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FRUITFULNESS: THE ABIDING PLACE

What is the basis for our life in the Vine? Where is that dwelling place where we are to live, and to which we must return when we have strayed? How are we incorporated into the Vine? To present the proper backdrop in order to answer these questions, we must look once again at the principle of fruit-bearing. Remember the principle that Jesus revealed regarding this subject? He said that a plant will always bear fruit according to its nature (Mt. 7:16-20; 12:33-35; Jn. 3:6). Thus, the fundamental problem with us as sinners is that we are sinful by nature (Eph. 2:1-3).

We can only produce fruit that is according to our spiritual-genetic make-up.

Consequently, there could be no hope for us producing good fruit unless our make-up was somehow dramatically transformed. This is fundamental to a correct understanding of Jesus' death, His resurrection, and the prospect of new birth in Him. **This drastic and complete transformation is exactly what God promised** in the Old Testament (Ezk. 11:19,20; Jer. 31:31-33) and made possible in the New Testament.

Rom. 5:12-21 presents the idea of Jesus' role as our representative head. Just as we all were somehow in Adam when he sinned, and became like him in his fallen state (I Cor. 15:47-49), so also we were somehow incorporated into Christ. Those who receive Him as their representative partake of the benefits of His death and resurrection, resulting in regeneration or "re-creation" in His image. Sin entered the world through Adam and, having affected him, tainted the entire race with its perversion. In a similar way, **through Jesus' one act of obedience unto death, and His resurrection to newness of life, all His spiritual descendants are affected by a spiritual regeneration or rebirth according to His image** (I Cor. 15:49). It is of primary importance to see that Jesus' work in dying for us involved more than just a payment for our sins. Our sins are only the *fruit* of our perverted root stock. His death was also the representative condemnation and cutting off of that root stock itself, as God poured out His wrath upon Jesus *as us*, i.e., in our place (Rom. 8:3; II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 3:18; Isa. 53:4-6). Then, as our representative, His resurrection from death to glorified life became the basis for our rebirth and future glory (Rom. 6:3-11).

The rebirth is like a re-creation of our spiritual-genetic make-up. Furthermore, the outflow of His life within us begins transforming the appearance of our fruit, etc., immediately. Although the power of sin is broken and our identity is changed, the apostle Paul mentions the possibility, the danger, of presenting our members to sin to bear *its* fruit, instead of enjoying the freedom that is in Christ (Rom. 6:12-23). The important thing to note, however, is that this is a defrauding, a prostitution of our real identity as "Christ-ones". Paul never presents sin as a necessary affliction that must be borne until Jesus comes. He sees it, rather, as an insidious, foreign force which still dwells within us, but is not part of the real "us" (Rom. 7:16-20). Instead, we are "new creatures" (II Cor. 5:17), who ought to see themselves as dead to sin but alive toward God, able now to do His will by His grace (Rom. 6:11-22; 8:2).

This is basically a description of what our "abiding place" is. Our place of life and continual dwelling is a place of death to the old life and motivations, and a place of re-creation into a new thing. This place of transformation, the place of death and life, of incorporation into the Vine, is the place where we are to return in order to abide. We are not to seek the transformation over and over again by new conversions. We are, rather, to return and continue in the creative work that began at our regeneration. Neither are we to seek a new or different power of life than that which we received from the Vine when we were joined with Him. It is, rather, the power of the life which is *already in us* that we are to seek to more fully receive and to continue in (Jn. 3:6; Eph. 3:20,21). We are to seek to increase our capacity both to receive and to express that indwelling life. That is where the process of abiding begins. **The place of abiding is the life-link which was established for those who have believed in Jesus**

and have, consequently, been made new in Him. The abiding process is remaining in that dependent, life-receiving relationship, as He produces growth and fruitfulness in us.

Father, thank You that Your plan never was rehabilitation; it has always been re-creation that was Your method for redeeming people. Yet, that message has so often been obscured in history, ...human kind attempting to make themselves better, more righteous, that they might somehow become more acceptable to You. How foolish! How impossible! Oh Most Holy God, how have our minds been so dull as to entertain the preposterous idea that He Who is Light could fellowship with darkness? Open the eyes of our understanding to see the genius, and the hope, of re-creation. Thank You that in Jesus I have been made fundamentally different, begotten of Your own substance in my innermost being. Help me to see my new life as it is, rooted in my unity with Jesus in past history, my present victory and future hope established firmly in Him and His work. You are the basis of my freedom, Lord Jesus. Make me sensitive to the whispers of Your indwelling life and quick to respond to Your leadings.

FOR MEDITATION: II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6: 11.

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

"Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

One-Anothering In The Body Of Christ

"NT writers exhorted believers to engage in specific activities that would enable the body of Christ to function effectively and to grow spiritually. Frequently they used a unique word to describe this mutual process -- the Greek word *allēlōn*, most frequently translated 'one another'. In fact, excluding the Gospels, the word is used 58 times in the NT."

Eleven of these times we are told to love one another. (Jesus had also commanded this an additional five times in the Gospel of John.) Practically, however, there are an additional twelve "one another word pictures" that can help us to implement this mutual love. These include recognizing that "we are members of one another" (Rom. 12:5) and the exhortations to "be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (vs. 10a), to "give preference to one another in honor" (vs. 10c), to "be of the same mind with one another" (vs. 16a), to "accept one another" (Rom. 15:7), to "admonish one another" (15:14), to "greet one another" (16:16), to "serve one another" (Gal. 5:13), "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6: 2), show "forbearance toward one another" (Eph. 4:2), "be subject to one another" (Eph. 5:21), and "encourage one another" (I Thess. 5:11).

Allēlōn is a reflexive pronoun in Greek. This means the action goes in both directions. For example, I love you and you love me, I encourage you and am encouraged by you. In his study of *allēlōn*, Dr. Gene Getz states, "These 'one another' functions are to be carried out by *all* members of the body of Christ -- not just by Christians who are specially gifted." This creates an atmosphere of loving, giving, and receiving where all are valued, all can participate and where all can be built up, affirmed, nurtured and strengthened. This is how the body is to function.

Selected portion and thoughts from Gene Getz' books, Building Up One Another (Victor Books: Wheaton, IL., 1979), pp. 4,5, and Sharpening the Focus of the Church (Victor Books: Wheaton, IL., 1988), pp. 163,164.