christ through obedience to His Word, God will permit us to bear fruit and not just a little fruit, but “more” fruit and then “much” fruit. Jesus wanted His disciples to realize that apart from Christ we can do nothing.

Do you get this? Do you see this? We cannot grow, we cannot produce fruit, we cannot have spiritual victory, we cannot have full joy in life apart from abiding in Christ. The Greek is very strong here, not only can we not do anything, but we are not even capable of doing anything apart from Him (ου δυναται). Try teaching or witnessing on your own without a close relationship with Jesus Christ and see how much fruit you bear. Get up tomorrow morning and turn on the TV and spend no time in the Word or with Jesus Christ and go through the day and see how much fruit you bear for God. Truth is, apart from our connection to Him, we won’t amount to anything as far as God-honoring fruit production is concerned.

The adverb “apart from” (χωρίς) means without, separate from, apart from beside (Smith, p. 486). Anything we do, no matter how religious, apart from a close relationship with Jesus Christ will put you in a state in which it is impossible for you to bear fruit as a child of God and a state in which it is impossible for you to have full joy. It is that simple. You can go to meetings and serve on committees and you can have your little home study and not accomplish anything with it for you have left out the key ingredient - close communion with Jesus Christ.

It is possible for you to have the full benefit of living life in Christ and Christ living life in you. This full benefit will be realized as Christ produces much fruit through you as you abide in Him.

REVELATORY POINT #5 – Those who don’t abide in Christ will experience negative things.
15:6

In this context there are four negative things said about one who does not live in close communion with Jesus Christ:

Negative #1 - He will not bear any fruit. **15:2**

One of the worst things God can do with His child is to leave them alone and not use them for anything. One of the greatest tragedies that could occur with any of us would be for God to decide He will not prune us and use us to bear any fruit.

God has given us an amazing package of grace which has saved us from all of our sin. It is a very somber thing to think through what is said right here. As a believer you went through life, all of life, and never accomplished one thing for God; never bore any fruit for God. The possibility of not bearing any fruit is very real for the believer.

Negative #2 - He will be thrown away. **15:6a**

Now unfortunately Arminians throw away the context when they come to a verse like this and say it teaches that a believer can be lost and eternally condemned. Well, Jesus has already taught that you cannot possibly lose your salvation once you believe on Him - John 6:37; 10:28-30.

The warning being given here to disciples is a warning of potential divine discipline.

The verb “throw away” is one generally used of a weapon or object that was thrown or cast away. When the passive form of the verb is used it referred to becoming ill such as being thrown down or laid down into an illness (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 74).

God is promising that He will see to it that one who persists in a non-fruit bearing lifestyle will be cast down into a physical illness or sickness by God the Father. Not only will the branch not bear fruit, but it will not have healthy growth and will be plagued with some physical infirmity. In fact, in another of John’s writings he said there was a sin leading to death (I John 5:16). This is exactly what Paul said in I Corinthians 11:30, “for this reason many among you are weak and sick and a number sleep.” This is also exactly what Jesus said in Revelation 2:22 - “I will cast her upon a bed of sickness.”

Jesus is warning His disciples that if you persist in a non-fruit bearing life, I’ll hit you with a string of physical negatives until you either snap out of it or I take you home.

Negative #3 - He will be dried up . **15:6d**

The believer who does not maintain close fellowship with Jesus Christ will dry up and wither. A spiritual life vibrancy will disappear and will never be seen as a result of a direct judgment of Jesus Christ. No true, fresh vibrancy will be seen in the believer's life, just a deadness to the life. You will not see any joy or any hope and you will not see any fruit. This is a judgment of God. Don't be deceived; God can dry up our spiritual vibrancy in a moment.

Negative #4 - He will be thrown into the fire and burned . **15:6c**

Now here is where many toss away sound doctrine. The question that must be contextually asked is what is it that may be burned up in a non-fruit bearing believer who has been judicially washed and is clean? We know that hell is not the issue here because the matter of that is determined by union with Christ. So what is it that may be burned up?

There are two possible answers to this question:

- 1) The testimony of the believer is withered to the point that it is burned. Notice the pronoun used is "they", not "I" or "My Father."
- 2) The works of the believer are gathered up and burned and the believer loses rewards.
This very theme was developed by Paul - I Corinthians 3:14-15.

Those believers who persist in a life that does not abide in Christ, will get into eternity, having lost all rewards. Their testimony didn't amount to anything productive. It is serious and sacred business to be "in Christ."

REVELATORY POINT #6 – Those who abide in Christ will receive many answers to prayer .
15:7

A critical key to moving God in prayer is one's communion with Jesus Christ. To have communion with Jesus Christ means you must abide in the Word of God. If you are lining up your life with God's Word, you will greatly move God through prayer.

REVELATORY POINT #7 – Those who abide in Christ will glorify God and bear much fruit.
15:8a

Fruit bearing is not something we do, it is something God does.

REVELATORY POINT #8 – Those who bear fruit prove to be Christ's disciples . **15:8b**

The way you prove to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is by bearing fruit. There are lots of books and courses on discipleship, but the real issue of discipleship is to cultivate a close relationship with Jesus Christ based on the Word of God. As you are doing that, you bear fruit and prove you are a disciple of Jesus Christ.

REVELATORY POINT #9 – Those who abide in Christ abide in the love of God. **15:9-10**

It is one thing to talk about loving God, but it is another to truly manifest it by a love for His Word. The believer who loves the Lord and loves the Word is one who enters deeper into the love of God (Jude 21).

You will never convince me that you are a fruit bearing disciple in love with God if you don't have a passion to accurately know His Word. But more than convincing me, the point is we will never convince God.

You cannot possibly abide in Christ if you don't love His Word; if you don't desire to guard it. For example you will never convince God that you are His great fruit bearing disciple if you reject the doctrine of election found right in this context - John 15:16; 6:44. Fruit bearers love the truth. They protect it, obey it and defend it.

REVELATORY POINT #10 – Those who abide in Christ have full joy. **15:11**

This is the key to Christ's joy and this is the key to our joy. Focused on God's Word and bearing fruit.

If we abide in Christ we will bear fruit and when we bear fruit we have full joy and we will never be able to use our age as an excuse for just like Psalm 92:14 says - "They will still yield fruit in old age."

Abide in Christ and you will bear fruit and you will have full joy even when your heart has been full of sorrow.