

## Bearing Fruit



David Wilkerson September 14, 1987

There is a portion of Scripture that convicts me deeply. It involves a great and terrible responsibility that no true disciple of Jesus Christ can ignore. *Jesus said, "I am the vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit...If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned..." (John 15:1-2,6).*

I have read and re-read these powerful words of Christ, and I can't escape their convicting power. What a solemn charge, along with a frightful, ominous warning set forth here by our Lord. The Holy Spirit has impressed upon me the importance of understanding these words of Jesus, "My Father is the husbandman...every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away..."

This matter of Christians bearing fruit is not optional with God. He watches over His vine and all the branches engrafted to it with great jealousy and concern. He patiently waits for the branches to bring forth fruit. He stands beside it with pruning knife in hand, lovingly watching for the slightest evidence of corruption, blight or disease which could hinder growth. God expects fruit from every branch. Without fruit, it is impossible to honor and glorify God — or be a true disciple of Christ. Jesus said: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples..." (John 15:8).

Bearing fruit has everything to do with pleasing God — with fulfilling our mission in Christ — with having our prayers and petitions answered. Jesus said, "Ye have not chose me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (verse 16).

### Fruit or Fire

It may sound harsh and unloving to some, but the truth here is *bear fruit or be cast into the fire! Bear fruit or be cut off the vine! Bear fruit or be taken away to wither and die!*

The teachers of false security can try to explain away the pointed warnings Jesus gives us here; but I refuse to change a single word of what Jesus has clearly stated. You can't escape our Lord's forewarning, "*Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.*" Some would try to soften this stern message by suggesting, "Well, if they are ever cut off the vine, they were not really connected to it! They pretended to be in Christ." But Jesus is speaking of "*branches in me.*" They are connected to the vine. They are partakers of the very life-flow that is in the vine.

Barren, fruitless branches are not long endured! They are not permitted to remain in the vine without bearing fruit. They are cut off, not by the devil, but by the Heavenly Father. "He taketh away...He prunes it..." Jesus saw a barren fig tree and cursed it. "And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee hence forth forever and presently the fig tree withered away..." (Matthew 21:19). Jesus saw what no human eyes could see — the cancerous blight beneath the leaves —

disease beneath the bark — the spreading power of death in it. He did not curse the ebbing life of that tree, but the death that was at work in it.

This was meant to be much more than a symbolic message to Israel; it is a warning to every Christian of every church age! Jesus said He did only that which He saw the Father do — and did only His Father's will. His Father saw the fig tree was beyond pruning, beyond salvaging, because corruption and death had become dominant. Its branches were cursed to a withering death — to end up in the fire. Here again our Lord is showing us the seriousness of *fruit bearing*. Jesus came looking for fruit. So it is even now, our Lord is coming to us daily, and the question is, "Where is the Father's fruit? Where is the *much fruit* you are to bear for His glory?"

When I began to see how sobering this matter of fruit bearing is — I reasoned with the Holy Spirit: if bearing fruit is synonymous with true discipleship — if bearing fruit brings glory to God, and much fruit even more glory to Him — if being barren, fruitless brings the knife of the husbandman down on me — if bearing no fruit could end up with my being taken away, cast forth as a branch, leaving me withered and spiritually dead — *then I want to know what this fruit is! I want to make every change in my life necessary to bear it! I want every hindrance removed! I want the Holy Spirit to purge out all signs of spiritual blight, apathy, corruption!*

### Motivated by Fear or Love?

Am I moved by fear — do these words of Jesus put a dread in me? My answer is that I am moved by both the dread of God's Word and by His overwhelming love for me.

If I know my heart, I want to bear much fruit for my Heavenly Father, because He is glorified thereby, and my heart yearns to please Him. I want to know that the fruit He wants is brought forth in me; I want to bring joy and gladness to Him. I want to truly glorify the Father.

But I also have in me the dread and fear of a holy God — a Father who will not put up with unjudged hypocrisy or farce. Some think of the fear of God as nothing more than a source of awe and wonder. It is much more than that. Isaiah had a vision of unutterable holiness of God. The posts of the temple door moved at the sound of His majestic voice. Seraphims could not even gaze on his dread glory; they covered their eyes with their wings. Being in the presence of His wondrous holiness overwhelmed Isaiah. He cried out, "Woe is me, I'm undone..." (Isaiah 6:3-6).

Did Isaiah come away from that experience with only a sense of awe? No! Much more! He had upon him from that day on a *fear and dread of His righteous and holy judgments!* Of men Isaiah said, "Fear ye not their fear, nor be afraid" (Isaiah 8:12). But of God he said, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread..." (Isaiah 8:13). Isaiah said, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word..." (Isaiah 66:5). He also proclaimed these words of the Lord, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and *trembleth at my word*" (Isaiah 66:2).

At the burning bush when God appeared to Moses, he "trembled, and durst [dared] not look..." (Acts 7:32). The Hebrew word used here suggests *to shake terribly!*

Jacob had a dream in which a ladder was set up reaching to heaven and angels of God were ascending and descending. He saw the Lord above it all and heard Him utter great promises. When he awoke, his first words were: "Surely the Lord is in this place...I knew it not." He was overwhelmed with the fear of God and cried out, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God...this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:10-17).

Daniel was a praying man. He knew God very intimately, having been shown heaven's secrets. He was a man who "set his face to seek the Lord God by prayer, supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Daniel 9:3). Listen to Daniel's description of God: "And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the *great and dreadful God...*" (Daniel 9:4).

David said: "The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble...let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy" (Psalm 99:1,3).

I have emphasized the dread and fear of God and the trembling at His Word because that is what is missing in the

church in these last days. If we trembled at His Word — if we truly feared His righteous judgments — if we believed Jesus meant just what He said — *we could not put this matter of bearing fruit out of mind!* This generation too often perceives God as some kind of indulgent, doting grandfather type whose only purpose for being is to pamper and bless them. They see Him as one who winks at sin, who expects nothing more than their best efforts, and who overlooks certain sins and lets bygones be bygones. There is no such God! God is loving and merciful — kind and tenderhearted! But He is also holy. He visits iniquity with judgment; and when the Word declares Him to be a husbandman with a knife, pruning and cutting, we had better believe it!

## What is the Fruit the Branch Must Bear?

The answer is in Philippians: "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God..." (1:11). Here Paul helps explain the passage in John — *it is righteousness God is looking for in His people! Holiness is the fruit that glorifies the Father!* How different from our concept of *fruitfulness!* We have been led to believe that fruit is *success, results, more converts, bigger churches, and ever-expanding finances and non-ending prosperity.*

Actually, bearing fruit has to do with *what we are becoming*, rather than simply what we are doing. The Bible makes it very clear that many, many will have great results — successfully casting out devils, healing the sick, doing great works in His name. But God sees it as barrenness, *fruitlessness*, when sin and pride reign in the heart.

*I am bearing fruit when there is nothing hindering the flow of the life of Christ into me!* That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). He is saying, "Because you believed my word, trembled over it, letting it reveal every hidden secret, bringing to light every dark thing, allowing the Word of God to purge you — *the hindrances are all gone!*"

This is why I will not have TV in my home. Not because getting rid of it is meritorious, not because its absence will make me any holier — but because it is a *hindrance to the life flow from Christ the vine*. It is a blight, a seed of cancer that could bring spiritual death and cause me to become unfruitful. That is also the reason I refuse to indulge in drinking, theater, and going to discos or clubs — or doing anything that is of the spirit of this world. It is because all these things *hinder spiritual growth! They bring in death — they are dangerous because they could cost me the ability to bear righteous fruit!*

Someone will say, "By all this abstinence and all this separation, aren't you trying to make yourself righteous? Isn't righteousness all from Christ? Aren't all our works as filthy rags? Why so fanatical about giving up so much? Why not simply trust God, put your faith in Christ's righteousness, and be free in Him?" It's true — "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me...for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4,5). But there is much more!

## The Truth About Abiding in Christ

There are multitudes of shepherds who are lying to their sheep about what it means to *abide in Christ*. Millions are going to hell believing they are in Christ and abiding by faith. There is much talk about faith — little talk about *fruit!* Consequently many believers are convinced that once in the vine, always in the vine. They believe that no matter how clogged and diseased the branch, the life of Christ still flows through them and that they are bearing precious fruit to the glory of God.

That is impossible! Hear Him! "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall *abide in my love*; even as I have kept my father's commandments, and abide in his love" (15:10). Jesus obeyed faithfully every commandment of His Father! And He called that *abiding!* He tied it to obedience!

It is amazing how Christians today think they can pick and choose which commandments of Christ to obey! If they don't like what is commanded, they simply ignore it or explain away their disobedience with, "I just don't see it that way — I don't believe it like that." If the Spirit moves on a pastor and he brings forth God's call to holiness, separation, self-denial — and the parishioners don't like it, they pack up their billfold, their membership card, and go shopping for a pastor who will accentuate the positive. That is why the terrible plague of *apathy* is sweeping over religion today. We have been so afraid of works — so riled up about legalism that we have given obedience a bad name. The church has reached the zenith of apostasy when it calls obedience legalism.

How is it possible for a branch in Him not to abide? Jesus said: "if a man abides not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and man gathers them, and casts them into the fire, and they are burned" (verse 6). Can it be any clearer? Abiding includes rest and responsibility. It is possible to be in Him, connected to the vine, and not be abiding — not having a flow of life with which to bear fruit. Abiding has to do with absolute obedience to the commandments of Christ because every branch has a free will — it has a life force in it! The branch is not passive; it must draw out the life from the vine! "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you..." (verse 7). This brings out that the Word is the Father's pruning knife. How can any branch bear fruit if the Word of the Lord is ignored, unknown, neglected?

We see the *fruits of dryness* springing up all over the Lord's vineyard — the music of devils, adultery, fornication, drinking, drugs — because the pruning process has stopped with so many. The Word of God is His knife — a two-edged sword. The majority of Christians today do not read, do not know, do not plan to read the Word of God! They have hours and hours to sit and drink the dregs of filth on TV — but no time and no desire to be exposed and probed by the Word.

It is impossible to bear the *fruit of righteousness* without His Word abiding in you! Neglect of the Word is causing barrenness — it is bringing a terrible withering to God's people.

The abiding believer is one who loves and fears God, who dreads His righteous judgments, who hungers for the Word and trembles at His power of conviction. It is one who delights in having the Word prune away all hindrances, who prays that the very life and likeness of Christ be ever-increasing in him, and who grows more and more mature in obedience and love!

## The Horrible Consequences of Being Cut Off the Vine

Every branch bears other smaller branches, other sprouts; and the sprouts in turn bear the seed of ever-expanding branches. For example, husbands and wives are one branch, because it is written, "The two shall be as one." What happens to me spiritually affects my wife, my four children, their mates, my grandchildren. I am the burden-bearing branch, and if there are no hindrances in me, life can flow unhindered to every twig, every little offshoot sprout. Life produces life!

If I neglect God's Word, if I disobey the Lord in my daily walk, I will become dry. I will begin to wither; I will pass from the pruning stage to the cutting off stage. My spiritual alienation from God can spread death all through my family branches! Death produces death! Spiritual corruption and disease in me can spread like cancer all through the spiritual life of everybody connected to me.

Tragically, this very thing is happening daily all about us. A minister goes through a mid-life crisis and turns to someone besides his wife for support. He commits adultery and runs off with another woman. He destroys the respect his loving wife had for him. Bitterness takes hold of her and she becomes spiritually cold and indifferent to God. Two teenagers who believed dad was the godliest man in the world now turn despairingly to ungodly friends. The spiritual death in dad has spread its evil power all through the family. The congregation dismisses him and proceeds to let down its spiritual guard. They begin to doubt the Word; they are suspicious of other ministers and won't take godly reproof now! Not only has the minister been cut off from the flow of Christ's life from the vine — he has disturbed that flow of life that once flowed so freely to all those connected to him. He is now a minister of death. He is barren and his life is no longer bringing praise and glory to the Father. Everywhere he turns, there is death and decay. He may repent and be restored, but he cannot reclaim all those other precious little branches he destroyed.

A mother sits before her TV idol, drinking in hours of demonic swill. Her children and her husband never see her reading the Word of God. She is never heard weeping or praying or showing any evidence in the home of being a handmaiden of the Lord. She becomes so dry; she lives in a fantasy world. She constantly loses her temper and argues. She secretly longs to get out of her marriage, to get away from all the responsibilities. She is drying spiritually. The husbandman must cast her off and give her over to idolatry. There is no fruit — just empty barrenness — no Christlikeness! She is destroying her home because she is a minister of death. She has no flow of divine life. She has so clogged every avenue of life, it is impossible for her to be fruitful. Her children become just like her — spiritually dead! Her husband cannot draw any spiritual strength from her. She is withering on the vine and must be cast off. She may still repent and be restored; but she cannot call back the spirit of death she spread throughout her home. She may one day weep over these lost souls; she may cry over her bad example of the past;

but she cannot undo all the damage.

Every Christian who truly loves the Lord must stop and let this word sink in deeply! The more fruit of holiness that is shown in us — the more of Christ's fullness revealed in us — the more heavenly minded we become — *the more of Christ's life will touch everyone we are connected to.*

I once saw an entire forest of diseased, brown, worm-infested trees. But here and there, in the midst of all the death, I saw a green, healthy tree. What kept some of them green, while there was withering all around? It was an abundant supply of life! Life overcame the death. Every worm that attacked a leaf was repelled by the power of life. There was nothing of death in the green trees; there was no place for disease to attach itself.

I want to be like that — *green, full of His life-bearing fruit — a channel of life to everything within my circle of ministry and influence.* The Word says, "*that your fruit should remain....*" This means — *that you may be ever-bearing! You will remain in the flow of Christ's life — with no hindrances!* It means that all who are with you will continue growing in Christ.

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