

## FRUIT-BEARING

Mark Kolchin

Every true believer has a responsibility to bear fruit for the Lord, a fact supported by the Scriptures, beginning to end. In Ex. 28, Aaron's priestly robe was to be adorned on the hem with pomegranates and golden bells. The pomegranates speak of the visible aspect of our testimony—fruit-bearing—and the golden bells, the audible aspect in our testimony and service for Him. In Num. 17, Aaron's rod that budded is a powerful picture of Christ as our Great High Priest in His resurrection ministry. But it is also a compelling example of the responsibility of the believer to walk in newness of life and to also bud and blossom and bear fruit. In the parable of the soils in Matt. 13, the only soil that the Lord spoke well about was the soil which brought forth fruit; some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some one hundred-fold (v. 8). It represents the genuine believer whose fruitful life demonstrates the undeniable proof of properly receiving the Gospel seed. Likewise, in writing to the Colossian believers the apostle Paul commended them for the evidence of their true faith in Christ by the fact that the Gospel brought forth fruit in their lives from the very first day since they knew the grace of God in truth (Col. 1:6). The case is clear: every believer should bear fruit for the Lord.

But not only is there a clear *case* for bearing fruit, but there is also a clear *command* for bearing fruit. To those whose lives were impacted through the ministry of John the Baptist, the confirming word to them was: "*Bring forth fruits, meet for repentance*" (Matt. 3:8). Their repentance would be substantiated by the fruit that would be evident in their lives. Likewise, in Rom. 7:4 the command for fruit-bearing is also clearly stated: "*Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God*". The Lord said to His disciples in John 15: "*Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear fruit, so shall ye be my disciples*" (v. 8). It was not just a suggestion; it was a mandate from the Lord himself. Later, He stated: "*You have not chosen Me but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain...*" (John 15:16). He has called us to bring forth fruit and for that fruit to remain. This fruit comes from abiding in Him and results in the Father being glorified. The Lord Himself promised that the Holy Spirit will dwell in us forever (John 14:7, 16, 23), but for the Holy Spirit to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit requires that we are in communion with Him. We abide in Christ as we dwell close to Him. This was the essence of Paul's prayer to the Ephesians when he wrote: "*that Christ might dwell in your hearts by faith*" (Eph. 3:17). This should be our prayer as well. But how "close" are we to the Lord and how much fruit is being displayed as a result of being near Him? True, *positionally* we are very near to God and nearer we cannot be, but *practically*, perhaps we could be a little bit nearer.

The NT identifies four different categories of fruit-bearing for the Christian. The first relates to the fruit of our *character*. These are the inward attitudes and qualities that shape our personality and make up our personal, private lives. Often it is easy to identify the more obvious sins of the flesh, both in ourselves and in others. But attitudes are far more difficult to detect and are also displeasing to the Lord, if contrary to the Word of God. Gal. 5:22-23 describes the multifaceted dimension of the fruit of the Spirit and the type of attitudes that God desires for the Christian. This fruit reflects Christ-likeness; something the law could never produce (v. 23). These are the virtues and graces manifested in the life of every born-again believer through the purifying work of the Holy Spirit, which we should be diligent in cultivating (2 Peter 1:3-7). Are we working on these qualities through the help of the Holy Spirit as we pray and read God's Holy Word? If we are, this fruit will be reflected in our demeanor and

then wonderfully displayed through our kind words and deeds in our lives for the sake of Christ and His kingdom.

These kind words and deeds are the actions that represent the second category of fruit-bearing in the NT, our *conduct*. Paul encouraged the Philippian believers to be sincere and without offense until the Day of Christ, “*being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 1:11). He acknowledged that their public lives and actions evidenced the work of Christ within. One of the ways that this fruit was exhibited in their experience was by the financial gift they sent to him. Paul rejoiced that this sacrificial gift was fruit that abounded to their account (Phil. 4:17). Giving to the work of the Lord is a fine example of fruit-bearing and one in which there could be more displayed! But giving is not all there is in terms of the fruit of conduct. James 3:8 reminds us that the action of peacemaking also qualifies as fruit: “*now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by them that make peace*”. There could also be more of this fruit displayed as well! Fruit-bearing is not just a private, attitudinal matter; it is outward and action-oriented.

A third category of fruit-bearing relates to our *conversation*, namely our worship of the Lord and the frequency by which we render thanks to the Lord. Heb. 13:15 reminds us: “*By Him therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks unto His Name*”. We should thank the Lord continually for all He did for us in salvation and all He does for us in His present intercessory ministry on our behalf. The leper that was healed along with nine other lepers demonstrated this fruit when he came back and consciously thanked the Lord, who was surprised that the others did not do the same. We are exhorted in 1 Thess. 5:18: “*In everything give thanks for this is the will of God concerning you.*” Each one of us ought to continually give thanks to the Lord, no matter what the situation may be. As Psalm 107:2 states: “*Let the redeemed of the Lord who He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy*”.

The fourth category of fruit-bearing in the NT deals with those we win to the Lord, our *converts*. In writing to the Romans, Paul expressed his desire to win others for Christ when he said: “*that I might have some fruit among you also, as also among the other Gentiles*” (Romans 1:13). He also referred to the house of Stephanas as the firstfruits of Achaia. Certainly, this is fruit that will always remain since no true believer will ever perish. What a worthy endeavor! If the great apostle Paul humbly requested prayer to open his mouth and speak boldly for the Lord (Eph. 6:19-20), how much more should we ask for help in speaking for Christ? Certainly, Paul longed for this fruit in his life and we should too.

To have these four aspects of fruit-bearing displayed in our lives is challenging enough—it requires that we honestly and objectively be before the Lord in prayer, and not just give Him lip service, but that we understand our responsibility and act on those duties with His help. But what truly makes the concept of fruit-bearing even more challenging is its progressive aspect alluded to by the Lord in the Upper Room Discourse. In John 15, the Lord explained that our fruit should advance from the level of no fruit, some fruit and more fruit (v. 2), to much fruit (v. 5, 8) and much glory to our Father in Heaven. Through extrapolation, this means that our fruit for God which was non-existent at one time in our lives before Christ, should always be on the increase. In other words, our joy, our patience, our love for others, our actions, our thanksgiving, our worship, those we win for Christ – these aspects of fruit-bearing should always be growing as we journey toward Heaven. But is it? Has our commitment to this fruit remained or has it become stagnant and static? Is it increasing or is it waning? Is it at the level that it once was when our lives were characterized by first love, or has it slipped back through sin

or spiritual neglect? These are challenging questions indeed for every child of God who thinks through the issue of bearing fruit for God. Paul stated his desire to the Philippians to upwardly progress in his walk with the Lord when he said: "*I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*". (Phil. 3:14) May that be our desire also as we think through our responsibility to increase in our responsibility of bearing fruit for God.