

THE TRUE VINE

(JN 15:1-8)

Each of us has probably experienced an especially productive or successful period in our lives - whether short season or long. We may recall a single event or accomplishment which particularly stands out, or there may be several which come to mind. More than likely, however, we have each languished through various times of relative non-productivity, as well. Such non-productivity may have resulted from mere idleness - a failure to redeem the time - or, perhaps, the frustration of sincere, but failed attempts to actually be productive.

As we begin, let us be reminded that true productivity is that which is seen as such from *God's* view, not necessarily our own. Thus, we will consider the benefits of applying the teaching of this passage in our efforts to fulfill the responsibilities God calls us to as Christians; both individually and corporately.

The scripture text we will examine (Jn 15:1-8) provides a formula which ensures exciting and fruitful productivity in everything we do. It combines an unfailing principle with a never-ending source of everything required to successfully maintain that principle. Furthermore, from the view of the true Christian, it supplies an unmistakable and irresistible motivation to assist us in overcoming our natural tendency to lethargy.

Now, if such a formula is indeed to be found in this text, and if, in fact, it can be successfully applied to all of our efforts, then we would be wise to establish it as the basis of our personal self-discipline as we strive to live godly and productive lives - and we should seek to adapt it to our corporate endeavors, as well.

This writing will identify and examine this formula; in fact, we will see that it is easily discovered and understood - if not so easily applied. For we must be aware - and therefore prepared - that scripture itself warns us that our effort and desire to implement it will be hindered by our sinful nature. Finally, we will also learn that apart from application of this formula, we can accomplish nothing.

So then, since God has blessed us, first of all, with the new birth itself, then with marvelous provision for all our needs, and finally, with individualized spiritual giftedness - all of which He requires and commands us to use productively for His purposes and for our own best interests - how can we employ these with an assurance of pleasing Him; of meeting His requirements? The inspired text before us addresses itself precisely to answering that question.

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵"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. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:1-8 NIV)

We will consider three elements of vs 1:

First, this is the 7th and final self-reference by Jesus in John's gospel. Here He calls Himself the True Vine. Elsewhere He refers to Himself as the Bread of Life; the Light of the World; the Gate; the Good Shepherd; the Resurrection and the Life; and the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Second, He chooses a humble symbol by which to illustrate Himself: a vine. He could have painted Himself in much more noble fashion.

And third, God the Father is the gardener, or vinedresser. This can also be seen in Isa 27:2-3 ...

"Sing about a fruitful vineyard: ³I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it.

And so, we are able to find comfort in the knowledge that God maintains a great interest in, and concern for the growth and welfare of the vine. Moreover, as the vinedresser Himself, He watches over the branches properly united to it; that is, He cares for, nurtures, protects and meets all the needs of all the true branches of the True Vine - the disciples of Christ.

Phil 4:19 makes the same promise and points to the same source: Christ Jesus. God will supply all our needs through Him; that is, out of God's glorious riches stored up for us in Christ. Eph 1:3 states that we have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ. 2Pe 1:3 says it all and says it best: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness."

Before we move on, note that the qualification of the vine as "true" is not incidental. The vine imagery was very common and familiar to the immediate

recipients of John's gospel. It was regularly employed in the Old Testament. However, many of those references described unproductive, useless vines; often symbolizing Israel's unfaithfulness. Just two of several examples:

Isa 5:1-7 I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ²He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ³"Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What 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? ⁵Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. ⁶I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." ⁷The 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.

We observe in this passage:

First, vs 2 shows that productivity was *expected* - a winepress was cut out from the very beginning. Second, the rhetorical questions of vs 4 evoke a great sadness. We can almost envision the tears of lament which accompany, "What more could I have done?" The vineyard owner had taken great pains to ensure a productive vineyard. With great pride, he had prepared everything well - a choice and fertile hillside; dug out and cleared of rocks; planted with specially chosen vines; a watchtower to guard it. Still, it languished in non-productivity.

The symbolism cannot be missed because it is included in the text itself - and we would do well not to miss its lesson. God's chosen people were delivered in miraculous ways to a land flowing with milk and honey - a place which was to have been purged of its sin and evil - that they might enjoy God's continual blessings. But the people forsook the One who had arranged things so well for them, who had tenderly cared for and accompanied them through their trials. They corrupted themselves with the peoples and practices which they were given power and means, and clear instruction to eradicate. They immersed themselves in unrighteousness and suffered God's judgment.

Jeremiah says it like this:

Jer 2:21 I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock.
How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?

Unlike these examples, Jesus is the *True* Vine - completely availing all the true branches. And so, the adjective “true” distinguishes Him from the OT negativity.

On to vss 2-3:

²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

First, since we will encounter the concepts of “fruit” and “fruitfulness” throughout our text, it is important for us to consider and understand what is meant. In basic terms, these refer to what naturally flows when the formula mentioned at the outset (to be defined and examined further on) is properly and consistently implemented. In other words, we are speaking of the expected spiritual production of a true, born-again, spirit-filled, obedient Christian.

Ironically, the key to this first of all rests in another fruit - the fruit of the Spirit spoken of in Gal 5:22-23. In order for us to produce fruit, we must first become newly created as in 2Co 5:17, through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit described in Tit 3:5. Our character must be transformed and begin exhibiting the characteristics of the Holy Spirit Himself. We must be indwelt by the Spirit of God, submitted to His influence and guidance, manifesting His presence by showing forth the characteristics of His fruit in our lives.

But the fruit-bearing of our text is not referring to this fruit of the Spirit. Though the lives of true Christians should intrinsically be displaying the fruit of the Spirit, the concept being conveyed here is not that we should be fruit *displayers*, but that we should be fruit *producers*. So, while we must indeed be displaying the fruit of the Spirit, we must also be producing fruit of our own.

Finally, the scriptural concept of “fruit” is used figuratively (both positively and negatively), symbolizing the natural production, or outworking, of the character or nature behind the effort (Mt 7:16-20; Lk 6:43-45; 1Jn 3:7-8, among others). The “fruit of the Spirit” is the character of Christ - that is what the work of the Holy Spirit naturally produces. In other words, what the Holy Spirit produces in us is changed character - an image of *Christ’s* character. And so, our lives display new characteristics; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The evidence of the Holy Spirit’s fruit in our lives then, is the same as the evidence of the character of Christ.

However, we are not called to produce, in turn, the character of Christ in others. We are not able to; that is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit. Our responsibility is to allow our reborn spirit nature to govern all that we think, do and say, thereby allowing Christ to exercise His character in and through us. The fruit-bearing we are called to is what results when we employ the fruit of the Spirit - the character of Christ - which has been produced in us.

On one hand, the Spirit's fruit-bearing in us causes many changes: our hearts, attitudes, minds, what we value and what we desire; our view of God, ourselves, others and life itself; our approach to relationships, work, family and, ultimately, *everything*. These changes result from the fruitful work of the Spirit in us.

On the other hand, our own fruitfulness is what these changes naturally cause *us* to do. *Our* fruit-bearing is what results when we employ the fruit of the Spirit. Just as one man manufactures tools to be used by another for the production of various other things, the Holy Spirit manufactures Christ's character in us - which we then employ in various fruit-bearing endeavors of our own.

These endeavors will differ for each of us: encouraging, comforting, serving, teaching, and giving; showing hospitality, love and compassion to others; attracting others to Christ ("naturally" and deliberately); discipling others and being discipled (the mutual edification of Pr 27:17); local church and other ministry duties ("small" and "large"), mission service; purposeful fellowship (not at all restricted to church attendance); study of, and meditation upon God's Word with the goal of applying it to our lives and sharing it with others; spending time praising and thanking God, listening and growing in relationship with Him, presenting our own needs and interceding on behalf of others ... The list is so vast that even some obvious inclusions were no doubt missed.

It is important for us to understand, however, that God does not measure our fruitfulness by the *results* of what we do - He simply judges *what* we do and *why* we do it. As Heb 4:12 states, He judges the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. If we are doing what He asks, how He asks, when He asks, then we are producing the fruit He expects of us. We are merely called to obedience. God is sovereign over, and takes responsibility for the results.

This is a two-fold relief for us: First, it removes the temptation to become prideful over "great" results, or depressed when they are discouraging. Second, it removes the stress and futility of attempting to manipulate circumstances beyond our control. There may be souls in heaven who, to their knowledge and by their own measure, never succeeded in their efforts on God's behalf. Were the OT prophets "successful?" But if Spirit-filled hearts and minds are behind the effort in obedience to God, we will be counted as God's faithful servants.

And yet, when our efforts are indeed obediently aligned with God's will, there is one fruit which is *always* being produced: spiritual growth in ourselves! Often these days, this is sadly overlooked - not only by the one expending the effort, but also by the leadership they are accountable to. This sometimes leads to abandonment or changing of course based on improper evaluation criteria.

Many times folks are convinced that they have discerned God's call to modify or move on from "futile" endeavors when they have merely made a human judgment apart from inquiring of Him (though somewhat different in context, see Jos 9:14-15). That is not to say that God does not use our view of the results to cause us to examine our effort, or that we should ignore the results completely.

Sometimes it is indeed right to "move on" (Mt 7:6; 10:14), but we must allow God to guide that decision. Unlike men and man-made agencies which seek to keep others reliant upon them for their own benefit, *our* best interests are served by God's design which keeps us in continual reliance upon Him. Thus, every situation is to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. While the principles remain the same, we must rely upon God for specific and dynamic application.

Our obedience to Him is all that truly matters; trusting that He is serving our best interests through the circumstances He arranges (Jer 42:6; Rom 8:28). Abandoning the course in the sixth circuit around our "Jericho" causes us to miss out on God's power and blessing, thus failing to produce the fruit which would have resulted. On the other hand, launching out on some course without consulting Him first is to go forth utterly unequipped. Without necessary provision, we are destined to yield thorns and briars only. Or worse, as in the zealous but unauthorized attack on Ai, we may cause ourselves needless failure and suffering. Lk 5:5-6 and Acts 16:9-10 provide models for us to follow.

To continue, vs 2 touches on the judgment of God, but also notes His tender care for the fruitful. While the eight verses of our text present both sides, the emphasis is on unity in Christ - oneness with Him; common knowledge, understanding, interests, joys, sufferings, purpose and destiny. The theme and intention of the passage is not to threaten, but to encourage. However, it does not ignore what we are familiar with; that many folks attempt to join themselves to Christ as bad branches to a vine. They seek to sap divine nourishment, power, comfort, and blessing - with no intention of producing any true fruit.

Such folks seek to be joined through "religion," church activity, works, moralism, manufactured piety, self-righteousness, "sacraments," generosity, devotion to "good" causes, involvement in social concerns, and by various other means. And they do so for an assortment of reasons: to impress others, to feel better about themselves, or due to a false sense of actually pleasing God; that in such doings they may actually find themselves accepted by Him. Then, of course,

there will always be those who deliberately seek false attachment in order to reap worldly benefit. They have no intention or desire for true attachment at all.

These are all illegitimate branches and, as this verse tells us, will be cut off for the sake of the vine and the true branches which remain. God effects their removal in various sovereign ways. Sometimes He brings about circumstances which expose them as counterfeits. Other times He brings various worldly troubles and snares into their lives. And though there are countless other means at His disposal, ultimately He may remove the offender through physical death. Nevertheless, God's stated desire is that they would all come to repentance unto salvation (1Ti 2:4; 2Pe 3:9).

Also in vs 2, the word "prunes" in the NIV is rendered "cleans" or "cleanses" or "purges" in other translations. The same Greek word form is used in vs 3 to state that we are already "clean." That is, true believers have been "pruned" as vs 2 promises; tenderly cared for and prepared for healthy growth by the Master Vinedresser. And though God performs the necessary purging with loving care, it is usually not without a measure of pain, suffering or loss.

Like branches on the vine, God does whatever is necessary in order for us to produce fruit most abundantly. Just as pieces, portions, unhealthy growths and everything which hinders fruit-bearing in a branch must be taken away, so God will remove from our lives whatever stands in the way of spiritual fruit-bearing. This may include wealth, material items, physical health, jobs, relationships and much more. He will disrupt our plans (those which do not originate with Him) and shake up all aspects of our worldly security. Whatever we trust in or desire more than Him - anything we allow to compete with God for our attention and affection - is an impediment to maximizing our fruit-bearing for His purposes.

When these things hinder or paralyze our usefulness for the Kingdom, God may remove them so that we are free to function as designed and intended. Through these sufferings and losses we become aware, or are reminded of our reliance on God for true sustenance. As this causes us to more naturally draw upon Him - and Him alone - we yield fruit more abundantly and consistently.

On the other hand - from the positive view - the latter part of vs 2 tells us that for those who are already faithfully bearing fruit, God will remove the obstacles which the fruit-bearer himself desires to be removed. This is the elimination of existing impediments, pain and struggle for the one who is already pursuing godly fruit-bearing, rather than the introduction of difficulties in order for God to gain the attention of the lethargic one, as above.

Sometimes, however, God merely provides His assurance that He is aware of the difficulty, and that His grace is sufficient to deal with it (2Co 12:8-10). But,

whether God actually clears the path or simply provides His comforting presence and assurance, the fruitful worker is enabled to be more productive. This introduces an important theme which runs throughout the text: There is a distinction to be made between mere growth and the bearing of fruit.

The vine exists to produce fruit, not barren branches. This is why those with pruning skills remove even apparently healthy growth. Resources which could otherwise be used to produce fruit are being sapped and wasted by these branches for barren growth. The branches of a vine are meant to bring forth grapes. And Christians - true branches of the True Vine - are meant to produce spiritual fruit; to manifest true, working Christianity and to further its cause. Bearing fruit is fundamental to both. And in both cases, the presence of fruit is the evidence that the attachment of the branch to the vine is true and healthy.

Many modern Christians consider themselves to be growing spiritually, but unless spiritual fruit is being produced in their lives, this "growth" is pointless, worthless from God's view, and ultimately, falls into the trap of being a prideful end unto itself. Sadly, this is quite pervasive today because many "Christian leaders" and "Christian ministries" are neither producing fruit themselves nor properly exhorting those under their charge.

Finally, vs 3 states that this pruning, purging and cleansing is accomplished through the word of Christ's message. This serves as a reminder that the power to change lives - to cleanse us from sin and unrighteousness - and to nourish and sustain us afterward is in the Word itself (Heb 1:3a).

Next, vss 4-7:

⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵"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. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

These verses contain the essential teaching of our text. First, they introduce the principle which guarantees fruit-bearing productivity: true Christians abiding in Christ. Next, they reveal the reason why the application of this principle guarantees productivity: The True Vine, Christ Himself, will supply everything needed for bountiful production. The concept conveyed here is this: If we maintain ourselves solely and purely in and upon Christ, He will abide in us with abundant vitality, supplying all our fruit-bearing needs; that is, He will continually

fill us with necessary, fruit-bearing nourishment - as a healthy branch is assured of nourishment from a healthy vine as long as it remains properly attached.

Eph 1:22-23 tells us that this nourishment is Christ Himself: "And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be Head over everything for the Church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way." An amazing truth! Christ is, at the same time, the One who *does* the filling (or nourishing) and yet, He is that very filling (or nourishment) *itself!* In a similar manner, Jesus teaches us the way to heaven (eternal life) while revealing in Jn 14:6 that, in fact, He *Himself* is the way.

Next, the alternative to maintaining ourselves in and upon Christ is clearly presented: We can no more bear fruit apart from the vitality of a healthy and dynamic attachment to Christ than a branch is capable of bearing fruit unattached to the vine. Providing greater impact, this truth is more emphatically stated in vs 5: We will not merely fail and suffer in *some* things apart from Christ; without Him we can do *nothing*. Stated differently, all productive accomplishment is enabled by Him. We must be careful to give Him the praise!

Finally, these verses contain some additional points of interest. First, in vs 5, Jesus repeats the profound claim of vs 1: *He* is the vine. And just so there is no mistake, He removes all doubt as to who the branches are. Man has an amazing capacity to elevate himself in order to reduce God to manageable size.

Another truth we must embrace is found in vs 5: We are not meant to merely bear fruit, but to bear *much* fruit. *We* do not set the pace or limit - *God* does. Whereas the fruitless branches are cut off (vs 2a) and the vibrant branches are enabled to produce an even greater crop (vs 2b), branches which are damaged, diseased or only tentatively attached yield limited production. Unlike the totally fruitless branches - the illegitimate which fall under God's judgment - these are true Christians who stagnate or regress; afflicted by harmful influences which God enables and expects them to overcome. As a result, they are not fully submitted or devoted to God, and therefore, not in optimum fellowship with Him.

This stunted productivity results from a failure to draw nourishment exclusively and continually from the True Vine; mingling, and thus adulterating Christ's pure sustenance with impure additives and substitutes; corrupting the healthy provision of Christ with unhealthy allures which appeal to the sinful nature. These temptations are numerous and varied, but common to them all is worldliness and self-centeredness, as opposed to godliness and selflessness.

The emphasis on *much* fruit is an exhortation to overcome our complacency and self-contentment. Consistently and continually drawing upon Christ allows us to maintain the bountiful production which the magnitude of God's plan and

provision enables and demands, rather than settling for the meager but self-satisfying production of our own self-imposed limit and effort. If we are properly focused, we ought to be *excited* by God's vision of our potential; eager to cooperate with Him to achieve it, and anxious for more "assignments."

The next interesting truth is found in vs 7. Eight times in these four verses, Jesus speaks of remaining - twice referring to His remaining in us. Of these two, the first - which we examined in vs 4 - identifies what will remain in us as *Himself*, but now we are instructed that *His words* should abide in us. Here, Jesus is revealing to us the greatest causes of the limited fruit-bearing just discussed: spiritual ignorance and lack of obedience. These, incidentally, are also what necessitate God's discipline of His children.

If we seek to draw sustenance from the True Vine, Christ, we must know and obey His words. We must possess an accurate understanding of His complete message of instruction, and we must be committed to following His directives. In today's age of seemingly endless new technology - whether a cell phone, the latest computers, all the extra gadgets on new cars, an iPod, programmable household appliances and home control systems, or whatever - we know that to benefit from what they have to offer, we must learn and follow their instructions. And yet, the vastness and profundity of the benefits offered to us in Christ so far surpass all that the world can ever provide (Eph 1:3) - if we would earnestly apply ourselves to learning and following the instruction of God's Word.

Satan has done a masterful job of distracting us with an ever-increasing smorgasbord of time-consuming, temporary pleasures of this life. Though some of these may be God-provided and properly engaged in when kept in perspective, we must not allow them to hinder or replace the greater, more rewarding pursuit of superior, eternal joys. In fact, the test of these life activities and gadgets is whether or not they fit in with, promote and yield eternal benefits.

On one hand, we find ourselves busy struggling to overcome life's difficulties. On the other, we stress ourselves to fit in as much enjoyment from life's short-term pleasures as we can. Both can keep us from being instructed by God in the way of true and eternal peace and contentment. For Christians, the result is limited fruit-bearing and blessing. For the lost, a day of great regret is coming, as pictured in vs 6: to be thrown away, to wither, and then to be cast into fire.

Worldly distractions cause the fruit-bearing effort to suffer and become feeble; to lack excitement, reducing output. This is what results when the pursuit of life's attractions hinders the pursuit of adequate instruction in God's Word.

Another facet of this failure can be illustrated from our experience: Have you ever purchased something and been so excited to use it that you just could not

delay your pleasure by a few minutes to “waste” time reading the instructions? Has that omission ever caused you long-term or expensive difficulties which far outweighed the immediate enjoyment you sought (which you missed anyway)?

Pr 19:2 tells us that it is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way. An excited effort to produce fruit without the benefit of necessary instruction will surely fail. Nowadays however, this is often not the error of the untrained zealot. More and more, churches and ministries are pressing the unprepared and/or spiritually immature into service which they are unqualified for and unready to perform. (See the separate posting on this site entitled, [“So We’re Saved - Now What?”](#))

Finally, again in vs 7, Jesus combines two imperatives to create an axiom which guarantees that God will grant whatever we ask. Yet, here is a quick lesson for us in bible interpretation: Scripture must be read and interpreted *in context!* Clearly, what Jesus intends to convey here is that while we abide in Him, and His words abide in us, we will receive whatever we ask *in order to bear fruit in keeping with God’s will and directives.*

Still, there are indeed folks who teach - and many who are more than willing to believe - that this and similar assertions of scripture actually promise that we can ask for, and expect to receive anything we want according to the wisdom of our *own* plan and purpose; that we can dictate to God what He must provide based on what *we* determine is needed; what is best from *our* view and desire!

And yet, “all” that Jesus is *truly* promising here is what vs 4 clearly states: that while we remain in Him, He will remain in us. And then further, while we maintain this mutual abiding in one another, we will produce much fruit - because everything we require as true branches is available for the asking; supplied to us by and in Christ Himself, the True Vine.

So, first we must abide in Him, for apart from Him we can do nothing (vs 5). Second, as the unfailing source, He - in the form of His teaching - must abide in us. His instruction, of course, is not optional or merely a good choice among many. The way of the Lord is (exclusively) perfect!

Nevertheless, all believers practice their perfect faith and obey God’s perfect instruction imperfectly. Though we are legitimately attached to the Vine, we rob ourselves of its full nourishment through ignorance and disobedience. That is why Jesus exhorts us here to not only abide in Him, but that His words should also abide in us. With both in place, we are assured of fruitful success.

Col 3:16 says it like this: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom ...” Yes, the Word must *richly* dwell in us, but notice that this is designed for our mutual edification and mutual

admonishment unto obedience. God's Word is a divine provision for our safety and well-being; that all of our thoughts, words and actions should be influenced and directed by its teachings; that every step should be measured and taken in light of its counsel; that the words of Jesus alone would be the final authority.

Moreover, while the abiding of His words in us is the very means by which we are able to fulfill His exhortation to abide in Him, abiding in Him facilitates the abiding of His words in us. Phil 2:12b-13 and 1Th 5:23-24 come to mind.

And so, Jesus promises here that our prayers are heard - and answered in accordance with our requests - when we are in union with Him through faithful obedience (1Jn 3:21-22; 5:14-15). Conversely, these verses unambiguously expose disobedience and ignorance as debilitating hindrances to the granting of our requests for necessary fruit-bearing provisions. (See [module 14b](#), "Prayer," of the separate study posted on this website entitled, "[God's Plan of Salvation](#).")

As scripture repeatedly warns us:

Dt 32:47a *They are not just idle words for you--they are your life.*

Act 3:22 For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.

Jer 42:6a *Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God, (from God's view, obedience always yields favorable results)*

Jn 14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (He will remain in us)

Jn 8:31b Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Lk 5:5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

Before we move to our final verse, make no mistake - the danger of missing the two important concepts of vss 4-7 is real and great. Apartness from Christ, and disobedience and ignorance of His instruction, are not compatible with true Christianity. Yet, why has it become necessary to qualify Christianity as "true?" I would submit that - as it has come to be understood - there are now two concepts identified and conveyed by the term "Christianity."

The first is a "religion;" that is, the "Christian" religion which, depending on which report you read, 80-90% or so of Americans profess to. But it is just that: merely another "religion" - one among the rest, and just as unavailing from the eternal view; that is, from God's view. This is essentially where we find the fruitless branches, blissfully unaware of the danger which lurks undetected.

Conversely, true Christianity has nothing to do with “religion” really. It is all about relationship; new creations reconciled to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit through the finished work of Christ - abiding in vibrant, healthy, productive relationship with Christ, as effectively illustrated by our text.

A professing Christian who seeks to draw sustenance from sources other than Christ - especially if he openly disdains nourishment from the True Vine - and who is not excited or even interested, perhaps, in godly instruction from the Word is probably no Christian at all. Yet, it is possible - though beyond human judgment - that such a one may simply be an immature, complacent, ignorant or struggling true believer in need of loving correction, care and discipling.

However, we must be careful to avoid the trap of assigning this unlikelihood to everyone we know and love, or to someone we desire to marry or partner with in business or ministry. For, in the meanwhile, we retain a bold conviction that all others we encounter in a similar state (unrepentant and uninterested) are most certainly destined for hell. If we truly love someone in this condition, we will not ignore their true need when God provides opportunity to offer scriptural care - and we will not be an enabler, fostering in them a false sense of security.

And now, our final verse:

⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

This is our final exam, and it poses one question only: Are we truly Christ's disciples? The criterion is clearly identified: We must bear much fruit. Perhaps the admonishment of 2Co 13:5 is in order; self-examination to determine if we are truly in the faith. Is our faith productive; yielding abundant spiritual fruit?

And then, what about the Father's glory mentioned here? Do we have an abiding interest and excitement in seeing God magnified among men? Just as a businessman gains a good reputation and is held in high regard because he is represented by dedicated, honest, caring employees, or a father is respected on the basis of the character of his children, just so is God glorified when His children serve as fruitful ambassadors of Christ.

As the businessman meets the needs of his customers through his dedicated employees, and the father is able to delegate important responsibilities to his obedient and trained-up children, God brings healing and salvation to the lost. He bestows blessings of various types upon people everywhere through His children appointed to represent Him (2Co 5:18-20; 1Pe 4:10; Mt 28:18-20). God is then praised by the newly saved, the heavenly host of angels (Lk 15:10), and

by others who benefit from our fruitfulness. We are the instruments He uses to accomplish these noble purposes (2Ti 2:21, yet 2Co 4:7). We should find all of this quite attractive and exciting! So what holds us back (Heb 10:38)?

In conclusion and summary then, just as branches are unable to stand alone - requiring the support and sustenance of the vine - Christians cannot stand without the aid of the True Vine, Christ Jesus. Apart from Him we can do nothing. He is the only true, pure source of spiritual fruit-bearing nourishment.

This applies to us both individually and corporately. As we have discussed - and this passage makes clear - there is no spiritual life in merely professing Christians (vss 2a, 6). And there is only limited fruit production from true Christians who either fail to take full advantage of the pure sustenance of the True Vine, or corrupt it with the unhealthy provision of alternate sources.

Likewise, local churches which are “dying on the vine” have no true attachment to the True Vine. It is sadly apparent that many (most?) churches which claim the Christian label these days have leaders and congregants who have not yet experienced the new birth. There can be no true fruit produced by such churches, no matter how well-intentioned the effort, nice sounding the programs, enjoyable the fellowship, or “dynamic” the preaching and teaching.

And yet, for the true Christian, the opportunity to see God glorified and magnified is an irresistible motivation to faithfulness in bearing much fruit. That this fruit will nourish others and attract the lost to the saving power of the gospel ought to provide more than enough excitement to compel us to obedience. Still, we must not become over-confident, because God’s Word warns us of the struggle ahead - from within (Gal 5:16-17; Rom 7:14-25), and without (Eph 6:12; 2Ti 3:12; Jam 1:2-4; 1Pe 1:6-7; Phil 1:29; 1Pe 4:12-16). Ultimately, faithfulness in fruit-bearing is more easily achieved when we maintain an eternal view (Rom 8:18; 2Co 4:17-18; Jam 1:12; Heb 12:3; Mt 5:11-12).

So, let us review this formula for consistent, successful and abundant Christian fruit-bearing promised at the outset. First, we must wholeheartedly embrace and employ the principle taught in this passage: We must remain in Christ; that is, we must make our home (abide) in Him. And yet, to insure that we do, He promises to make His home in us (Jn 14:23)! Still further, as we abide in Him, He provides us with abundant and pure sustenance; all that we require to produce the abundance of fruit which God commands and expects of us.

Of course, abiding in Christ is most effectively facilitated when His words (teachings) abide in us. We must study, know, understand and consistently apply the Word of God in our lives. Yet, though the guarantee of successful

productivity relies on our abiding in Christ, everything returns (as always) in full circle to God. While we are commanded to abide in Christ, His teaching at work in us (1Th 2:13) guarantees that we will. Then, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit - ensuring God's Word remains fresh, accurate and effective in us (Jn 14:26) - maintains that guarantee. And finally, the gift of God includes the promise of the indwelling Spirit (2Co 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph 1:13-14), so that we can be certain that all of this will indeed be accomplished (Phil 1:6; 1Th 5:23-24).

This is an amazing, gracious, priceless provision of blessing which God bestows on all His dearly-loved children. The wisdom of its design, just described, is worth reviewing. The command is given: "Abide in me." The One who issues the command provides us with His teaching, that through its abiding in us, we are enabled and may be certain of abiding in Him. Lest we fear to fail, the Holy Spirit is assigned the duty to teach us all things and remind us of all that Jesus has spoken (Jn 14:26). Indeed, the Spirit's presence is the very evidence that this mutual abiding has been effected and still remains (1Jn 3:24; 4:13). And lest we fear that we should miss out on the Spirit, His indwelling presence is predicated on nothing less than the promise, as seen in Gal 3:14 and elsewhere, of the Father Himself - One who cannot lie or fail (Heb 6:18).

Every child of God - receiving his free gift of faith - discovers that it comes "batteries included." The starter package includes the Holy Spirit, so the gift can be immediately enjoyed. May each of us - today and always - fully appreciate our special role as fruit-bearing children of the almighty and supremely sovereign God of the universe. May we consistently manifest our gratitude and love for Him, showing ourselves to be Christ's disciples, and exhibiting the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And may we abundantly produce the spiritual fruit which flows from it all, sharing our joy with as many as God provides opportunity.

As Jude closes his letter, may he also close this writing:

Jude 24-25 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Unless otherwise noted, scripture texts are from the New International Version, © Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society - Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers