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FRUITFULNESS: WHY NO FRUIT?

by Dan Trygg

We have seen that not all who claim to be children of God are so in actuality.

However, the fact that some people might superficially identify themselves with Christ, whether through insidious Satanic infiltration, through religious self-deception, or through the inertia of family tradition, does not determine what the condition was of the rejected branches mentioned in Jn. 15. There are several facts, however, that would argue that they were not actually born again people.

(1.) The absence of the fruit-bearing process is evidence that there was no life within the branches at all. Fruit-bearing is always the natural outworking of the life of the plant. It is the goal or objective of its life-energy. *Since we know that the Vine itself is healthy, then the absence of fruit development can only be possible if there is no life-link between branch and Vine.* Obviously, in nature a branch cannot exist on a vine unless it had at sometime grown there, or been grafted there. As we have seen, the natural analogy breaks down because there are ways to be in the Vine, even having sprung out of the Vine, without having a spiritual life-link relationship drawing upon the Vine's power. The thrust of this analogy is not to focus on how to get into the Vine, but on the necessity for a vital relationship of dependence upon Him in order for fruitfulness to be produced.

(2.) A closer examination of Jesus' description of the pruning process, mentioned in vs. 2 and 3, **implies that these branches were not joined to the Vine in life.** According to these verses, the Vinedresser removes that which is dead or useless. With regard to the branches in which He finds the process of fruit-bearing, He trims away this unnecessary growth so that the life-flow might be more fully expressed in fruit. With regard to the fruitless branches, He cuts away the entire branch, there being no profit in it. This pruning activity is called cleansing (vs. 2). *The good branches were already clean because of their faith in Jesus' words* (vs. 3). The Vinedresser had need only to cleanse them from the growth which was dead, unprofitable, or in any way a departure from the goal of fruitfulness. He would cut them back to their "cleanness", their trimmed condition, as their best expression of the Vine's life. *In contrast, when dealing with the fruitless branches, the Vinedresser could find nothing "clean" in them. They evidently had not trusted in the truth of Jesus.* There was no life of the Vine in them to which He might trim them back. Thus, He removed them entirely, as far back as the Vine itself.

(3.) There are two factors involved in having life in Jesus. The first was true of both the cast-off branches and the disciples, i.e., **they were joined to the Vine.** The second ingredient for life is only mentioned in reference to the disciples, i.e., that **they had Jesus abiding in them** (Jn. 15:4,5; cf. 6:53-56). Admittedly, this is an argument from silence, but it could be that this was the essential difference between the two groups. **They both were in Jesus, but the Spirit of Jesus was only in the true disciples.** In Jn. 8:30-47, we have a classic example of this situation. These people believed Jesus and joined themselves to Him, but they had not really been transformed at all. Having heard some of what Jesus was teaching, ...that which was agreeable to them..., they had identified with Him, making some sort of profession of faith. However, when they began to see more clearly the full content of Jesus' message, they were offended (cf. Jn. 6:60-66) and became more resistant, even hostile, toward Him (Jn. 8:48-59). Very rapidly, *the true nature of their hearts was revealed* in this outward expression of evil fruit (Matt. 7:16-20; 12:33-35). In Jesus' analysis of their reaction to His teaching, He determined that they were not of God and they, therefore, could not hear God's Word.

(4.) After stating the principle of abiding in dependency upon the Vine in order to bear fruit, in vs. 4 and 5, the language Jesus employs in the following two verses sets forth two distinct possibilities. He uses differing forms of the same verb ("abide") that offer some unique nuances for us to consider. In both cases, He chose to use the subjunctive form of the

verb, which indicates a future possibility. This is usually translated as he “may”, “might”, or “shall” do something, especially when used in an “if” construction. In vs. 6, then, He uses a present subjunctive, referring to the ongoing action of abiding over a period of time. Verse 6 would literally be rendered, “If ever anyone may not be-abiding...”. The picture is of someone who either never takes the option of abiding in Jesus, or someone who is presently not abiding in Jesus. This person will be rejected and judged. If the latter interpretation were the correct understanding, then any lapse into sin would bring the consequent judgment. By this statement, there would be no second chance, no forgiveness or restoration. This obviously does not square with what the Bible teaches. One need only to look at the life of Peter (Lk. 22:54-62; Jn. 21; Gal. 2:11ff.), or the teachings of the apostle John regarding both the possibility of falling into sin and the promise of forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:8-10; 2:1), to see that forgiveness assuredly is offered to those who lapse into sin, if they, through repentance and confession, seek to return to Christ. Therefore, the former translation must be accepted as correct. **The option of verse 6, then, is that if anyone should ever *not* live in, dwell in, or abide in Jesus, he will be rejected and cast out unto destruction. This must be a reference to someone who never comes to Christ at all.**

In verse 7 there is a different construction used. Once again, there is a subjunctive verb used with the word “if”, meaning a future possibility or option. However, in this case Jesus uses an aorist subjunctive verb, instead of a present subjunctive as in vs. 6. The significance of this different verb tense is that the aorist form emphasizes action at a point in time. In other words, while the form in verse 6 indicates continual, or ongoing action, the form in verse 7 refers to action completed in a moment of time, a one-time, point-in-time event, or episode of action. Thus, the translation would be, “If ever you shall abide in Me (at a point in time), and My words shall (at a point in time) abide in you, whatever you wish you will ask and it will be done for you.” The emphasis of vs. 7, then, is that *any moment of true abiding* in Jesus and His will would be the condition for prevailing prayer, and its consequent fruitfulness (vs. 8).

The significance for our discussion, however, is that Jesus’ use of the aorist in vs. 7 clarifies how verse 6 must be understood. *It could only refer to a branch which never enters into abiding into the Vine*, not just a branch that has given up, or wandered away from, abiding. Why? Because the abiding/prevailing prayer relationship is the condition for glorifying the Father (cf. 14:13), bearing much fruit, and being true disciples (15:7,8). If you were to abide in Him once, with His Word abiding in you, there will be fruit. Consequently, according to verse 2, you would only experience pruning, not removal. Incidentally, this would be in accordance with Heb. 6:4-12, where the author is confident that the Hebrew Christians will *not* wander away into apostasy, but is “convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation” (vs. 9). Why? Because they are not like those mentioned in Heb. 6:7,8, who bring forth *only* bad fruit, regardless of endless cultivation. No. They *have shown* the life of Jesus resident within them by the good fruit which they have produced (vs. 10). **Fruitfulness is a sign of life. If Jesus’ life is in us, we can be sure that we will not be rejected or cut off as a branch. We may need to be pruned, but we will not be rejected.**

Father, thank you for the assurance that if we see the fruit of Jesus in our lives, then we know that we will not be lost or rejected. You will prune us to bear more fruit, but You will not cast us off. God, give us hearts that are responsive to you, so that we benefit from the discipline and trials that come to prune us (Heb. 12:1-13; Jas. 1:2-4). In this moment of clarity, we ask You to do whatever is necessary to teach us to abide in You. May our resulting lives bring You glory.

FOR MEDITATION: Hebrews 6:9,10

“Beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.”