

I Am the True Vine **(Growing Spiritual Fruit)** **Part 1**

Introduction

In previous studies we have studied three of Jesus' "I Am's" which He used to describe Himself: I Am, I Am the Bread of Life, and I Am the Good Shepherd. In this study we will look at Jesus as the True Vine, which produces spiritual fruit. In addition to the related scriptures, I have included information gleaned from gardening books as well as my own gardening experiences.

When Jesus described Himself as The True Vine, He is contrasting Himself to the wild vine that grows rampantly in the world and produces the fruit of the flesh.

Our Study

Before we can actually study what this fruit of the Spirit is, we need to see what it is not.

What the fruit of the Spirit is not:

In the fifth chapter of Galatians Paul tells us that we are capable of producing two varieties of fruit - the fruit of the Spirit, and the fruit of the flesh. Here is how he contrasts them:

The Scripture: Galatians 5:16-18

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law."

1. If we live by the Spirit what happens? _____

2. What does the sinful nature desire? _____

3. What does the Spirit desire? _____

4. What is the relationship between our sinful nature and the Spirit? _____

Kenneth Wuest, in Wuest' Word Studies, gives this picturesque explanation: "The fallen nature has a strong desire to suppress the Holy Spirit. The Spirit and the flesh reciprocate the antagonism each has for the other. There is a permanent attitude of opposition toward each other on the part of both. The

picture in the Greek word is that of two opposing armies, each digging a system of trenches for the purpose of holding the land they have and conducting trench warfare. They have dug themselves in for a long drawn-out contest."

Paul continues:

The Scripture: Galatians 5:1 9-21 in The Living Bible

"But when you follow your own wrong inclinations your lives will produce these evil [fruits]; impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, spiritism (that is, encouraging the activity of demons), hatred and fighting, jealousy and anger, constant effort to get the best for yourself, complaints and criticisms, the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group - and there will be wrong doctrine, envy, murder, drunkenness, wild parties, and all that sort of thing."

The fruit of the Spirit is not the same as the so-called "good works" the Christian performs. Although the two things are related, they are nevertheless very different.

What the fruit of the Spirit is:

The Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

5. What is the kind of fruit the Spirit produces? _____

The fruit Jesus and the apostle Paul taught about is another name for spiritual maturity, the very character of Jesus which is being worked into the life of the believer. It is the remaking of us into the exact image of Christ, and that, all too frequently, is a long, slow process.

In order to truly understand the implications of what Jesus and Paul meant when they talked of our growing spiritual fruit, we need to look at the fruit-growing process from a gardening or farming point of view.

When we are born-again, that is, born of the Spirit, we become in a spiritual sense a young seedling. Although we are miniatures of what we will someday be in the Lord, we still have much growing and maturing to do before we will consistently display those Christian characteristics which clearly tell the world that Christ is living in us.

Here is what Jesus has to say:

The Scripture: John 15:1

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener."

6. How does Jesus describe the Father? _____

We have been entrusted to the care of the One who designed the Garden of Eden and that beautiful tree-lined city described in Revelation. He is the Creator of every beautiful plant and tree that brighten our world. Could anyone ask for a better Gardener?

Through the Holy Spirit, the Father will bring us to maturity. He cares for us ever so gently at each stage of our growth, giving us exactly those experiences we need.

New Christians are tender young plants.

The Scripture: Isaiah 5:1-2 in the King James Version

"My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; And he dug it and gathered out the stones, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine press in it."

Although this scripture refers to Israel, it can just as well apply to new Christians.

7. What does the Lord do? _____

Tender young plants must be protected from the elements, from insects, disease, from marauders who would trample them down and destroy them. Tender young Christian seedlings, likewise, need protection and the Holy Spirit protects them too, as part of His job. Isaiah 5 tells us that the Lord has built a fence or hedge around us, His vineyard, and set watchmen in towers as guards. In other words, no harm, nothing He does not permit can break past His watchmen and through His fence to disturb our growth. Even events which we might regard as adverse can contribute to our growth.

After a long period of growth under the watchful eye of the Holy Spirit, we can actually be called fruit trees. We are suddenly aware of our supple, handsome branches. Isn't our trunk straight and strong? Our bark is particularly beautiful. Yet, when we look for the fruit, we find our branches are as bare as ever. Won't we ever produce fruit?

There is a lot of difference between being a healthy fruit tree and being a healthy fruit tree that produces fruit. As with trees, maturity affects the production of fruit. Even young Christians can and do produce some fruit, but mature Christians should and will produce more.

Think of all the steps that go into the making of natural fruit. First, the tree produces tiny buds, which develop into flowers. When the flowers are gone, small green fruit appear on the branches. These need time to grow and during this time, the fruit has to be protected from insects, disease, and other enemies. Once the fruit has reached its full size, it still has to ripen. Finally, it is mature and ready to be picked.

Requirements for growing fruit

Although natural fruit trees can do little to help in the production of their own fruit, Jesus has pointed out some very definite requirements for Christians if they would be fruitful. At the Passover supper, the night before His death, He spoke to His disciples at length on the subject of bearing fruit.

The Scripture: John 14:4, 7 in The Amplified Bible

"Dwell in Me and I will dwell in you. Live in Me and I will live in you. Just as no branch can bear fruit of itself without abiding in (vitality united to) the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me. If you live in Me and My words remain in you and continue to live in your hearts, ask whatever you will."

8. What are the first two requirements for bearing fruit? _____

We must live and abide in the Lord and His words must remain in us and continue to live in our hearts.

In other words, for us to be fruitful, Jesus said, He must live in us; His words must remain in us and continue to live in our hearts, and we must abide in or be vitally united with Him.

These requirements are not hard to understand. When we become Christians, Jesus comes to live in us, and if we are reading, meditating on and being obedient to Scripture, His words are living in our hearts; however, Jesus also said we must abide in Him.

The word abide implies a long-lasting or permanent dwelling. There is nothing transient or short-lived about an abiding relationship. It is for keeps. Just as a branch attached to a tree receives its life from the tree so we receive our spiritual life when we are united to Jesus. Separated from Him, we die spiritually. It is essential that we understand this fact: Natural life can produce nothing spiritual. Only when we are united to the source of spiritual life, have a vital relationship with the Lord, can we bear spiritual fruit.

The big question then becomes a practical one: How do we maintain this vital union to Jesus? In the same chapter, our Lord answers this question.

The Scripture: John 15:10 in The Amplified Bible

"If you keep My commandments you will abide in My love and live on in it."

9. How do we abide in God's love and live on in it? _____

The Scripture: John 15:13

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

10. What does Jesus say is the greatest expression of love? _____

The Scripture: John 15:12

"Love one another [just] as I have loved you."

11. What is the most important of these commandments? _____

Does this commandment sound too hard? All too frequently we think of love only as an emotion, but that is one of its least important aspects. Love is much more than an emotion. Essentially, it is an action.

Let me ask you a question. Was Jesus' love for us expressed by a warm, tender emotion, or was it expressed in His willingness to die on our behalf? I think we would all agree that it was expressed by His death. While He suffered on the cross, His emotions for us were much less important than the fact that He obeyed the Father and thus became our sacrificial lamb.

Many times the acts we perform from our acceptance of obligations are better demonstrations of love than all those warm, tender, puppy-dog emotions we sometimes feel towards someone. I believe Jesus is saying that when we love one another with His kind of sacrificial love, we abide in Him. The result of this abiding is the accomplishing of what the Gardener wants for us--in good time, we will bear abundant fruit.

In the second part of this study, we will look at pruning--ways our Gardener ensures larger crops.

The Answers

1. We will not gratify the desires of our sinful nature.
2. That which is contrary to the Spirit
3. That which is contrary to the sinful nature
4. They are in conflict with each other.
5. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control
6. As the Gardener
7. He has a vineyard on a fruitful hill; He digs it, gathers out the stones and plants it with the choicest fruit. He builds a watch tower in it and plants the choicest vines in it.
8. We must live and abide in the Lord, and His words must remain in us and continue to live in our hearts.
9. By keeping His commandments
10. To lay down our life for our friends
11. To love one another just as Jesus loves us

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