

LESSON 291

LIFE AND FRUIT

Related Scripture: John 14:1-21

KEY VERSE: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father but by me."—John 14:6.

Lesson Scripture: John 15:1-16

Introduction:

Perhaps few figures used in Bible teaching are more abused and misunderstood than the metaphor of the vine and the branches in Jesus' teaching on fruit-bearing. As usual, the difficulties are not in the teaching of the Bible itself, but in the willful dragging of texts out of contexts.

Among the most universally admitted and commonly ignored principles of interpretation are, first, the consideration of context and, second, the limited application of figurative language. Let us be careful to note, therefore, that the metaphor of the vine and the branches has simply nothing to do with church polity; and further that it cannot possibly contradict the Bible teaching of the eternal security of the genuine believer in Christ as plainly declared in literal language in hundreds of passages of inspired scripture.

No—the aspect of Christian life that Jesus illustrated with this metaphor is the aspect of fruitbearing or good works in the lives of individual disciples or believers, especially in connection with the maintenance of fellowship with Him. So recognized, the figure is not too difficult.

For an outline of the lesson we may note:

1. Patrimony, John 15:1
2. Purgation, John 15:2, 3
 - a. Manner of purging, 2
 - b. Means of purging, 3
3. Production, John 15:4-6
 - a. Branches remaining, 4
 - b. Branches replete, 5
 - c. Branches removed, 6
4. Prayer, John 15:7
5. Participation, John 15:8-10
 - a. Obedience demanded, 8
 - b. Obedience demonstrated, 9
 - c. Obedience determined, 10
6. Prescriptions, John 15:11-13
 - a. Love supplying, 11
 - b. Love specifying, 12
 - c. Love sacrificing, 13
7. Predestination, John 15:14-16
 - a. Faithful friends, 14
 - b. Favored friends, 15
 - c. Fruitful friends, 16

Notes on the Printed Text:

Patrimony, John 15:1.

Israel is described in the Old Testament as having been planted "a noble vine" (Jer. 2:21) and as later becoming "an empty vine" (Hos. 10:1). But in the New Testament economy Jesus is the true vine, and His Father is the husbandman, farmer, or vinedresser. It is a bold figure, not to be pressed too hard. Christ Himself is our patrimony; individual believers, if genuine, are vitally joined to Him as branches are to the vine; and the God Who planted that vine is carefully tending the vine and all its branches to be sure that He will gather suitable fruit.

Purgation, John 15:2, 3.

Left to itself, a vine naturally runs wild, producing an abundance of new branches with plenty of leaves and little fruit. A good farmer of grapes must know what and when and where to prune in order to encourage the growth of grapes rather than leaves. Men may neglect their property, but God does not neglect His.

Manner of Purging, 2.

Some branches appear which bear no fruit. The word translated "taketh away" here can be rendered "lifts up." When a "branch" (that is, a Christian) bears no fruit, God either lifts it out of the dirt into the air and sunshine where it will bear, or He takes it away out of this world to make room for other branches that will bear.

Every branch that bears fruit produces also a surplus of leaves and twigs that the good farmer trims off to increase the production of fruit. No branch escapes this purging. (Compare Hebrews 12:6-8.)

Means of Purging, 3.

Vinedressers of this world use pruning hooks or shears; God uses His word, especially the word spoken by His Son, to purge unhealthy growth.

Production, John 15:4-6.

Jesus used the obvious facts of natural plant life to illustrate principles of spiritual fruitbearing. As with any figure, the application must be limited. A plant does not possess eternal life as Christ does, nor have its branches received the gift of eternal life as genuine believers have; to argue from this figure that a believer's life is no more lasting than the life of a literal branch cut off from a literal vine is about as intelligent as to argue that he must grow literal green leaves on his body and produce literal grapes.

Branches Remaining, 4.

Remaining or abiding in Christ, as spoken of here, has to do with our fellowship with Him in this world, not with the eternal relationship which all true believers have to Him. We must remain in vital fellowship with our Lord in order to bear spiritual fruit.

Branches Replete, 5.

We can bear much fruit or we can do nothing. It all depends on whether we remain in constant fellowship with Christ. "He that abideth in me, and I in him," said Jesus, is the one that produces "much fruit." It is through the indwelling Spirit that Jesus abides in us; it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to abide in Him; and the fruit we bring forth is the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22, 23.)

Key Verse:

"And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."—I John 4:21.

Loving God must come first. Bogus Christianity and other false religions of the world try to put first a supposed love for mankind—a love that cannot possibly be of a quality acceptable to God. We are incapable of loving our fellow creatures as we ought until we learn to love God Who created us all. But if we love Him, then we are commanded to love others—with a divine love especially for our brethren, but in some sense extending even to our enemies. (Mat. 5:44.)