

### Exegesis

**Vs. 4-5** – Now that he’s highlighted the importance of bearing fruit (vs. 2), Jesus explains *how*, exactly, the disciples are to be fruitful: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." The Greek word translated as "abide" is μένω (*menō*) and, of its 120 occurrences in the N.T., over half of them (68x's) occur in one of the books written by John.<sup>1</sup> And given that it's a pretty common word, there are several ways to translate this verb: "dwell," "stay," "continue to live," "remain," .etc.<sup>2</sup> But, whether speaking literally as in 1:38-39 or metaphorically, the concept being conveyed is the same: *togetherness*. In *communing* with the Son of God, the disciple is *connected* to the life-giving power of Jesus Christ. And because of their *continued* and *active* fellowship, the disciple will bear fruit. So much so that, should there be a lack of fruit, it is evidence that a "branch" is not actually connected to the True Vine at all. There is no such thing as a fruitless disciple. That would be like a star that doesn't shine or a fire doesn't give off heat.

But what was Jesus referring to when he used the term "fruit"? Admittedly, the word could refer to converts (cf. Rom. 1:13). But, given its usage elsewhere in the N.T., it is likely John's audience would've understood that the metaphor referred to "moral fruit,"<sup>3</sup> as in the Christian virtues—i.e., answered prayer (vs. 7), repentance (Mat. 3:8, 10; Lu. 3:8-9; 13:1-9), obedience (Matt. 7:15-23), wholesome speech (Mat. 12:33-37), love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23), righteousness (Phil. 1:11; Heb. 12:11), holiness (Rom. 6:22), good works (Col. 1:10), peacemaking (Ja. 3:18), financial aid (Rom. 15:28; Phil. 4:17), truth (Eph 5:9), persecution (2. Tim. 2:3-6), thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15), wisdom (Jam. 3:17), and so on. Thus, when the Lord speaks about "fruit," he refers to *all the things* that come from a relationship with him and not only those individuals we may win to Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6-9). Just as light is evidence that a lamp is connected to an electrical grid, fruit is evidence that a branch is connected to the vine. Righteous living (in all that that phrase entails) is the undeniable proof that Jesus has taken up residence in a person's life.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 41x's in his gospel account, 23x's in 1 Jn, 3x's in 2 Jn, and 1x in Revelation.

<sup>2</sup> Klink (2016), p. 653; Kruse (2017), p. 368;

<sup>3</sup> Keener (2012), 2:997.

<sup>4</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 369; Köstenberger (2008), p. 454.

Consequently, living a fruitful Christian life *apart* from Christ is impossible. Sadly, this has not deterred some from trying to do so under their own power (cf. 2 Tim. 3:5). Jude calls such people “clouds...without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12). This is why Jesus says, quite emphatically, “without me ye can do nothing.”<sup>5</sup> As the Son was powerless without the Father, the disciple is powerless without Jesus (cf. 5:19-20, 30; 2 Cor. 3:5).<sup>6</sup> Nothing is *possible* without Christ, but *with* Jesus, nothing is *impossible* (cf. Mat. 19:26; Mar. 9:23; Phil. 4:13).<sup>7</sup> So much so that one cannot help but “bear fruit” when they’re in union with Christ. Those who remain faithful to Jesus will become an unstoppable force of spiritual production. How could it be otherwise? Since the longer a disciple abides in Christ, the more they naturally become like Christ, which is, arguably, going to be the *most fruitful* version of that disciple (cf. 1 Jn. 2:6). As a rule, a follower of Jesus does not bring forth a *little* fruit, but “*much* fruit.” After tapping into the True Vine, the believer soon begins discovering fruit in every facet of their life. They start avoiding destructive behaviors and begin embracing good ones. Fruitfulness is the byproduct of discipleship.

**Vs. 6** – If fruitfulness results from abiding in Christ, what is the consequence for not abiding? Jesus explains, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” Though he is not explicitly mentioned as the “Husbandman,” God is the one who enacts this judgment. And though he is longsuffering, God’s patience will eventually run out (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8-10). And just as a fruitless branch is suitable only for kindling (Ezek. 15:1-8), those who do not abide in Christ will be thrown “into the fire and...burned.”

Interestingly, though judgment is a key theme throughout John’s account (cf. 3:18; 8:21, 24; 12:25, 48; 17:12), vs. 6 is the closest he gets to mentioning hell.<sup>8</sup> And we should not miss that it comes in the context of those who *appear* to be a part of the vine but who prove, by their fruitlessness, that they aren’t connected to Jesus.<sup>9</sup> It is as if hell, at least in this context, is being used to jolt supposed “Christians” from their reverie. In fact, though the metaphor is different (a field instead of a vine), the Lord makes a similar point about judgment in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 when he told the parable of the weeds. Initially, the wheat seed is indistinguishable from

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<sup>5</sup> Carson (1991), p. 516, “The Christian or Christian organization that expands by external accretion, that merely apes Christian conduct and witness, but is not impelled by life within, brings forth dead crystals, not fruit.” Keener (2012), 2:998, “...the best of human effort apart from God’s own enablement is worthless.”

<sup>6</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 454.

<sup>7</sup> Morris (1995), p. 596.

<sup>8</sup> Keener (2012), 2:1000.

<sup>9</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 455, “Some who appear to be members in good standing in the Christian community may eventually turn out never truly to have been part of it in the first place, Judas being the paradigmatic example (see esp. 1 Jn. 2:19).”

that of a weed. Eventually, however, as the two plants grow together, the difference becomes unmistakable. And just as with the fruitless branch, the weed does not survive long after its nature is exposed. As Jesus explains, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Mat. 13:41-42).

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

### **Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 55 | John 15:4-6**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

As a rule, a follower of Jesus does not produce a *little* fruit but "*much* fruit." In other words, fruitfulness is indicative of discipleship. So much so that one cannot help but "bear fruit" when they're in union with Christ. How could it be otherwise? The longer someone abides in Christ, the more they naturally become like Christ, which will arguably make that person the most fruitful version of themselves (cf. 1 Jn. 2:6).

But the reverse is also true. As fruitfulness results from abiding in Christ, fruitlessness is the consequence of not abiding. Once an unfruitful branch is discovered, what is a gardener to do? Such a branch is suitable only for *kindling* (Ezek. 15:1-8). And, sadly, those who do not abide in Christ will meet a similar end, as Jesus warns in Jn. 15:6, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

All true disciples will bear fruit. All false disciples will be burned.

**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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