Fruitfulness in Service
Steven R. Cook, D.Min., M.Div.

Fruitfulness in service is an experiential blessing available to the believer who walks in fellowship with God and yields himself to His purposes. Every Christian possesses the same perfect standing in Christ (Rom. 5:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 2:10), but not every Christian produces the same spiritual fruit in time. Salvation is entirely by grace through faith and is received totally apart from works (Rom. 3:28; 4:5; Eph. 2:8-9), whereas fruitfulness belongs to the believer's subsequent walk and service (Eph. 2:10). God saves the believer and places him in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-28). He also desires that the believer mature spiritually and become useful in His service (Eph. 4:12-15; 2 Tim. 2:21). Fruitfulness, therefore, must never be confused with salvation or treated as evidence necessary to prove that salvation has occurred. It belongs to the Christian life after salvation and concerns what God produces through the believer who walks by faith according to His word. According to Lewis Sperry Chafer:

> Though in perfect and unalterable union with Christ, the believer will be fruitless except he remains in that obedient relation to Christ wherein the power of the Spirit may be realized in and through him…Union with Christ is God's undertaking and is wrought for, and continues as the portion of, the one who merely believes; communion is the believer's undertaking—a specific plan of life which calls for an intelligent purpose and method of life, adapted to the precise will of God, on the part of the one who is saved.[1]

Jesus explained the basis of spiritual fruitfulness in John 15 through the imagery of the vine and branches. He said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The branch does not generate life from itself. It bears fruit because it remains in vital fellowship with the vine. In the same way, the Christian cannot produce divine good through human energy, personality, talent, religious enthusiasm, or moral determination. The believer may accomplish many things in the energy of the flesh, but Jesus' statement remains absolute: "apart from Me you can do nothing." The issue is divine production. Fruitfulness results from abiding fellowship with Christ and dependence upon the resources God provides. According to Warren Wiersbe:

> The key word is *abide;* it is used eleven times in John 15:1–11 ("continue" in John 15:9 and "remain" in John 15:11). What does it mean to "abide"? It means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to

[1] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 164–165.

> produce fruit. This certainly involves the Word of God and the confession of sin so that nothing hinders our communion with Him (John 15:3). It also involves obeying Him because we love Him (John 15:9–10)… This abiding relationship is natural to the branch and the vine, but it must be cultivated in the Christian life. It is not automatic. Abiding in Christ demands worship, meditation on God's Word, prayer, sacrifice, and service—but what a joyful experience it is! Once you have begun to cultivate this deeper communion with Christ, you have no desire to return to the shallow life of the careless Christian.[2]

Jesus also connected fruitfulness directly with the glory of God, saying, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:8). To glorify God means to display His character, power, grace, and goodness so that He receives the recognition and praise that properly belong to Him. The fruitful Christian glorifies God because his life demonstrates what God can produce through a believer who walks in dependence upon Him. The glory belongs to God because He supplies the truth, power, opportunity, and grace necessary for spiritual production. The believer participates through faith, obedience, and availability, but God is ultimately the source of the fruit. According to Earl Radmacher, "For the branch to produce more fruit, it must abide, which means to dwell, to stay, to settle in, to sink deeper. The way to abide in Christ is to obey (15:10; 1 John 3:24). The believer who lovingly obeys the Word of God produces much fruit."[3]

Abiding in Christ is experiential, not positional. Jesus was speaking to men who were already His disciples and described a fellowship relationship that could either be maintained or neglected. He commanded them, "Abide in Me, and I in you" (John 15:4). The imperative demonstrates human responsibility. The believer must choose to remain in fellowship with the Lord through obedience to His word. Jesus connected abiding directly with His teaching when He said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you" (John 15:7), and He later connected abiding with obedience: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love" (John 15:10). Thus, fruitfulness is conditional. Salvation is secure, but fruitful service depends upon positive volition toward God's word, continued fellowship, obedience, and dependence upon Him. Radmacher adds, "Christ loves believers unconditionally (John 15:9). But as believers obey Christ's Word and abide in His love, they come to experience and understand His love for them more and more (Eph. 3:14-19)."[4]

---

[2] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 355.

[3] Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 1348.

[4] Ibid., 1348.

Scripture also explains that spiritual fruitfulness involves both divine provision and human responsibility. God does not command fruitfulness and then leave the Christian to manufacture it by himself. The believer learns God's word and allows it to shape his thinking (Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:16), maintains fellowship with God through confession (1 John 1:7-9), walks by means of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18), obeys what he has learned (John 15:10; Jam. 1:22), and presents himself to God for service (Rom. 12:1; 2 Tim. 2:21). These are not conditions for maintaining eternal life but conditions for experiential fellowship and spiritual production. God supplies the resources; the believer chooses whether to utilize them. As biblical truth fills the mind, the Holy Spirit empowers the walk, and the believer responds in faith and obedience, God produces divine good through him. This combination of divine provision and human responsibility is essential to spiritual growth. According to Charles Ryrie, "Discipline is a good illustration of the combination of the divine and human in sanctification, for while it is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), it is also the fruit of human effort."[5]

The first expression of spiritual fruitfulness is internal character produced by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). Significantly, Paul calls this the "fruit of the Spirit," not the fruit of human determination. These qualities are produced as the believer walks by means of the Spirit rather than according to the flesh. Paul commanded, "walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). The Christian possesses the indwelling Spirit from the moment of salvation (1 Cor. 6:19), but experiential spirituality requires that he be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). As biblical truth renovates the mind and the believer consistently applies that truth under the Spirit's influence, Christlike character increasingly develops in his life (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Internal spiritual character naturally expresses itself externally in divine good production. God has prepared good works for believers to perform, for Paul states, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). These post-salvation works constitute God's intended sphere of Christian service. Paul encouraged believers to "learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful" (Tit. 3:14). A Christian can be fruitful or unfruitful depending upon his spiritual walk. Fruitfulness occurs when biblical truth in the soul, the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit, and obedient faith produce conduct that accomplishes God's purposes.

---

[5] Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Dubuque, IA: ECS Ministries, 2005), 190.

Spiritual fruitfulness also benefits and edifies others. God does not develop Christian character merely for the believer's private enjoyment. He produces love so that others may be loved, kindness so that others may receive kindness, generosity so that needs may be met, spiritual gifts so that believers may be served, and biblical wisdom so that others may be instructed and encouraged. Paul wrote, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10). He similarly instructed Titus that believers should "be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men" (Tit. 3:8). God works in the believer, and then through the believer for the benefit and edification of others. William MacDonald states:

Fruitfulness also involves availability and usefulness to God. Paul told Timothy that the believer who cleanses himself from evil men and false doctrine (2 Tim. 2:16-18) "will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). Separation from corrupting influences promotes spiritual fruitfulness because the believer who maintains purity in doctrine and conduct is positioned for honorable service and useful work in the hands of his Master. Paul similarly wrote that if a man builds upon the foundation of Christ with "gold, silver, precious stones," his work will survive divine evaluation and receive reward, whereas works characterized as "wood, hay, straw" will be burned up (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Christian activity and work of enduring value are therefore not synonymous. What matters is not merely that something was done, but whether the work possesses value that survives Christ's evaluation.

Fruitfulness is also part of the blessed and best life God intends for the Christian in time. This does not mean a life without suffering, adversity, loss, persecution, or testing. Jesus Himself promised His disciples tribulation in the world (John 16:33), and Paul experienced extraordinary suffering while faithfully serving God (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Rather, the blessed life is the life lived according to God's design. It is characterized by fellowship with Him, spiritual stability, divine viewpoint, usefulness, meaningful service, and the inner fruit produced by the Holy Spirit. Jesus connected obedience and abiding with joy when He said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love," and then added, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:10-11). The best Christian life is not necessarily the easiest life. It is the life in which the believer increasingly experiences what God intends for him as he walks according to His word and accomplishes His purposes.

Fruitfulness in service is both a privilege and a responsibility. God supplies the spiritual life (John 10:10; Rom. 6:4), His word supplies divine viewpoint (Ps. 119:105; Rom. 12:2), the Holy Spirit supplies enabling power (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18), and God

provides opportunities for service (1 Cor. 16:9; Col. 4:3). The believer supplies positive volition, faith, obedience, and availability. As he remains in fellowship (1 John 1:7-9), learns and applies God's word (Jam. 1:22-25; Heb. 5:14), walks by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), and presents himself for service (Rom. 12:1; 2 Tim. 2:21), God produces fruit through him (John 15:4-5; Gal. 5:16, 22-23). Such fruit glorifies God by displaying His character and grace (John 15:8), edifies and benefits others (Eph. 4:12-16; Gal. 6:10), advances the believer toward spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:13-15; Heb. 5:14), contributes to a life of spiritual stability and joy (John 15:10-11; Gal. 5:22-23), and results in eternal reward (1 Cor. 3:14-15).

Conclusion

Fruitfulness in service is a conditional blessing of the Christian life. The believer who abides in Christ bears fruit, and the believer who consistently abides bears "much fruit" (John 15:4-5). God provides everything necessary for spiritual production, but the Christian must choose to walk in the sphere where that production occurs. Fruitfulness does not make the believer more saved, justified, or secure. It makes him more mature, useful, and effective in accomplishing God's purposes in time. Such fruitfulness glorifies God (John 15:8), increases usefulness to God (2 Tim. 2:21), produces the blessings associated with obedience and fellowship (John 15:10-11), and results in eternal reward (1 Cor. 3:14). In this sense, the fruitful life is the best life available to the Christian in time. Salvation is unconditional and secure; fruitfulness is conditional and experiential. God supplies the resources; the believer chooses whether to walk in them.