

The Relation of Believers to Christ

John 15:7-11

John 15:7-11 – *“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.”

Background Notes

In John 15:1-6 the Lord Jesus likened the relationship between Himself and believers to the relationship between a vine and its branches: *“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”* (v5).

We’ve already mentioned that the parable of the vine and the branches was part of the Lord’s Upper Room Discourses that are recorded in John 13-17. The “Farewell Discourse” is covered in chapters 15 and 16. These discourses, or conversations, are called the “Upper Room Discourses” because they began in the upper room, on the occasion of the Lord’s final supper with His disciples. This was the same day that He was arrested, and the day before His crucifixion.

This second discourse, however, may not have been given in the upper room. The Lord may have spoken these words and prayed the prayer of John 17 after He and His disciples left the upper room. He may have continued His teaching as they walked past the Temple area, crossed the Kidron Valley and entered the Garden of Gethsemane. There is a very good possibility that they walked past the Temple on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

I wish you all could join us on our next Holy Land tour! We could take you to the traditional location of the upper room, and we could then go down towards the Kidron Valley and the Garden of Gethsemane, as the Lord and His disciples did. We could walk directly down into the Kidron Valley, or we could walk past the Temple area before going down into the Kidron Valley and crossing over to Gethsemane. There is a very good possibility that the Lord and His disciples went past the Temple area on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Why is this important for "background notes"? Well, over one of the gates of the Temple building was a great golden vine, the national emblem of Israel. It’s possible that the Lord gave this teaching about the vine and the branches within sight of the golden vine in the Temple area. It’s an interesting thought. We can’t be sure, but it’s a possibility.

A vine has only one purpose. The purpose of a vine is to bear fruit. You don't plant a vine for lumber if you want to build a house, right? Contractors don't go to a lumberyard and order five board feet of grape vine! You can hardly even make a good fire out of vine! (Read Ezekiel 15 in this connection.)

So there's only one purpose for planting a vine, and only one purpose for growing a vineyard – and that purpose is to produce fruit. Likewise, the purpose for God's vineyard is to produce fruit.

Jesus Christ is the Vine and we are the branches. We are to produce fruit!

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. Bearing much fruit brings glory to the Father

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

What is the "fruit" that believers are to produce? Certainly we should be producing the "fruit of the Spirit" in our lives. Galatians 5:22-23: *“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”* As the fruit of the Spirit grows and multiplies and is seen in our lives, God the Father is glorified.

In addition, the "fruit" mentioned here would also include the "fruit of our labor," as we serve the Lord in Christian service. The fruit that results from our service to the Lord brings glory to God the Father.

In verses 7-8, notice the connection between fruit-bearing and answered prayer. *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”*

Answered prayer is a form of fruit bearing. The fruit of answered prayer brings glory to God the Father, because answered prayer means that God's will is being carried out. Notice - it is assumed that the believer's answered prayers will be prayers that are made in the will of God. If a believer is abiding in Christ, how could his or her prayers be anything less than aligned with the will of God?

Last fall, my wife Margie and I visited a Christian girl who was a first year student on a secular campus on the west coast. We were appalled at the pagan atmosphere of this secular campus. Right across from her dorm, on a building across the quad, a very large banner proclaimed, “Maybe your heterosexuality is only a phase that you're growing out of.” Can you believe it?

When this young student began to relate some of the content of the required courses she was taking, we were further alarmed and discouraged. She seemed to be unhappy and somewhat depressed. Because she was just getting settled in, we began to pray that either she would meet a solid group of Christian believers on campus who would support her in her faith, or that she would decide she didn't like this university and she would transfer. Well, God answered that prayer!

She began to dislike this place so much that she decided to transfer to a Christian university, where she was not only much happier but her young faith was supported and nurtured.

We believe that our answered prayer was fruit that brought glory to God, because it was prayer made in the will of the Lord. So here in verses 7-8, the fruit that is involved is not just the spiritual fruit of Galatians 5, or the fruit of our Christian service, but answered prayers made in God's will are fruit as well.

Remember, bearing much fruit brings glory to God the Father.

2. Bearing much fruit is proof of discipleship.

"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples"(v8).

The proof of discipleship is "bearing much fruit." How are we doing? Would you classify yourself as a *disciple* of Jesus Christ, or only a Christian? Well, you'll know the answer by asking another question: Are you bearing fruit? "Bearing much fruit" is proof of a *disciple*. There it is - in verse 8.

This passage certainly teaches that **obedience** is crucial to abiding in Christ, and thus obedience is crucial for discipleship and bearing fruit. Look at verse 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."* Notice the connection of verse 10 with 1 John 3:24, *"Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."*

Last weekend I happened to ask some friends about a man who was one of my fellow seminary students. I was told that he was now separated from his wife and family, and was unwilling to make any moves to be reconciled - yet he was not only claiming to be a Christian, but he was still claiming to be a disciple and bearing fruit for God!

Sadly, something is very wrong with that picture. If we're not willing to obey and *"keep His commandments"* - then we're not abiding in Christ! And if we are not abiding in Christ, then we will not be able to produce "much fruit." And if we're not producing "much fruit," then we are not true disciples - because bearing much fruit is proof of discipleship.

Practical Application

Right now you can say, "It doesn't get any better than this!"

If you're a Christian, a true believer, then right now you can say, "It doesn't get any better than this!"

We often use that expression when we're having a great time and everything is going well: "It doesn't get any better than this!" This past winter I was speaking at a men's retreat in Colorado, and because it was winter, and because it was Colorado, and because I like to ski, I took my skis with me. And - would you believe - we got stranded in Colorado because of heavy snow! The airports were closed, the roads were closed - we couldn't travel back. So what could we

do? All we could do was ski in fresh powder snow! I had no choice – all I could do was ski! Do you think I felt guilty? Of course not! As I enjoyed the beautiful scenery and skiing the fresh snow on the mountain trails I was thinking to myself, "it doesn't get any better than this!"

Well, I'm sure all of us have had some wonderful experiences in life that have made us say, "It doesn't get any better than this!" But even the best experiences life can offer can't begin to compare with the spiritual realities of the love and joy that are available to us when we're abiding in Jesus Christ! And we don't have to wait for Heaven to experience them - they're available to us right now!

Verse 9: *"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love."* "Abide in My **love**" - can you believe it? Can you think of any greater love than that? As the Father loves the Son - that love is here for **us**? Yes – it's available to **us**! We can abide in that love - and the Lord wants us to abide in that love!

Now look at verse 11: *"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."* Your **joy** in Christ can be full! Can you think of any greater joy than the joy of Christ? And it is available to **us**! And it is joy that is independent of the circumstances of life!

Happiness goes up and down with the varying circumstances of life, but **joy** is independent of circumstances. We can experience steadfast joy in Christ even when the circumstances of life are not happy. The Lord wants our joy to be full, and that joy is available. His joy is available to us when we abide in Him.

If you're a Christian right now, you can say, "It doesn't get any better than this!"