

INTRODUCTION

Spring is a growing season. We have many gardening experts in our midst. Compare to them I know very little about gardening. Some of you know that I studied agriculture in U.S. I feel ashamed to admit that I never went down to the field to do things like an actual farmer. All my research was done in a lab. Growing plants is not my interest either. A few years ago a brother visited our home and he saw a corner in our backyard where the previous owner of the house designated as a vegetable garden. He commented: “You have an ideal spot here with plenty of sunshine to grow veggie. What a waste to leave it idle!” He was so passionate that he even helped me till the soil. Then he shared with me some tips on how to take care of plants. So there I was using myself as a bait to feed mosquitoes while watering the garden twice a day. I knew nothing other than spraying the plants with water. To my surprise things gradually grew up. On a particular weekend my wife and I were out of town and so this brother volunteered to take care of our garden. After we came back he scolded me for not reaping the harvest in time. I opened the fridge and was surprised to see lots of cucumbers. When I went to the garden and looked under the bushes there were many more! What a sense of fulfillment to this city dweller that he could actually grow stuff. Growing a person is like growing plants. There is a reasonable expectation of a future harvest. In John 15 Jesus uses vine and branches as a metaphor to illustrate His relationship with believers. Jesus’ expectation is that our lives can bear fruit for Him. Bearing fruit is an external evidence of an eternal relationship in the Lord.

EXPLANATION

1. 連接的明證 A Proof of Connection

Bearing fruit is an external evidence of an eternal relationship in the Lord because the ability to bear fruit is a proof of life connection. Jesus says in **verse 5**: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Jesus says those who remain in Him, and He in them will bear fruit. We will explain more about what those fruits are later. The phrase “in Him” means that a personal has an eternal relationship with Christ. In simple term, he is a Christian. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:17** that: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! Jesus said that a person who is in Him would bear fruit. The reverse is also true, that a person who does not bear any fruit would indicate that he has no eternal relationship with Christ. **Verse 2** may be the most difficult verse to understand in this passage: “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” Jesus tells us that our Heavenly Father deals with two kinds of unhealthy branches differently. He cuts away those that do not bear fruit, whereas he prunes those that do so that they may bear more fruits. Let’s deal with the latter condition first because it is easier to understand. Our Father prunes away the less effective areas so that we can bear more fruits. If you have experience in gardening you know exactly what Jesus was talking about. In my backyard there are two bushes of rose. Before every winter I have to trim back the branches that grow in less desirable

directions. I also thin off other branches that are too crowded. The result is that when spring comes the shape of the whole plant will look more balanced. God is doing the same thing to you and me. It is called discipline. **Hebrews 12:10-11** reads: 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. God exercises discipline for our good so that we can grow in His holiness and righteousness. If we incorporate the truth in the Hebrews passage to the teaching in John 15 we can understand why the Father has to apply His pruning scissors on us. He prunes us when we deliberately sin against Him. He prunes us when we waste our time and energy in meaningless pursuit or relationship. When God disciplines us it is not because He does not love us. Quite the contrary! He loves us so much that He does not want us to go astray like a plant grows in a wrong direction. Going back to **John 15:2**. Now let us deal with the more difficult part. When does it mean when Jesus said the Father “cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit?” Our utmost concern is whether cutting away means that some people would lose salvation altogether. The verb “cut off” can also mean “lift up.” For example, the same verb was used when Jesus healed a paralytic who was carried to Jesus by four of his friends. Jesus ordered the patient to lift up his mat and go home. Therefore, some commentators believe that Jesus was saying that God the Father would not cut away, but rather lift up those branches that are unproductive because they have fallen to the ground. So which is it: cut away or lift up? Allow me to borrow a comment from D.A. Carson. In his commentary Carson says that Jesus’ focus is not about whether those branches being cut away will be lost forever. Jesus was contrasting the healthy branches that bears fruit with those branches that do not bear fruit because they do not have an eternal relationship with Him. Those branches are good for nothing, as Jesus says in **verse 6**: “If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” Bearing fruit is a proof of connection with Jesus. So what are the fruits that Jesus refers to? We can think of the fruit of evangelism, namely, leading people to believing in Christ. There are also the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is an array of godly characters. In this passage Jesus in fact gives us some hints the fruits He has in mind. I will go through the list briefly: pray according to God’s will (v. 7 and 16), a desire to bring glory to the Father (v. 8), an outward testimony that we are Jesus’ disciples (v. 8), a will to love God by following His commands (v. 10 and 14), true joy from the Lord (v. 11), love one another (v. 12 and 17) and reaching out to the spiritually lost (v. 16). These characteristics are not something we were born with, but they are the results of our union with Christ. The question is not whether you have more or fewer fruits. It is a distinction between 0 and 1. If you have none of the fruits listed then you have to seriously wonder if you are a true believer of Christ.

2. 順服的表現 A Sign of Submission

Bearing fruit is an external evidence of an eternal relationship in the Lord. Bearing fruit is not only a proof of connection with Jesus it is also a sign of submission to Him. Jesus tells us in **verses 7 and 8** that: 7 “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” We said earlier that bearing fruit is in indication that we are in the Lord. But how can a person consciously remind himself that he is in the Lord? In verse 7 Jesus draws an equal sign between remaining in Him and remaining in His Word. Our faith in

Jesus began with receiving His Word. Jesus tells His disciples in **verse 3**: “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” We are being sanctified by accepting the truth in the Bible. The apostle Peter echoes the same truth in **1 Peter 1:23** - For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. That is the beginning of our spiritual life. But God does not want us to end there. He desires for us to keep feeding on His Word. Peter goes on to say in **1 Peter 2:2** that we should be: Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. Peter urges us to desire after the Word of God just like a newborn baby craves on milk. In doing so we will continue to grow in our spiritual life. Jesus tells us that if God’s Word is in us and we submit to it a few results will happen. Jesus says in **John 15:7** that “ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” Is that real that we will get whatever we want if we just ask? That depends on what we are asking God for. The prerequisite is that God’s Word is in us. If so, then what we ask should reflect His will rather than ours. Normally parents would teach their younger kids to share what they have with their friends. I am a stingy person and my sons are way more generous than me. When they ask me if they can share some snack from our pantry or fridge with the neighbors’ kids I have to say yes. It is because in my children’s mind sharing is what their dad tell them to do. Therefore, if they request something based on their dad’s words they expect the wish to be granted. Brothers and sisters: the question is, when you pray for something it is just for your own gain or do you pray according to God’s Word? If we ask according to God’s Word our Father would give us what we ask for. Jesus tells us that in **John 15:8** that henceforth, this intermediate result of getting what we ask for leads to an ultimate result of bringing glory to the Father. Since our ability to bear fruit is from the Lord those fruits should draw people’s attention to the Father, not us. Jesus says in the sermon of the mount in **Matthew 5:16** that: “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” When you watch sports on TV you can distinguish two different kinds of athletes – those who bring attention to themselves and those who bring attention to God. You can tell the difference by their reaction when they score. Some may pat themselves on the chest, signaling: “Look, I did it!” Some others may point their finger to heaven, meaning: “God did it through me!” If we are in Christ we should submit to His Word to bear fruit for His glory.

3. 關愛的流露 A Display of Affection

Bearing fruit is an external evidence of an eternal relationship in the Lord. It is a proof that we have life connection with God. It is a sign of our submission to Him. Thirdly, bearing fruit is a display of our affection to God and our fellow believers. Jesus says in **verses 9 and 10** of the passage: 9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.” Pay attention to the progression of thoughts here. Everything Jesus says in this passage ties together like one ring being attached to the next to form a chain. Our ability to bear fruit proves that we are in Christ. If we are in Him we will show our submission to His Word and obey it. If we obey His Word we display our affection to Him and remain in His love. Therefore, we can draw equal signs to the different elements I just shared. Now let us get a little deeper to the affection part. Notice how Jesus puts it in verse 9: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.” Do you get that? Jesus loves us the same degree as the Father loves Him. How does the Father love Jesus? It is a perfect, unreserved and unconditional love. Jesus tells us that He loves us the same way. Jesus did not just tell us verbally that He loved us completely He

even displayed His affection through actions. He says in **verse 13** that: Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. Jesus died for us on the cross when we were still rebellious in sins. Many of you should be familiar with **Romans 5:8** when Paul tells us: But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We are underserved of Christ's sacrificial love for us. But Jesus did not want us to be the beneficiaries of His love only. He commanded us to imitate after His love. He says in **verse 12**: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Then He repeats it in **verse 17**: "This is my command: Love each other." By obeying Jesus' command to love one another we prove that we have an eternal relationship with Him. The same apostle John further develops this truth in **1 John 4:20-21** when he says: 20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. If we say that we love God we must love one another too. If we love God we would naturally have a desire to obey His commands. Love and obedience go hand in hand. Just ask the single brothers who are in love and they will definitely agree with that. No matter how hard the mission may be, how tired he is and how inconvenient the timing may be he will still be willing to obey what his girl-friend asks him for. The guys in our midst would agree that sometimes we do the silliest things in the world just to please our lovers. However, things change instantly soon after we got married. What had happened? Some guys may think that the goal had been accomplished once he married the lady of his dream. No more sacrifice needs to be made. The sad thing is, we may have the same mentality soon after we became a Christian. When we first accepted Christ we were zealous in everything. We preached the gospel to everyone whom we know and do not know. We spent hours in the church and committed to every ministry duty we were asked to do. A few years later we lack interest in the spiritual matters. Our meeting attendance becomes sporadic. When we are invited to serve, we replied: "Let me think about it," meaning that you should find someone else. Even when we serve we may pick and choose the things we like to do. Sometimes we may grumble in our hearts: "Why I am always recruited to do trivial things like cleaning and baby-sitting, while other people get the spotlight and serve in more prominent positions?" We become intolerant of our brothers and sisters. We are easily ticked off when there is any disagreement. Let us grow in our affection toward God and our fellow believers.

CONCLUSION

Bearing fruit is an external evidence of an eternal relationship in the Lord. It is a natural result that requires no coercion. When there is life there will be growth. Years ago before a family moved away from St. Louis they gave us a pot of Ivy with long vines that they had been keeping for years. I am not a grower, either is my wife. Since the plant was way too long and our space was limited my wife decided to cut off a section of it and move it to a different pot. She expected that by burying the cut end into the soil the plant would survive. However, weeks later the plant withered and died. The reason is very simple. Though it might look like that the plant had life on the outside without roots the green leaves eventually turned brown and crumbled. Brothers, sisters and friends: what kind of branches are you? Are you a dry stem that shows no life, plastic flowers that may look good but actually does not grow or a healthy branch that connects to Jesus Christ the true vine and keeps producing fruits?