

Keep an Open Mind and Be Obedient

Introduction

Welcome to this edition of My Thoughts and the fifth of our eight-week series on **“The Cost of Discipleship.”** In this week’s segment, **“Keep an Open Mind and Be Obedient,”** I will be discussing how Jesus teaches us to be open to producing spiritual fruit after receiving spiritual life. I will also use Jesus’ teaching calling Himself the **“True Vine.”** Open your Bible and turn to the Gospel of John 15:1-17.

The most popular fruit growing on a vine is grapes. Many vineyards exist in countries such as France, Italy, and the United States, mostly in the Napa and San Joaquin Valley regions of California. Some uses for grapes are to make wine, jelly, or just to eat off the vine. Grapes come mostly in red, purple, or green.

What about spiritual fruit, and how does someone go about producing it? Christians receive spiritual life after salvation to produce spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). The presence of fruit or our Christian character in our lives reveals the life of the Lord Jesus Christ in us. In John 15:1-17, Jesus uses the vine and the branches to show us how to keep us fresh in our faith.

Passage Text - John 15:1-17

¹ “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”

² “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

³ “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”

⁴ “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.”

⁶ “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

⁷ “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”

⁸ “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so, you will be My disciples.”

⁹ “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.”

¹⁰ “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”

¹¹ “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

¹² “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

¹³ “Greater love has no one than this than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

¹⁴ “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”

¹⁵ “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

¹⁶ “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.”

¹⁷ “These things I command you, that you love one another.”

The Vine and the Branches

Jesus illustrates the vine and branches as a picture of the Christian’s obligation to abide in Him and produce the fruit of the Christian life. Abide (*meno*) in Greek means to remain or to stay. Staying vitally open and obedient to Jesus, believers can keep producing the spiritual fruit God expects.

Jesus said He is “the true vine” which contrasts with the unfaithful people of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7). God called the covenant nation of Israel to be a mediator of truth to the world, but their persistent failures resulted in judgment.

Jesus is the true and faithful Servant who came to reveal the Father and to provide salvation for the lost. Fruit is useful if the vine is good. Jesus is the true vine; therefore, those who are connected to Jesus by faith have no excuse for lack of productivity.

In verse two, the phrase “every branch in Me,” refers to two types of individuals in relationship to Christ:

- Removal of the first branch is because it does not produce fruit
- The second type of branch is the genuine believer demonstrating their salvation by producing spiritual fruit

Production of fruit does not earn salvation; it reveals salvation. Moreover, the pruning of branches is necessary so that they might bear even more fruit

Fruit of the Vine

Vines produce grapes, but what is the equivalent fruit of the Christian life? It consists of spiritual qualities of the believer filled with the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), personal surrender to God in worship (Romans 12:1), and a life characterized by Christ-centered service to God including evangelism and discipleship.

Pruning refers to the ongoing process of sanctification. It consists of denying sinful nature and growing spiritually through Bible study, prayer, witnessing, and spiritual gifts. The Bible, as God's Word, reveals our sin like a mirror that shows our physical need for cleansing (2 Corinthians 3:18). Pruning can be painful, but the result is spiritual growth and fruitfulness. Just as weeds and dead branches zap vital strength, sin chokes the progression in holiness for the believer.

The Branches Obey

Jesus declared believers to be the branches. There is a vast difference between Jesus as the vine and believers that are the branches. He is the source of life, and believers are the recipients. Only by abiding in Him can we bear much fruit. Unbelievers cannot accomplish real acts of righteousness. Christians must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to be effective in ministry.

The focus in verse six is on those who do not abide in the Lord Jesus Christ. The failure to produce fruit demonstrates the absence of life. Believers connected to Jesus produce living fruit, while pretenders who are not connected make empty professions. They also produce dead fruit because they refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

True disciples demonstrate their existing connection to Jesus by carefully obeying His commands. They will ask for the things necessary to accomplish His purposes, and He will provide the resources they need. Ultimately, the fruitfulness of the faithful believer's life in Jesus results in glory to the Father. We show that we are vitally open to Jesus when we consistently obey His teaching and thereby honor God.

Great Devotion to Love

Jesus described the depth of His love for His disciples by equating it with the Father's love for Him. We do not love others equally. For example, our level of loving devotion to family members or close friends is higher than our level of loving devotion to acquaintances or strangers. Jesus' boundless love for us is an expression of His grace and mercy revealed at the cross.

Believers who want to have a growing, intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ must keep His commands. He is our great example. He stayed in the Father's love by obeying what the Father sent Him to do. Jesus was in perfect harmony with the Father. Nothing can substitute for

obedience in the life of the believer. God is not impressed with human knowledge or attainments. Obedience to Him demonstrates genuine love on our part.

Love and Relationships

Jesus returned to a previous theme of showing love for one another as believers (John 13:34). Again, emphasized His love for them was the standard of their love for one another. Jesus had in mind not only love is shown to them up to that point, but notably, His love demonstrated on the cross. He set the example of love for others and established the principle of supreme love. No gift is higher than the willing surrender of one's life for another (John 15:13). Jesus would give the greatest gift imaginable when He died on the cross for our sins.

He contrasted His relationship with His disciples with the typical master-slave relationship that was common in the first century. Jesus shared all the Father told Him. He made clear He did not merely command His disciples but loved them and wanted to have a close, sharing relationship with them.

Conclusion

Those who respond in belief are saved and then are appointed by Jesus to produce fruit that lasts. The fruit produced by faithful believers is permanent. When we win someone to the Lord Jesus Christ through sharing the gospel, the destiny of a soul is changed forever. The heavenly treasure more than surpasses any earthly losses.

For the unsaved, it will only lead to spiritual death. As faithful disciples, we can rely on the Father to give us whatever we need to accomplish our divine assignments. We can do nothing without Him, but we can do all things through Him (Philippians 4:13). The power comes from God, and all the glory belongs to God, Amen!

I am Dale Van De Bogart and I fully agree on God's Word!

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