

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BEAR FRUIT?

In John 15, Jesus uses the illustration of the vine and the branches to explain that each of His disciples is expected to bear fruit. Those who bear fruit will be pruned to bear even more, and those branches that bear no fruit will be thrown away into the fire to burn.

Jesus says if we remain in Him, the vine, we will be able to bear fruit. The message is a clear warning to Christians that discipleship is more than just an acknowledgement of a belief in Christ--there must be a concentrated effort to remain in Christ as a fruit-bearing disciple.

But what does it mean to 'bear fruit' anyway? Perhaps many have never fully comprehended the full implications of Jesus' command. We should think for a moment what the fruit of a vine or tree really represents, and apply that spiritually to our own lives.

The fruit is the part of the plant that is beneficial to others. A tree or vine that bears no fruit is really useless and has never fulfilled its purpose for existence. The fruit is a source of nourishment, pleasure and life to all those who partake. Thus, a disciple bears fruit when he becomes a blessing, something beneficial to others. This means we should render service to others, sharing, caring and supplying their needs. This is what Christ did and what He expects of His followers.

As we examine the fruit, we also realize it is that part of the plant that enables it to reproduce. It contains the seeds to create additional plants. Thus, a fruit-bearing disciple is one who reproduces. We do this by preaching, teaching, making other disciples, calling the lost to the Lord. We plant the seeds around the world that will produce a bountiful harvest of souls, for this was Jesus' mission for coming to the earth.

The Christian's duty then as a bearer of fruit is two-fold. He is to serve- being a blessing to others, and to reproduce- winning other souls to Christ.

Our job as the church, the body of Christ, is to bless others and to save lives. We can accomplish this only by dedicating ourselves to remaining attached to our source of strength and life- the vine, Jesus, and following His example.

This teaching of our Lord presents us, then, with a trinity of concerns—we must remain in Him, bless others, and reproduce. The early church certainly seemed to follow this pattern as they participated in worship, study and prayer to focus on Jesus, then reached out to assist those in need and went everywhere preaching the gospel.

What about our lives today, though, and the lives of our congregations? Are we devoting time, money and energy to all three?

It seems only a small percentage of our church budgets go to the fruit-bearing activities of benevolence and world evangelism, while the majority of our human and financial resources are concentrated on worship, study and activities designed to keep us close to Christ. While these are necessary, as we have seen, a continual focus on these areas at the expense of the other two, creates a religion that becomes purely self-indulgent.

While the average Christian has heard sermons, sang songs and offered prayers that would number in the thousands, how many have ever lead a person to Christ, gone on a mission trip, helped a needy family or sponsored a child overseas? Is our devotion to Jesus really translating into fruit-bearing?

For the Christian, our field of service is the world and we must look beyond the horizons of our community to the millions who have never heard the gospel at all and who may be in need of the basic necessities of life. Let us do more than plan programs and activities for the local church, but create opportunities for evangelism and benevolence and begin to put our energy, time and money into true “fruit-bearing.”

As Jesus states, “This is my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” It is only through demonstrating our love for the world that others can truly see the glory of the Father.