

FRUITFULNESS: DIFFERENT KINDS OF FRUIT

by Dan Trygg

Jesus said, "I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:16). **God is at work in our lives to produce His fruit through us.** He is looking for and desiring to see the fruit of Jesus in our lives. **Our fruitfulness is the fulfillment of the effect of the Christ-life within us.**

In the same way, in the plant kingdom, bearing fruit is the fulfillment of the life energies of the plant working out in the natural development of growth to maturity. Fruit is that for which the plant lives. Oftentimes, reproduction is an activity that will take precedence over any other, even when life is threatened, because it is so significant to the purpose of the plant's existence.

There may be other ways of looking at fruitfulness than that of reproduction alone. In general terms, fruit is that which is useful both to the life of the plant and to others, as well. *Any production of growth*, whether specifically the fruit of the plant, or its stalk, leaves, or root system, is useful to the plant. As mentioned above, the completion of the plant's life cycle is reproduction. Virtually any kind of growth is either directly related to this function, or provides a support base from which reproduction can be accomplished. Whether the actual seed-fruit is edible or not, the growth of the plant is considered as the fruit of the ground, and is thus a God-given resource for the benefit of both man and beast (Gen. 1:29,30; 9:3).

Not every plant produces a seed that is profitable for consumption. In fact, this is the basic difference between fruits and vegetables. Plants whose seed-bearing products are what we consider edible are designated as fruit-bearing, their edible product being referred to as fruit. Vegetables, on the other hand, are plants that have seeds that are unprofitable for eating, but their leaves, stalks, or roots are usable. In either case, the product of the growth of the plant, as mentioned above, would be considered as "fruit of the ground".

Just as what we call fruitfulness in plants has more aspects to it than merely reproduction, the same would be true for our Christian lives. **Fruit-bearing can be a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted process.** Our perception of what "fruitfulness" is in the Christian life will reflect some of these principles that we can observe in the world of plants. There seems to be somewhat of a "fruit and vegetable" dimension to different Christians. There is also a vast difference in stages of development between different believers. *All* of the growth, however, ...both what is evident, and some which may be difficult to see..., is the "fruit" of Jesus' presence in the lives of these believers.

The Scriptures seem to delineate **three general areas of fruitfulness** which are products of the life of Jesus working within us:

- (1.) **Character, or Christlikeness** (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 5:22,23; Col. 3:5-11; Eph. 4:20-24; II Cor. 2:14-17; 3:17-4:17);
- (2.) **Good works** (Mt. 5:14-16; Tit. 2:11-14; 3:5-8; I Pet. 2:11,12; Jas. 1:19-27; 2:14-26; Gal. 6:9,10; Heb. 6:1-12); and,
- (3.) **Reproduction**, i.e., by affecting others to come to life in Christ (Mk. 4:1-20; Mt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8; Lk. 16:1-13; Col. 1:3-12; I Pet. 2:9,10).

It is important that we do not allow ourselves to limit our thoughts about fruitfulness to one area only. Too often, for example, I have seen committed, growing Christians who were

weighed down with guilt, living on the edge of despair, without any joy, and even questioning the reality of their new birth in Christ, all because they had not personally led someone to the Lord. Satan, the master of half-truths, had ensnared and bound them in a web of doubt and confusion by harassing them over and over again with the accusation that they were entirely unfruitful, ...even void of life in Christ at all... because they were apparently not producing in this area. Sloppy or shallow exegesis, partial perspectives, or unbalanced teaching provide our enemy with his most dangerous and effective fiery darts (Eph. 6:16 RSV). Ironically, he can use these most deftly against those whose hearts are sensitive, and who are sincere in their desire to grow and to please the Lord.

What is fruitfulness? It is the natural outworking of the life of Jesus, which is in us who are His, brought to its natural and full expression in us as we are:

- (a.) conformed to His character;**
- (b.) perform good works by His Spirit** and leading; and,
- (c.) have an impact on others** by their interaction with His truth and love revealed through us (II Cor. 3:2).

Bearing fruit is the focus and purpose of our new life in Christ. God has called us to this, and He, as the Master Gardener, is continually at work to nurture and encourage the new life that is in us to come to its completion and full expression in us in these areas.

Father, thank You for the signs of life that I can see stirring in me. Work out Your will, Your way, and Your fruitfulness in me.

FOR MEDITATION: Mark 4:26-28

"The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows -- how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first, the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head."

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Ministering the Word to One Another

"Many traditional churches are designed not for 'body function' but for 'preacher function'. Only the pastor or minister or some other teacher is delegated to share the Word of God with others in the church. Some pastors insist on being the only interpreter of Scripture in the church. The Bible teaches that every Christian must be involved in this process. All Christians are to 'speak the truth in love'.

"Don't misunderstand! It is not wrong for a pastor or teacher to open the Word of God through an extended exposition and message. In fact, this is good, right, and necessary. It was one means in the New Testament for teaching and preaching. But it was not the only means. In fact, more emphasis is placed in Scripture on mutual and informal teaching than on individual and formal communication. This probably is what the author of the Hebrew letter had in mind when he wrote 'Let us consider how we may spur *one another* on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting *together*, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us *encourage one another* -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching' (Heb. 10:24-25)."

Building Up One Another by Gene Getz