

John 15: Jesus' "Viability" Theology

Ultimate Fruitfulness

John 15.16

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you
so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.
Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*

The Progression of Fruitfulness

- ❖ In his “paradigm of viability” Jesus presented the evidence of viability: **fruit**.
- ❖ Viability begins with **inspection** by the True Gardener: no fruit, no viability: “*He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit*” (15.2a).
- ❖ When there is fruit, the True Gardener seeks **more fruit**: “*every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful*” (15.2b).
- ❖ But what the True Vine and the True Gardener really desire is “**much fruit**”—“*This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples*” (15.8).
- ❖ But there is an ultimate purpose that Jesus has in mind: “**fruit that will last**” (15.16)—fruit that has eternal value will “*result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed*” (1 Peter 1.7), eternal fruit that fulfills the Father’s eternal purpose for each of us (Ephesians 2.10).

Divine Purpose

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”

❖ *“I chose you and appointed you so that . . .”* In our study of the “theology of choosing” we saw that God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world. This reveals two fundamental truths about God that are repeatedly emphasized throughout Scripture: Everything God wills, speaks, and does is inherently eternal—because *He* is eternal. God never acts without an eternal purpose in mind. Whether it is God himself speaking in revelation of His purposes or a divine spokesman relaying His message, whether stated explicitly or implied, this dynamic of eternal nature and purpose underlies everything.

“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.” (GENESIS 17.7)

*“Who has done this and carried it through,
calling forth the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD — with the first of them
and with the last — I am he. (ISAIAH 41.4)*

*“I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, ‘My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please.’” (ISAIAH 46.10)*

*The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:
“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. (JEREMIAH 31.3)*

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (LUKE 21.33)

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. (HEBREWS 6.17-18)

- ❖ When Jesus said, “*I chose you,*” he is referring to an eternal action—one that took place before the beginning of time (cf. Ephesians 1.4); when he said, “*I appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last,*” he is emphasizing eternal purpose and value—eternal fruit that fulfills the Father’s eternal purpose for each of us:

For we are God’s [own] handiwork (His workmanship), recreated in Christ Jesus, [born anew] that we may do those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us [taking paths which He prepared ahead of time], that we should walk in them [living the life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live]. (EPHESIANS 2.10 AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

- ❖ Why is it important for us to emphasize these aspects of God's nature and purpose? For two reasons: (1) we must understand the nature of the True Vine so that we can bear "fruit that will last" and (2) we, like the disciples, are more inclined to view our purpose within the context of what relates to us and affects us.

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (ACTS 1.6-8)

- ❖ The Greek word for "appointed" ("ordained" KJV) is used by Jesus in chapter ten when he speaks of *laying down* his life (10.11, 15, 17-18); of Jesus (Hebrews 1.2) whom the Father has *appointed* to be the heir of all things; by Paul who said that he was *appointed* to be a preacher of the gospel (2 Timothy 1.11); and of us, to whom God has *committed* the message and ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5.19).

Grade A Quality

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars.

LUKE 6.43-44

- ❖ Both zucchini and hubbard belong to the squash family. Hubbard can be stored all winter, zucchini just a couple of weeks before it begins to degrade and rot. It is a very relevant picture as we read the words: “fruit that will last.”
- ❖ Interestingly, although Jesus has said much about fruit-bearing, he has spoken only in general terms about fruit. On the other hand, when we examine what he has said, we see that he has told us everything that is essential for bearing “*much fruit, fruit that will last.*”

- ❖ What has Jesus taught us about fruit-bearing, fruit-identification, and fruit-quality?
 - (1) He is the True Vine, the single source of fruit-life.
 - (2) We cannot bear fruit without a deep, abiding connection to the True Vine.
 - (3) His word, deeply and richly abiding within us, is essential for fruit-bearing.
 - (4) True fruit will resemble him—*“showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*
 - (5) There are no “seconds”—the grading standard is simple: *“just as I have . . .”*

- ❖ On another occasion when speaking about fruit, Jesus said: *“Each tree is recognized by its own fruit . . .”* In other words, “good fruit” is “Christ-fruit”—it looks like him (cf. Acts 4.13; 2 Corinthians 3.3), smells like him (cf. 2 Corinthians 2.14), tastes like him (cf. Galatians 5.22-23; Colossians 4.6). Christ-likeness—and Christ-fruitfulness—is the natural outcome of living a life that is deeply connected to him, one that is lived in full surrender and dependency, just as Jesus lived in relationship to the Father.

❖ *“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit”* (Matthew 12.33). As human branches, we have one major difference from vegetative branches: we possess a will. We must *choose* to abide deeply, to surrender and depend completely, to accept the pruning work of the True Gardener (cf. Hebrews 12.10-11), to obey as Jesus obeyed the Father, to love one another to the “laying down of our lives” just as he did (cf. 1 John 3.16-17). Whatever we choose to do, such as ingesting the words of Jesus, will be revealed in the quality of our fruit: *“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him”* (Matthew 12.35). We have a large responsibility, not one that is the result of human effort, but one that inevitably reveals how we have responded to the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit to draw us more deeply into the Christ-life (cf. Romans 6.11-13; 8.5, 13; Galatians 6.8; Ephesians 1.17; 2 Timothy 1.14, etc). Ultimately, each person’s work will be *“shown for what it [really] is”* (1 Corinthians 3.10-13).

Little Words, Big Significance

*“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you **so that** you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and **so that** whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”*

- ❖ We have seen that little words have great significance when Jesus is speaking—as it is here in the words “so that” (*hina*) which connect every emphasis in this verse (two are explicit, one is implied) and emphasize his divine purpose for us.
 - (1) Jesus chose us for **fruit-bearing mission**: “so that you might go” (Matthew 28.19). Remember, God has committed to us the work of reconciliation; it is through us that He makes His appeal to the world (2 Corinthians 18-20).
 - (2) Fruit of lasting quality must originate from Christ—his character, his motives, his surrender, his truth (cf. 1 Corinthians 3.11; 2 Corinthians 5.10).
 - (3) **Fruit-bearing prayer** is the most Christ-centered and glorifying prayer, the heart of our effectiveness (cf. Acts 4.29-33). May our cry be: “Lord, give me lasting fruit!”