

Christian Fruitfulness

By Everett Hardin

The figure of a fruit-bearing vine to represent the people of God is very common in the Bible. God is pictured as bringing a vine out of Egypt, preparing the ground in Canaan by driving out the nations, then inhabiting the land, and planting His vine in a choice vineyard. *“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, then planted it. Thou preparedst room for it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river,”* Psa. 80:8-11. Israel was once the pleasant vine of Jehovah, planted in God’s vineyard. Failing to bring forth fruit pleasing to God they could no longer be His vineyard.

God had *“a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes,”* Isa. 5:1-3. God had a perfect right to abandon it to destruction. He will take away the hedge and tear down the wall which protects the vineyard. It would be eaten and trampled by the beasts. Jeremiah used the same comparison, *“Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then thou art turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?”* Jer. 2:21. God expects His children to grow and develop spiritually, i.e. to mature as Christians.

When we come to the New Testament the figure changes somewhat and Christ represents Himself as the true vine, His Father as the husbandman, and the disciples of Christ as the branches of the vine. *“I am the true 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. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me,”* John 15:1-4.

Source of Fruitfulness

“Every branch in me.” Jesus says that it is the branches in him that bear fruit. To be in Christ means that we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior and that we become united with him by being baptized into him, Rom. 6:3-4. This is a spiritual relationship and not subject to the laws which would govern material things. The idea of abiding in Christ and him in us is simply a way of expressing our relationship to Him and His relationship to us. Through faithful, loving obedience we abide in Him, John 15:10 and through His constant, blessing and care He abides in us. One cannot be in Christ, the vine, without becoming a new creature. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is anew creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new,”* 2 Cor. 5:17. Christ is planted in the hearts of men by gospel preaching and teaching. Paul said, *“I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase,”* I Cor. 3:6.

Branches Are Disciples

Many Incorrectly teach that the branches are the various denominations. In the first place there was not a denomination on earth at the time this was spoken by Christ. Christ referred to man as it clearly seen in John 15:5-6. *“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”* Please remember the next time you hear someone trying

to justify the divisions of the religious world by using John 15:5,6 that the branches have no reference to denominations, but to individual disciples of Christ.

Bear Much Fruit

The necessity of fruit bearing is clearly shown in John 15:2,4,5,8. In verse 8 the exact expression is used: *“Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.”* After stating the graces that the Christian must add to his faith, Peter says, *“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,”* 2 Peter 1:8. Paul in speaking of fruit bearing and blessings that come to the productive Christian, said, *“But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life,”* Rom. 6:22. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law,”* Gal. 5:22-23. Neither the vine nor the branch bears fruit of itself. The vine supports the branch in order that it may bear fruit through the branch,

Those who allow the word of Christ to direct their lives will bear much fruit and will be rewarded by having their prayers answered. *“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight,”* I John 3:22. It seems impossible that such weak and unworthy creatures as we are could do anything to glorify God, the Creator and preserver of the universe. But bearing fruit in the Christian life will do that. Such faithful discipleship glorifies God and causes others to glorify God, Matt. 5:16.

Fruitless Are Burned

Unless the branch abides in the vine it will be burned. *“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,”* 15:6. As the branch withers when severed from the life giving vine, so we die spiritually when we depart from Christ, or are cut off by the Father for fruitlessness. Since it has been shown that the branch is a disciple, it follows that if a disciple does not abide in Christ he will be burned. Paul said to his Jewish brethren, *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace,”* Gal. 5:4.

Sometimes to avoid the force of this conclusion some argue that these branches were never in Christ; but listen to Christ, *“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he takes away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit,”* John 15:2. Saved people can fall from grace. Jesus said, *“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth,”* Matt. 13:47-50. The idea here is that as men gather up the branches which have been cut off at pruning time and burn them in the fire, so those individuals who have not been fruitful and have been cut off shall be gathered by the angels and cast into a furnace of fire.

Saved people can fall from grace and be destroyed. *“I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not,”* Jude 5. *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God,”* Heb. 3:12.

God's word, like rain brings blessings to all. But some fields do not bear good fruit because the ground is not cultivated by the owner, thus is rejected, cursed and burned. "*For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is blessed, receiveth blessings from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing whose end is to be burned,*" Heb. 6:7-8. The application is that if we receive the blessings of God daily and respond in such a way as to glorify Him, we shall be blessed; but if we use these blessings for sinful purposes, we shall be punished.

To become a branch or a Christian, one must be purged or cleansed. "*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you,*" John 15:3. In I Peter 1:22 we learn that our souls are purified or cleansed by obeying the truth. The dead wood of our lives has been pruned out by the teaching Jesus has given and we have accepted and followed. So, we today not only become Christians through hearing, believing, and obeying His word, but we are fruitful under the influence of His teaching. By adding the Christian graces we become fruitful, 2 Peter 1:5-8.