



The Sharon Star

Bringing Forth the Fruit of the Vine

By Gilbert James

Metaphors and Parables

Our Lord Jesus Christ frequently used metaphors, usually in the form of parables, to illustrate His teachings by natural things. A metaphor is basically used for illustration by applying the characteristics of one object to another object. The two objects are not literally the same, but the one used as the metaphor possesses qualities which can clearly illustrate certain qualities of the other.

For example, one song writer describes our Lord Jesus Christ as a Fountain of Life. Of course, Jesus Christ is not literally a fountain. But the basic characteristic of a fountain in terms of its ever-flowing source of water is familiar to people and can quite appropriately describe or illustrate the truth of Jesus being a constant and eternal source of Divine life. Therefore, for a metaphor to be effective one must have a good understanding of its characteristics. A metaphor is effective when its characteristics either may be easily observed or information about it can be easily obtained. Understanding the characteristics of a metaphor helps to reveal the more profound and hidden characteristics of the object which the metaphor is used to illustrate. Therefore, Jesus used

familiar natural things as metaphors to illustrate spiritual characteristics which are not easily observed.

Union with God

One of the major truths of the Gospel is the union or oneness between God and believers in Christ. It is a profound spiritual truth, which in fact underlies the entire message of the Gospel. The essence of the message of the Gospel is that God came to earth in Christ to reconcile sinful man to Himself by the atoning work of Christ on the Cross (2Cor 5:19). Through this process of reconciliation every believer in Christ is brought into a relationship of oneness with God in Christ or is "baptized into Jesus" in God (Rom 6:3). This reality of entering into union with God in Christ through this glorious salvation which God offers to mankind is astonishing. Paul declares: "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

Atonement and reconciliation are the words mainly used in the Scriptures to describe the establishment of this union between God and believers in Christ. With a play on the syllables one can write the word atonement to read "at-one-ment". Both atonement and reconciliation refer to the bringing

about complete peace or "at-one-ment" between enemies by removing or compensating for the factors which produce the enmity. Thus, according to the Gospel, the atoning work of Jesus Christ through the Cross has brought mankind reconciliation or "at-one-ment" with God in Christ by paying for and taking away our sins against God. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom 5:10-11).

In fact, knowing that His atoning work on the Cross would have removed the enmity between God and all who believe in Him, Jesus specifically prayed for reconciliation and oneness between God and all who believe in Him. "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that **they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (Jn 17:20-21).

The truth of the union of a true Christian with God in Christ is the

essence of Christianity. The reality of this vital union is brought out in the concept of all believers in Christ being members of the Body of Christ. For instance, we read in Eph 5:29-30: “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.” Christianity is actually the life of Christ lived in everyone who has come to believe in Christ. Paul’s testimony is the testimony of every genuine Christian: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The Parable of the Vine

The union of Christian believers with Christ may be a truth declared plainly in the Scriptures, but its reality is not always easily perceived. It may not be easy for us to perceive that “we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” but the Scriptures declare it and we must believe it and explore its reality. It is a profound truth that continues to amaze us and challenge our faith. Therefore, the use of metaphors can be extremely helpful in bringing home this truth to us. One instance where Jesus took time to expound the significance of the union between Him and those who believe in Him is in John 15. In that discourse Jesus used a parable known as the parable of the vine. In that parable He used the vine, its branches, and its fruit, as well as a vinedresser to illustrate the union between Him and His disciples and the purpose of this union.

The parable of the vine has been of tremendous inspiration to many believers in Christ and innumerable studies and messages have emerged from it. The fact that vineyards were common in Palestine during the time when Jesus was on earth explains why the use of the vine, its branches, its fruit, and vinedresser were ideal metaphors for Jesus to

use to illustrate the integral union between Himself and His disciples and God’s purpose for this union. In this article, I will focus on the metaphors which Jesus used in the parable to illustrate the union which characterizes the relationship between Him and the Church, and, more specifically, the purpose of this amazing union.

First of all, we will notice that Jesus introduces the parable by declaring: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1). This introductory declaration, we will see, has important implication for the lesson which the parable illustrates. The true vine and the vinedresser are introduced right at the very onset of the parable as the two foundational and primary factors for whatever it is Jesus intends the parable to illustrate. And He uses these two primary factors, the true vine and the vinedresser, as metaphors to represent Him and His Father respectively.

It is not without significance that Jesus in the parable first of all points attention to Himself and the Father – the vine and the vinedresser – as primary characters in this lesson. Notice that nothing is yet mentioned about branches and fruit. What is highlighted in the beginning of the discourse is that there is a true vine and a vinedresser – Christ and the Father. What then is the significance of highlighting Christ and the Father respectively at the beginning of the parable of the vine?

The Beginning

Whatever seems to be today the vast complexity of our world and the wider creation, as well as the Christian Church and its immense religious network and institutions; there standing in indisputable pre-eminence at the beginning of all is God, the Father and the Son and the Spirit. That reality may be ignored generally by unregenerate humanity, but true believers cannot ignore it. The Bible introduces the history of creation with a brief but

forthright statement: “**In the beginning GOD created** the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1).

Later, Paul uses a few more words to expound the same truth as it relates to the pre-eminence of the Son of God. Paul writes: “He is the image of the invisible God, **the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created** that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And **He is before all things**, and in Him all things consist. And **He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn** from the dead, that **in all things He may have the pre-eminence**. For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col 1:15-20).

From its beginning in Christ Jesus, through centuries of diverse tribulations and triumphs, the Church has emerged and exists today as a powerfully complex many-member Body of Christ, which is still growing yet to reach the full stature of the Christ that God has destined it to be. “And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies,

according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:11-16).

The history of the Church may highlight the amazing and wonderful works of diverse organizations, ministries and spiritual movements involved in the development of the Church. But, if Christ and the Church are represented by the vine and its branches in the parable of the vine, as we will see later, let us never lose sight of the Christ and the Father who are the beginning and the end of all that the Church has been and is and will ever be. However great or small, visible or invisible the contributions of all those whom God has used in the development of the Church over the centuries, they must always be seen in the light of their origin in and dependence on the Son of God and the faithful operation of God by the Spirit or the effective husbandry of the Father. In other words, the first lesson from the parable of the vine is that in the beginning of it all, there stand Jesus, the true Vine, and the Father, the vinedresser.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser,” is Jesus’ first declaration in the parable. Indeed, never was there a vine as healthy and prolific as Christ, the Son, whose Body the Church is. And never was there a vinedresser so wise, so watchful, and as proficient in the care of his vineyard as God the Father in whose care and grace the Church, the Body of Christ, flourishes.

The Vinedresser

The metaphorical description of the Father as the vinedresser needs to be examined some more as we move on towards unfolding the lesson of the parable. A vinedresser is one who takes care of the vineyard; one whose responsibility is to nurture, prune, and protect the vine. He is therefore one who has a genuine interest in the growth and welfare of the vine. Thus, the

metaphor illustrates the role of the Father in the life and ministry of Christ and the Body of Christ, which is the Church. God the Father’s role in the preparation and sending of Christ Jesus to fulfil His will on earth and in sustaining the ongoing ministry of Christ in the Body is well-documented in the Scriptures and must never be obscured by the many visible entities and operations which genuinely or pretentiously constitute the Church on earth. It is wonderful to know that the growth and development of the Church, the Body of Christ, is in the hand of the Father and has not been left to the rise and wane of the zeal of mortal men.

In fact, Jesus, in whom and through whom the Church has emerged to be His Body, declared plainly while on earth that He depends absolutely on the Father in all aspects of His life and ministry. He came from the Father and lives by the Father.

Jn 5:19-21: “Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.’”

Jn 6:57: “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.”

Jn 10:36-38: “Do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him.”

Jn 14:10: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the

Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”

Heb 10:5: “Therefore when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but You have prepared a body for Me.’”

Eph 1:20-23: “He worked *in* Christ in raising Him from *the* dead, and He seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all principality and authority and power and dominion, and every name being named, not only in this world, but also in the coming age. And He has put all *things* under His feet and gave Him *to be* Head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

1Co 12:18: “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body as it has pleased Him.”

All of these Scripture passages demonstrate that the powerful and excellent ministry of Christ Jesus, the Son of God and, by extension, the Body of Christ is the outcome of the wisdom, love, care, and mighty working power of the Father. They point out to us that Jesus Christ had been well-prepared by God to fulfil the task which He came to earth to do. And so, to illustrate this, Jesus uses the metaphors that He is the true vine and His Father is the vinedresser. It means that this true vine being cared for by a vinedresser who is the ultimate of excellence would be excellently and perfectly brought to readiness in every way to fulfil the function of a vine. This is the Christ being introduced at the beginning of the lesson of this parable – the true vine ready and able to fulfil its purpose of existence.

Bringing Forth Fruit

Now, another important question at this stage is what is the purpose of existence for this true vine? Why has the vinedresser cultivated this true vine?

After introducing Himself as the true vine and His Father as the

vinedresser, Jesus proceeds to expound the parable further. He continues in John 15:2-6: “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every one that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit. Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered. And they gather and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.”

Here, Jesus reveals the principal lesson which He is presenting through the parable of the vine. It is the revelation of the purpose and function of Christ, the true vine, and the role of the Father, the vinedresser, in it all. He does this by extending His use of metaphors in the parable to include two other integral parts of the true vine. They are the branches and their fruit. He explains that the branches are His disciples who are themselves integrally connected to Him as branches to a vine. And bringing forth fruit is the essential function of the branches.

Here lies the significance of the fact that in the parable Jesus Christ first introduces the existence of the true vine and the vinedresser before any mention of the branches and fruit. We know, of course, that all vines have branches. However, by focusing on the vine first of all without mention of the branches, Jesus is emphasizing in the parable the importance of the big picture, which is the union of the branches with the vine – the assimilation of the identity of the branches into the vine. The vine and the branches are one. The branches constitute the vine. They are not little individual vines but parts of the whole vine.

They cannot survive and function on their own, independently from the vine. They derive their existence, substance, integrity and life from the vine. Without being vitally connected to the vine, they perish. Therefore, the condition of the vine is reflected in the condition of the branches.

In addition, having introduced Himself as the true vine and the Father as the vinedresser, Jesus has already given us enough insight to conclude that the condition of this true vine is indeed most excellent since the one who has cultivated and nurtured it, being the Father, would have ensured that it is of excellence. Hence, all the branches in the vine would obviously be expected to be of the same excellent condition as the vine.

Now, when Jesus introduces the branches He presents them as fruit-bearing branches of the vine. Clearly, this indicates that fruit-bearing is the primary purpose of the vine in this parable. But the manner in which Jesus is unfolding the purpose of the vine in the parable is important. Notice that Jesus immediately introduces the branches of the vine as branches that are and must be bringing forth fruit. In other words, the true vine which Jesus refers to in the parable has already come to its fruit-bearing stage. Its branches being one with it must therefore be fruit-bearing branches. And so, Jesus turns our attention to the branches solely in their capacity of bringing forth the fruit of the vine.

From thereon, bringing forth fruit becomes the main focus of the lesson which Jesus is using the parable to present. It entirely engages the rest of the discourse of the parable. Bringing forth fruit is the main purpose for the existence of the vine and the main result of the union of the vine and its branches. Bringing forth the fruit of the vine is the evidence of the fruit-bearing nature of the vine, as well as the measure of the success of the husbandry of the vinedresser.

What else, anyway, is the purpose of the existence of a vineyard and a vinedresser, if not to produce grapes? No one reasonably wants a vineyard that is beautifully cultivated by an excellent vinedresser but remains perpetually barren. Thus, the parable is actually an illustration of the importance of fruit-bearing in God’s economy. And so, in using the parable to highlight the importance of bringing forth fruit in God’s economy, Jesus metaphorically introduces Himself as the true vine – the real, pure-breed vine, His Father, who is the ultimate of excellence, as the vinedresser, and His disciples, as fruit-bearing branches.

The use of these metaphors purposefully gives significance to the importance of fruit-bearing in the relationship between the Father and the Son and all who are brought into that relationship in the Son. As we mentioned already, it is significant that in the parable Jesus focuses attention first on the primary factors involved in the fruit-bearing project, the true vine and the vinedresser, as being Himself and His Father respectively. By this, He basically highlights the excellence of the factors that are involved in ensuring that the vineyard is a well productive one. In other words, since the basis or source for the fruitfulness of the branches is in the condition of the vine and the husbandry of the vinedresser, we can expect to have nothing short of a prolific vine because the vine is Christ Himself and the vinedresser is the Father.

And so, as Jesus proceeds in the lesson of the parable of the vine, He points out not only is the vine a genuine and excellent breed, it is also a fruit-bearing vine, and the work of the vinedresser at this stage is to diligently keep increasing the produce of the vine. Thus, **His first reference to the branches of this fruitful vine is that they are branches which the vinedresser expects to be bearing fruit.** “Every branch in Me that does not bear

fruit, He takes away. And every one that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit” (Jn 15:2). The parable does not say that, if a branch is not bringing forth fruit, it is because the vine has not reached the stage of fruit-bearing. The vinedresser, knowing well his husbandry of the vine and that the branches derive their fruit-bearing potential from the vine, seems so sure that the vine has reached the fruit-bearing stage that he concentrates on the branches and not the vine, expecting fruitfulness from every branch.

Fruit-bearing Stage

So, at that stage, that is the stage at which Jesus now introduces the true vine and the vinedresser, the vine is already at fruit-bearing stage. It is obvious that the true vine would have gone through a process of normal germination and growth under the proficient husbandry of the vinedresser. That pre-stage of growth up to fruit-bearing is outside the account given in the parable. While we may think that we would have been interested in that process of growth of the vine to the fruit-bearing stage, Jesus thought otherwise and focuses instead on a vine and its branches which are bringing forth fruit.

The fact that Jesus confines the account in the parable to the fruit-bearing function of the vine leaving off the growing process of the vine has some implications for the lesson which Jesus is illustrating by the parable. Clearly, as we have already mentioned, the lesson of the parable is on the importance of the union between Christ and His disciples or the Church and the purpose of this union. Bringing forth fruit is the purpose of this union. Of a truth, we know very little of Jesus Christ prior to the commencement of His fruitful ministry on earth. But when He emerged in public ministry, He was ready to do the Father’s will. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace

and truth” (Jn 1:14). Rightly, therefore, in the parable He is represented by a mature fruit-bearing vine rather than a striving seedling. Also, the branches in the vine, being united to or being offshoots of the vine, are already inevitably bringing forth fruit.

It is significant in the lesson of the parable that the branches of the vine are being presented as branches that have sprouted from a vine which is already nurtured into its fruit-bearing stage. Hence, all that is required of the branches is that they remain connected to or in union with the vine and draw from the vine its already available fruit-bearing sap that they can bring forth the fruit of the vine. We will see more of what this signifies in the lesson of the parable as we proceed.

In the parable, the vinedresser’s main objective is to ensure that every branch that is in that true vine is prolific. Therefore, with all diligence, he severs from the vine any branch which is barren and prunes the fruitful branches that they may be even more fruitful. Thus, with the branches representing Christian believers, who, like the branches of the vine, are members of the Body of Christ, the parable is clearly a wonderful lesson on the fruitfulness of Christianity. It gives tremendous insight into the fruit-bearing nature and potential of the life of Christ in the members of the Body of Christ. Since seedlings do not bring forth fruit, a fruit-bearing vine is a mature vine. The life of Christ reproduced in every believer in Christ is a fruit-bearing life. Christianity is invariably a mature life – a fruit-bearing life. Paul plainly reminds us “For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*” (Eph 5:8-11).

What do all of these imply? The

implication of this is interesting. If this parable is intended by Jesus Christ to be a lesson on fruit-bearing involving the union between Himself and His Church, it is obvious that the parable is teaching us that the true Church in Christ is by nature a fruit-bearing Church. The branches of the vine are offshoots of the vine and obtain their life and sustenance from the vine from the moment they sprout as branches of the vine. They cannot exist without the vine and hence the very life that is in the vine is the life that is in them. Thus if the vine has reached the stage of maturity and fruit-bearing, then the life which it shares with the branches is a life capable of bringing forth the fruit of the vine.

Clearly, the parable reveals the potential of every believer in Christ to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. It is not about the growth of a still immature vine and its branches, but about a vine and branches already cultivated by a vinedresser to a stage where they are bringing forth fruit. Jesus obviously sets the parable at a stage of fruit-bearing to demonstrate that fruit-bearing is expected of the Father from all who are represented by the branches of the vine in the parable. In other words, whatever growth the vine is still to do will not be for maturing into its fruit-bearing stage. That task the vinedresser has already effectively accomplished. The Vine is now a mature fruit-bearing Vine. Hence, every branch which springs from the Vine must also be able and ready to bring forth the fruit of the Vine through the fruit-bearing life of the Vine flowing in its branches. This truly reveals to us the fruit-bearing possibilities of the Christ life which every member of the Body of Christ partakes of in this age of grace.

Believers in Christ after being baptized by the Spirit into Christ no longer live of themselves but Christ lives His life in them. Hence, they are able to bring forth fruit by the fruit-bearing life of Christ in them.

Jesus explains this in the parable in this way: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned” (Jn 15:4-6).

Thus, the parable is an inspiration and encouragement to every believer in Christ desiring to be a fruitful Christian. It reveals that through the Christ who lives in us we are made fruit-bearing members of the Body of Christ. It is also a sobering revelation that there is no excuse or accommodation for a barren member in the Body of Christ. **“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away”** (John 15:2). The parable also highlights the effective work of the Father, the Vinedresser, to ensure that fruitfulness, and not barrenness, characterizes every member of the Body of Christ. **“And every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit”** (John 15:3).

In Christendom, there is a tendency to postpone the realization of a lot of what God has given to us to experience and do in the now to an ultimate future. There are things that are spoken in the Bible that are meant for the future. And there are things that are clearly meant for the now experiences of Christianity. It is necessary to discern them and the times and seasons to which they refer, thus rightly understanding and dividing the word of God and His promises to us and His expectations of us. A mature fruit-bearing Church is clearly one of the experiences and expectations of Christianity that God intends to be for the now, according to the Scriptures. And the parable of the vine clearly illustrates that. The Christ, the true Vine, is presented in the parable as

a fruit-bearing vine with fruit-bearing branches.

Barren Vineyard

There is much that the Bible tells us about an era of barrenness among the people of God. This era, according to the Scriptures, was prior to the coming of Christ Jesus to this world.

For instance, Isaiah lamentably describes the barren condition among the people of God prior to Christ using a similar parable of a vineyard. We read this account in Is 5:1-7: “Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. ‘And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; *and* break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.’ For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.”

David describes a similar condition of barrenness that existed among God’s people prior to Christ, using a similar parable of a vineyard. We read David’s account in Ps 80:8-19: “You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared *room* for it, and caused it

to take deep root and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River. Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her *fruit*? The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it. Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine and the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and the branch *that* You made strong for Yourself. *It is* burned with fire, *it is* cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Your countenance. Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man *whom* You made strong for Yourself. Then we will not turn back from You; revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”

Both of these accounts lament over a period of what was sadly an era of spiritual and moral barrenness among the people of God in the Old Testament. They vividly describe the condition using metaphors which depict a devastated and unproductive vineyard. That such a deplorable condition prevailed in Israel and Judah prior to Christ is well-documented in the Old Testament. David’s lamentation, however, ends with an interesting prayer based on the recognition of the importance of the grace of God in spiritual and moral fruit-bearing. It expresses the true realization that God only is the source and reproducer of a fruitful life of righteousness in us if we will trust Him to do so. In fact, the prayer is also a prophetic message that alludes to the role of Christ Jesus in the regeneration of God’s people to a fruitful life of righteousness. David ends his lamentation with the prayer: “Let Your hand be upon **the man of Your right hand**, upon **the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself**. Then we will

not turn back from You; revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”

David’s prayer interestingly anticipated the New Covenant and the coming of Christ, the true Vine, who would save God’s people by reviving or making them alive in Him that they may be fruitful branches of righteousness, not by means of their own self life or self righteousness but by means of the inflow of the life of the Son of God in them. In fact, many other Old Testament saints, some dramatically listed in Hebrews 11, were able to transcend the barren conditions of human self efforts under the Law era and reach out by faith into the grace of God’s righteousness. By faith they embraced the promises of the New Covenant, confidently expecting to come the era of grace when God will open the door of access into the fountain of the Son life of maturity and fruitfulness for His saints. “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, **that they should not be made perfect apart from us**” (Heb 11:39-40). They could not have experienced perfection during their era but knowing that God had provided “something better for us” they through faith embraced the hope of entering into perfection with us in our era.

During the Old Testament period, in the midst of the total spiritual and moral degradation of the people of God, the New Covenant promises for the salvation and regeneration of mankind was revealed to Jeremiah. God’s promise of the New Covenant clearly answers David’s prayer for the unconditional grace of God in bringing salvation to the nations.

We read in Jeremiah 31:31-34: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel

and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (cf., Heb 8:6-13).

Fruitful Vineyard

Turning to the New Testament, we see Paul referring to the prevailing condition of spiritual and moral barrenness in the Old Testament era as an outcome of the chronic condition of spiritual immaturity and infancy among God’s people during that era prior to Christ. Then he distinguishes that condition from the New Testament condition of spiritual and moral maturity made possible through Christ by the reproduction of the Spirit and life of the Son of God in all true believers in Christ.

Let us read Paul’s entire explanation of this wonderful transition from the Old Testament period of immaturity and barrenness to the New Testament period of maturity and fruitfulness in Gal 3:21-29; Gal 4:1-7: “Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. **Therefore the law**

was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

“Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, **when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son**, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Paul’s account is a vivid explanation that distinguishes the general condition of immaturity under the Law in the Old Testament from the present condition of maturity made available in Christ for every Christian believer under grace in the New Testament. It is another reference to the distinction between the barren vineyard of the Old Testament and the fruitful Vineyard of the New Testament. It must be noted that the word “children” which Paul uses to describe the former spiritual condition of God’s people under the Law or prior to Christ is the Greek word *nepios* (nay-pee-os) which means a spiritually immature person and not an offspring who is a child or newly born babe. In other words, the word depicts character rather than relationship by birth or

the baby stage of an offspring. An offspring of God, one who is a child of God by being born of God, is referred to in the Scriptures by the Greek word, *teknon*. In the Scriptures, *teknon* depicts relationship to God and does not particularly depict age. *Teknon* is translated as either sons or children of God to depict being born of God or sharing in the life of God. The coming of the firstborn Son of God into the world made it possible for us to be born again of the Spirit into children of God by partaking of the life of the Son of God (Jn 1:12-13; 1Jn 3:1-2; 1Jn 3:10; 1Jn 5:2).

Paul clearly highlights the present potential of believers in Christ in this era of grace to be mature and fruitful as an outcome of their partaking of the Spirit and Life of Christ, the Son of God. **It is the fact that under the New Covenant “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts” that makes you capable of bringing forth fruit as branches of a mature, fruitful Vine.** The branches of the Vine can now bring forth the fruit of the Vine because of the flow of the Life of the fruitful Vine into them.

Therefore, Paul’s account gives us greater insight into the parable of the vine and helps us to appreciate the reason why the parable introduces the vine and its branches as a fruit-bearing plant. A vine tree, like all other plants, brings forth fruit only when it has grown into a mature tree. With all intent, the parable illustrates that with the coming of Christ to the world the period for the condition of immaturity and barrenness had ended and God had sent forth His mature Son at the fullness of time that His people by faith can receive the Spirit and Life of His mature Son and be fruitful.

Therefore, the emergence of Christ, the Son of God in His maturity in the fullness of time, as a fruit-bearing Vine, according to the parable of the vine, has made it possible for those who are in Christ

and partake of the Spirit and Life of the Christ, the Son of God, to be themselves not immature and barren branches but mature sons of God, capable of bringing forth fruit abundantly. It may be sobering to know that God, the Father, as the vinedresser of a fruitful vine, according to the parable, expects every true believer in Christ either to be bringing forth fruit or be removed. At the same time, it is comforting to us all to know that our fruitfulness depends not on our own human ability or age as Christians, but on the inflow of the Life of His Son in us, who by God’s grace have been baptized or incorporated into Christ to become members of His Body, like branches of a vine.

Supernatural Phenomenon

It is an interesting point to note that in the parable every branch in the vine, regardless of its position in the vine, its age, or its stage of growth is expected of the vinedresser to be bringing forth the fruit of the vine. Natural reasoning, based on observation and science, tells us that a branch sprouts from a stem and goes through a process of growth before it begins to bear fruit, even if the tree from which it sprouts is already a fruit-bearing tree. So, not every branch in a vine is bearing fruit at the same time. Here, Jesus presents a parable which depicts a vine in which every branch is expected to be bringing forth fruit. This is an unnatural expectation in the natural world. But no doubt to remind us that the Lord is dealing with the supernatural in the parable, every branch in the true vine is expected by the vinedresser to be bringing forth fruit. If perchance there is any branch which is not bringing forth fruit, the vinedresser severs it off the vine. And this is where the lesson of the parable appeals to faith and not natural reasoning. It truly depicts a supernatural phenomenon. It is astonishing. However, faith is the ‘reasoning’ of the supernatural. The parable emphasises that the ability

of the branch to bring forth the fruit of the vine is not of itself but in the fruit-bearing life and ability of the vine from which the branch has sprung and which gives life to the branch. This demonstrates that every Christian in vital union with Christ is expected to bring forth fruit through the life of Christ and not by the effort and development of his own self life. This is living by faith, which is living in absolute dependence on and trust in God with whom all things are possible.

Let us take, for example, the case of Abraham and Sarah. Only faith could have enabled them to believe that they could and would bring forth a child in old age. Reasoning through the science and natural processes of child-bearing even made them laugh at the prospect. However, “not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Rom 4:19-21).

The lesson on fruit-bearing from the parable of the vine is obviously a challenge to every true Christian believer’s faith. It clearly depicts a Church in which every member is expected of the Father to be characteristically and continually bringing forth fruit. The Father expects every disciple of Christ to be bringing forth fruit by abiding in Christ and drawing of the fruit-bearing life which is in Christ. And only faith will fully convince us that God is able to make us fruitful by no other process or means but by our baptism or incorporation into Christ at our conversion and through the flow of the fruit-bearing life of Christ in us. Clearly, according to the parable of the vine, God has no place in the Body of Christ for chronic infants, ever growing and never coming to maturity and fruit-

bearing. The Father's provision ensures that every believer in Christ finds in Christ, the mature Son, the mature, fruit-bearing life needed to bring forth fruit.

Still Not Arrived or Attained

A point which is necessary to make here is that the fact that God has made available to believers in Christ the capacity to be mature and fruitful by partaking of the life of the Son of God in no way means that to be mature, fruitful believers in the Body of Christ is to have arrived or attained to all that for which God has apprehended them in Christ. Certainly not! We can infer from the parable of the vine that a living vine and its fruit-bearing branches will keep growing, as they are pruned by the vinedresser to bring forth more fruit, and new branches will keep sprouting. In the same way, the Body of Christ, from its beginning in Christ Jesus, has been growing and increasing, bringing forth fruit from generation to generation. And it will continue to grow until it attains the full stature of the Christ that God intends for it.

The Body of Christ continues to grow, according to the Scriptures, making increase of itself, by a process of edification of its members by one another. Each member of the Body is being equipped for this ministry of edification by the operation of a five-fold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers given to the Church by Christ, who is the Head of the Body (Eph 4:7-12). It also grows by the Spirit incorporating into it everyone who comes to believe in Christ. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1Co 12:13). And so, as it was in the early Church, so the Lord Himself continues to this day to give growth to the Church, continually adding to the Church such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

God calls us to go from glory to

glory into His infinite realms of glory. However, it is important, as we have already mentioned, that we distinguish between the glory which God has prepared for us to experience now and that which is yet to come, and continually press on to attain in Christ all that God has apprehended us for. As we have already seen in this article, spiritual and moral maturity and fruitfulness is the ideal state that God has set for believers in Christ in this era. Christianity is intended by God to stand as a bright shining light in the midst of the spiritual and moral decay of this present dark world and a source of revival for those stunted by the spiritual and moral retardation of vain religion (Mat 5:14). This is the Christianity generated by the ongoing move of the Spirit of God. As we yield to the powerful operation of God in us by the Spirit, the Father prunes us, removing from us anything that is vain and barren, enabling us to grow and be increasingly fruitful. Hence, there is always room for growth in the Body of Christ and in its individual members to bring forth more fruit.

Paul, who appreciated His maturity in Christ (Phil 4:13), enjoyed communicating with mature believers in Christ (1Co 2:6), and upbraided some Corinthian professing Christians who were displaying immaturity (1Co 3:1-3), was quick to declare that he had not attained fully all that the Lord had for Him in Christ. Paul pointed out: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore **let us, as many as are mature**, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal

even this to you. Nevertheless, **to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule**, let us be of the same mind" (Phil 3:12-16). Thus, as much as Paul acknowledged that there was much yet left for him to attain in Christ, he clearly embraced his maturity as one thing that God by grace had already given him in Christ.

Being Fruitful

In light of the parable of the vine, believers in Christ have no excuse to be barren. Genuine New Testament Christians are characteristically fruit-bearing Christians. It is certainly not for our boasting because it is made possible only by the abundant grace of God, who has given us freely the Spirit and life of His Son and has brought us into the Body of Christ. We must recognize that according to the Scriptures we, who are believers in Christ, are members of the Body of Christ and, therefore, the powerful, fruit-bearing life of the Son of God in the Body of Christ is flowing into us to produce the fruit of the Spirit. If we believe this, then we can easily accept that we can be fruitful and bring forth fruit and more fruit. Let us, who believe that we are members of the Body of Christ, integrally connected to Christ as branches are to the vine, be encouraged to yield to the fruit-bearing Life of Christ in us. Paul declares: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

How to be spiritually fruitful is an important concern to every young believer in Christ. In a world dominated by a culture in which the pride of life, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes seem to be the ideal of productivity and success, the concept of Christian fruitfulness may easily be distorted to mean material prosperity and fame produced by human talents and efforts. But true Christian fruitfulness remains in its simplicity the manifestation of that which the Bible defines as the fruit of the

Spirit – “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). According to the value system of this world, such qualities may be scarcely significant compared to the aggressiveness, selfish ambition, fame-generating, or wealth-producing characteristics of a successful lifestyle in this world. But the fact is, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are powerful personality characteristics by which the saints of God have contributed immensely to the survival and advancement of human civilization on earth and through which the Kingdom of God will rule in the earth. They are the fruit which the Father expects of the true Vine and which can be reproduced in the lives of the most common and ordinary of His children through Christ.

The concept of bringing forth fruit signifies especially the effortlessness with which fruit-bearing takes place. We pointed out earlier the distinction made by the Scriptures between the barrenness of Old Testament legalism and the fruitfulness of New Testament grace. This distinction is a continual theme in the writing of Paul, who had to constantly safeguard young believers in Christ from the relentless tendency of the Jews to revert to legalism or the tutoring of the Law in an effort to produce righteousness.

To Paul, righteousness can only be produced by the life of Christ generated by the Spirit in a believer. He plainly distinguishes one who is Spirit-led from one who is under the Law. According to Paul, these two are mutually exclusive characteristics. One cannot combine both at any point in being a spiritually fruitful Christian. “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal 5:18).

Therefore, to be spiritually fruitful, one must depend absolutely on the operation of the Spirit and

life of the Son of God within and not on one’s works of righteousness or efforts to keep the Law. This is because true righteousness is a product of Divine life and not the outcome of human efforts to be righteous. In other words, **true righteousness is the fruit of the life of the Son of God in a believer in Christ.** One who has the life of the Son produces the righteousness of God, apart from the Law (Rom 3:21, 28).

And so, the fact that the Law could not produce Divine life in anyone made it impossible for it to produce true righteousness. “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law” (Gal 3:21). This explains the barrenness of the people of God under the Law in the Old Testament era and even among those who today still remain in bondage to the tutorship of legalism as a means of producing righteousness. The Law cannot produce divine life which is the source of the fruit of righteousness. The fact that Christ has come to give life to all who believe in Him explains the possibility that exists now for believers in Christ to live fruitful lives of righteousness under grace through Christ. Only through the life of Christ reproduced by the new birth in a believer in Christ can one bring forth genuine fruit of righteousness. As Paul points out: “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal 2:21).

However, what the Law could not do, the Spirit of life in Christ began to accomplish in every believer in Christ by grace when Christ came. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the

righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:2-4).

Like the Hebrews in the early Church, many Christians still have problems understanding this truth and find it difficult to perceive that they can live spiritually fruitful lives of righteousness by depending completely on the working of the Spirit within them without the control and tutorship of the Law. The truth is that under the present New Covenant of God, a believer in Christ can produce fruit of righteousness without having any knowledge of or influence from the Law of Moses. This is because in Christ one is made alive in God or finds the Divine life that can produce righteousness. This is what God promised to do under the New Covenant, and it will agree with the Law of Moses, which is a righteous law.

Notice that the fruit which God expects of every believer in Christ is described as “the fruit of the Spirit” and therefore it is the produce of the Spirit in us, and not of man. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those *who are* Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-25). If we yield to the Spirit of Christ within us we will easily bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in season and out of season.

This may appear presumptuous to the legalist and self-effort oriented perspective of being righteous. But to the believer in Christ it is agreeing with and trusting the proven principle of faith in the truth of the word of God and the power of eternal life or the life of Christ in a believer. Put in the simple and straightforward words of Jesus: “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. **He who abides in Me,**

and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). Having the baptism of the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues, exercising the gifts of the Spirit, praying in the Holy Ghost, being equipped for ministry by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery and reading and meditating on the word of God are all operations of the Spirit of Christ within us when we are born again and abide in Christ and are effective tools used by the Holy Spirit to generate and bring forth in us various aspects of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned above.

In the Body of Christ, every part ought to be an active, fruit-bearing part connected to Christ, the Head, “from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). In fact, the five-fold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers is specially given by Christ Himself in the Body to equip every member of the Body for fruitful ministry work to edify the whole Body (Eph 4:11-12).

We Can Bring Forth Fruit

When believers in Christ can come to the realization that the newness of life into which they are born again of the Spirit is actually the life of the Son of God, and that their salvation, according to Scriptures, involves their integration into Christ as branches are in a vine, there will be absolutely no doubt that they can bring forth fruit of righteousness to the honour and glory of God, the vinedresser. Indeed, the integral union between Christians and Christ is an amazing and powerful truth. “And you are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1Co 12:27).

Paul admonishes us in Col 2:6-10: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you

have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

Fruit unto Holiness

All children of God, truly born again of the Spirit into offspring of God, at whatever the stage of their spiritual journey, are expected to be holy and to bring forth fruit unto holiness. Paul puts it this way: “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. But **now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness**, and the end, everlasting life” (Rom 6:20-22). Thus to a true born-again Christian, holiness is not an experience for the eventual future but a characteristic experience for the now.

As we already indicated, the coming of Christ into this world, His death and resurrection, signalled the era of maturity and fruit-bearing among the saints of God, according to the Scriptures. God has made ample provision in Christ for every believer in Christ to be mature and bring forth fruit of righteousness by entering into union with Christ and partaking of the mature, fruit-bearing life of Christ, the Son of God. God knows that our human nature is inherently weak and feeble. And He made provision to empower our frail earthen vessel with the life of Christ, the true Vine.

Peter tells us in 2Pe 1:2-7: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as **His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**, through the knowledge of Him who called us

by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For **if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful** in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

Anyone who lacks the faith to appropriate these provisions of grace made available by God for us in Christ for a fruitful life of godliness in this present world will obviously be a barren professing Christian, who is “short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins,” according to Peter. It is therefore obvious why many who lack the faith to appropriate the grace of God available in Christ to be fruitful usually remain subtly bound by a mindset or belief that in this world they cannot yet live holy lives and inevitably will continue in sin. Thus, they have forgotten that they were cleansed from their old sins when they were born again and, therefore, they still walk under the bondage of sin.

Any idea that holiness is not for Christians in this present age or will only be achieved when Christians have “grown” to a certain degree of maturity is misleading and not founded on sound Scriptures. The main objective of the plan of salvation designed by God, involving the gruesome death of Christ on the Cross, was to deal with the sin problem in humanity and put away sin (Heb 9:26; John 1:29). Salvation therefore involves

deliverance from the power and bondage of sin (Rom 6:1-23). When one is saved and born again, one is born of the Spirit into an offspring of God. Certainly, God's offspring is holy because God is holy (1Pe 1:15-16).

John the Baptist was plain and straightforward in declaring to the chronic barren religious adherents of his time the fruit-bearing characteristic which was expected to immediately follow repentance in this new era of grace. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones'" (Mat 3:7-9).

We may be born babes in Christ and need to grow up into much, but we are not born again in Christ as unholy or partly holy children of God. In fact, Peter forthrightly exhorts new born babes in Christ to completely lay aside all aspects of their former ungodliness. This is God's expectation of His offspring in this era. And it is an expectation based on the power of the godly character which God gives by grace to His offspring at the new birth.

Peter writes: "Therefore, laying aside **all** malice, **all** deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and **all** evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious" (1Pe 2:1-3). And David points out: "**Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength**, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger" (Psa 8:2). John states: "We know that **everyone who has been born of God does not continue to sin**, but the one born of God guards himself, and the evil one does not

touch him" (1John 5:18). Paul is even more explicit: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortionists will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1Co 6:9-11).

Therefore, being a born-again babe in Christ is no excuse for sinning because, according to the Scriptures, God endows His offspring with grace, strength, and character from their spiritual birth to be holy and to triumph over all ungodliness. If Christians, who keep condoning their ungodly living with the excuse that they are still spiritual babes, will believe and meditate on the truth of these powerful Scripture passages, they will find the faith and boldness to set aside all ungodliness and bring forth fruit unto righteousness and holiness, whatever the stage of their spiritual journey may be.

It is lamentable but true that there are many professing Christians who don't believe the truth of these Scripture passages and have allowed sin to remain an inevitable stigma in their conduct. That sinning remains a chronic characteristic among some professing Christians is not a result of the impracticability of the truth of the Gospel but a consequence of the apostasy of our time and unbelief in the truth and power of the true Gospel. God can make holy living an ordinary, and not an extraordinary, characteristic of every truly born-again Christian.

It may be possible, but not inevitable, for a believer in Christ to sin. According to the Bible, if a sincere believer in Christ ever sins, God mercifully and faithfully provides advocacy in Jesus Christ to obtain immediate forgiveness and

cleansing. This emphasizes God's aim to keep His children holy. John puts it this way: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1John 2:1). However, even with that provision, no sincere believer in Christ will easily give way to sin, or carelessly make sinning habitual, but will instead trust "Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jud 1:24).

That Christians are born again into holiness and begin their Christian life with the capacity to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit is a basic truth illustrated in the parable of the vine. Jesus admonishes us in the parable of the vine: "**You are already clean because of the word** which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, *you are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:3-5). According to Jesus, we begin our abode in Him clean and holy when we hear the word of the Gospel and are born again. It is through our faith in the truth of the word of God or the Gospel that the Holy Spirit regenerates us, makes and keeps us clean and fruitful as we are born into Christ and continue to abide in Christ, the source of Divine life and righteousness.

Conclusion

As we conclude these tremendous and profound insights into the fruit-bearing lesson of the parable of the vine, let us review a few Scripture passages that can inspire us to appreciate the reality of the life of the Son of God in every believer in Christ and the truth that, as a result, believers in Christ can bring forth much fruit of righteousness. As branches are there in the vine to receive the life of the

vine and bring forth the fruit of the vine, so every member of the Body of Christ, the Church, is integrated into Christ to partake of the Life of Christ, the Son of God, and bring forth the fruit of Christ.

Jn 15:16: “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain; that whatever you shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you.”

1Jn 5:11-12: “And this is the record, that God has given to us everlasting life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Col 3:1-8: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at *the* right hand of God. Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. When Christ our Life *is* revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness (which is idolatry), on account of which things’ sake the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience, among whom you also once walked, when you lived in these. But now also put off all

these things: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, shameful speech out of your mouth.”

Rom 6:1-14: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? Let it not be! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised up from *the* dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been joined together in the likeness of His death, we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *Him* in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, that from now on we should not serve sin. Likewise count yourselves also to be truly dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Do not yield your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but yield yourselves to God, as *one* alive from *the* dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under Law, but under grace.

Rom 8:1-2: “*There is* therefore

now no condemnation to those *who are* in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. But the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

The parable of the vine presented by Jesus Christ wonderfully illustrates that the normal function of all believers in Christ is to bring forth fruit and much fruit because of the union between Christ and believers in Christ. The parable unfolds to us the truth that the fruitfulness of believers in Christ is rooted in their union with Christ. Since, only mature trees bring forth fruit, it is an encouragement to every believer in Christ to know that he derives his maturity and fruitfulness from no other means or source but from Christ, in whom he abides. Christianity is therefore a spiritually and morally mature and fruitful life which, according to the Scriptures, is available in Christ to all who believe under this dispensation of grace. Therefore, let us with faith accept the truth that our capability to bring forth fruit comes from our union with Christ, the Son of God. As long as we are abiding in Christ, the mature fruit-bearing life of the Son of God flows in us to enable us to bring forth the fruit of righteousness continually.

Growing Into Maturity

By Mervin Sundbo

The Christian experience is a process of growth from childhood to maturity, not unlike the process of natural growth and development from a babe to a mature man or woman. Nourishment, instruction, experience and the passage of time all contribute to natural growth. It is a process worth working at because the fruit (the goal) is maturity. Those

of us who have raised children have spent countless hours working with our children with that goal in mind. There were times when we became discouraged because it appeared there was a lack of progress. But little by little, year after year, growth took place and the babe grew into manhood or womanhood.

God looks for fruit, for growth,

for the manifestations of maturity from the babe in Christ to the fully manifested son. Is it easy? No! What in life is easy that is also worthwhile? Let us take training for a particular profession as an example. Were your college or university years easy and a lot of fun? Let me give you some reminders: there were classes to

attend, papers to write, presentations to make, exams to write, deadlines to meet, a practicum or internship to undergo and lots of evaluation through it all. However, for the faithful who stayed the course, there was a graduation, a certificate, a ticket to a profession. You had become an engineer, a nurse, a teacher, a lawyer, an architect or whatever you trained for. The journey from the rebirth to maturity (sonship) is not easy. There are setbacks, trials and tribulations, temptations and testings. Skies are not always blue and the weather is sometimes stormy. The storms may come in the form of health problems, financial problems, relationship problems, etc. Jesus said to His disciples in Matt. 16:24, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (NKJV). The cross is not pleasant to the flesh, but nevertheless, there is where the flesh is put to death.

There may be some questions that arise in our minds from time to time regarding our progress and our fiery trials. Is the goal possible? Is it all worthwhile? Is the impossible, to the natural mind, possible in Christ? The answer to these questions is a resounding “yes!” God is well able to do what He says He will do, as stated in Phil. 1:6, “. . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (NKJV). He began the good work when we accepted Him into our hearts and He will complete the work until we come forth in His likeness and image. Praise God! The mind of man has difficulty to believe God. Limiting God, as Israel did on many occasions, is simply unbelief and that is what hindered their entrance into the land of promise (Heb. 3:19). “Now all these things happened to them (Israel) as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1Cor. 10:11, NKJV). We read about God’s unlimited

power in His Word, we have witnessed that power, and therefore there should be no question that He is able to accomplish a complete work in each one of us.

In 2Peter 1:3-4, we read: “As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (NKJV). This scripture says that when we accept Christ, we believe and receive the ability to live a godly life and in so doing we can partake of the divine nature – the nature of Christ. This is a spiritual principle which is foolishness to the natural mind, but a glorious reality to the mind quickened by the Spirit.

In John 1:12, we read: “But as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (KJV). By receiving Him, He gave each of us “power (right, privilege, indwelling ability) to become the sons of God.” Maturity is moving from selfishness to selflessness; from irresponsibility to responsibility; from doing your own will to doing the will of God; from childish immaturity to completeness in Christ. The maturity of Christ is demonstrated in His attitude of obedience to His Father. For example, in John 12:49-50, He says: “For I have not spoken on my own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (NKJV). Then, we read in John 8:29, “And he who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him” (NKJV). Let us be satisfied with nothing less than the

same attitude of obedience and level of maturity. Christ is our example.

Jesus said in Matt. 16:24-25, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (NKJV). These scriptures speak of selflessness, sacrifice and submission and there is no other way to becoming a mature son of God than what Jesus has pointed us to by what He said and by what He did. He is our perfect example. The nature of man does not deny himself, but rather indulges himself. It is the Holy Spirit working in our lives that will give us the ability to deny ourselves and the strength to take up our cross and follow Him.

In Phil. 3:10, Paul says, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. . .” (NKJV). It was Paul’s desire to really know Christ, to experience the ongoing power of resurrection life through sharing in His sufferings and being made like unto His death. You see, Christ’s death was no ordinary death, for in it was the seed and ultimately the power of the resurrection. The song writer penned these lines, “Will you be poured out as wine on the altar for me and will you be broken as bread to feed the hungry?” Jesus says in John 12:24, “Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit” (KJV). Paul expresses this recurring theme again in Rom. 8:29, “For whom He foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (NKJV).

In 1Cor. 13:11 we read, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (NKJV). Growth causes changes. What was once important no longer carries any significance. Perhaps there are

still some childish things we need to put behind us. God help us to recognize our immaturity and to resolve in His strength to grow into the mature sons that He wants us to be. Gal. 4:1-7 focuses on our childhood to maturity experience: "But you must realize that so long as an heir is a child, though he is destined to be master of everything, he is in practice, no different from a servant. He has to obey a guardian or trustee until the time which his father has chosen for him to receive his inheritance. So is it with us: while we were "children" we lived under the authority of basic moral principles. But when the proper time came, God sent His Son, born of a human mother and born under the jurisdiction of the Law, that He might redeem those who were under the authority of the Law and lead us to becoming, by adoption, true sons of God. It is because you really are His sons that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts to cry "Father, dear Father." You, my brother, are not a servant any longer; through God you are a son. And, if you are a son, then you are certainly an heir." (Phillips). What a wonderful and full salvation God has made available to the "called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev. 17:14). "...to those who look for Him, He will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to bring to full salvation those who eagerly await Him" (Heb. 9:28, Phillips). The song writer put it this way:

"It's a glorious salvation; it's a wonderful way,

And God has shed his light upon my pathway.

And my way keeps growing brighter and I want to shout and sing,

A creature of eternity, a child of the King."

Ephesians 1: 1-14 from the Phillips translation gives us a beautiful picture of the magnitude of the redemption plan: "For God has allowed us to know the secret of His plan, and it is this: He purposes in His sovereign will that all human

history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in Him. And here is the staggering thing – that in all which will one day belong to Him we have been promised a share" (vs. 9-11). We have been "stamped with the promised Holy Spirit as a guarantee of purchase, until the day when God completes the redemption of what He has paid for as His own..." (vs. 13 & 14). The promises of God will not fail and thus we look forward to the complete redemption for which Christ died – for our spirit, soul and body. In 1Thess. 5: 23 & 24 we read, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (NKJV).

We experienced salvation when the Holy Spirit convicted us of our sin and we became aware of our need of a Savior. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1: 9, KJV). There was a quickening that took place in our hearts and minds and we began to learn of His ways and to understand how He works in our lives. Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they

may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17: 3, NKJV). We continue to learn and to know Him more intimately as we are open to His Word and to the moving of His Spirit. This relationship opened our spiritual eyes to the realization that we can grow into maturity; into the fullness of Christ. The sound mind (transformed mind) is the mind of Christ and His nature can become our nature. The song writer says:

Little by little He's changing me,
Line upon line He's teaching me;

Precept on precept until I am free, Jesus is changing me.

Day by day He's changing me.

In every way He's changing me;
When I am yielded He'll set me free,

Jesus is changing me.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8: 29, NKJV). What a plan! What a glorious and complete redemption!

CORRECTION

DAVID LUFF

correct email address is
dwluff@gmail.com

CARIBBEAN CAMP - ST. VINCENT, WI

August 2-10, 2008

Grace and Truth Campsite - Layout, St. Vincent
Contact: Cephas Forde, Camden Park, St. Vincent
E-mail: merfor1@yahoo.com. Phone 784-457-7272

BOOKS AVAILABLE:

MESSAGES TO THE CHURCH

- *The writings of Herrick Holt*

BORN FROM ABOVE

- *The writings of
W. Douglas Whitter*

BUILDING GOD'S HOUSE

- *The writings of
Allen M. Hinchliff*

PAMPHLETS AVAILABLE:

**The Present Move Of God
The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit
You Are Loved**

**Growing In Christ
Born From Above
Honor The Lord With Thy
Substance**

**A Word To The Wise
Sexual Intimacy
A Testimony - M. Sundbo**

DATES OF IMPORTANCE

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Illinois Gathering (King's House) | May 2 - 4, 2008 |
| Camp North Battleford | July 6 - 13, 2008 |
| North Carolina Summer Camp | July 20 - 26, 2008 |
| Caribbean Camp, St. Vincent | Aug. 2 - 10, 2008 |
| Pinelaw Summer Family Camp | Aug. 4 - 10, 2008 |
| Hidden Acres | Aug. 29 - Sept. 1, 2008 |
| Park Valley | Aug. 29 - Sept. 1, 2008 |
| Winkler | Aug. 29 - Sept. 1, 2008 |
| Pinelaw Fall Family Camp | N/A |

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CALLED HOME

Eilene Metzger
November 17, 2007
Minden, Nebraska

Richard Baynes
May 1, 2008
Cranbrook, BC

NORTH CAROLINA CAMP MEETING

July 20 - 26, 2008

Belmont Abbey College, Belmont, NC

Belmont Abbey College is located in Belmont, NC, just off Interstate 85 at Exit 27.
Check-in time begins at 2:00 PM on Sunday, July 20.
Meals will be served in the college dining hall beginning at 5:00 PM
on Sunday, July 20, followed by the first meeting at 7:30 PM.
The camp will conclude with the noon meal on Saturday, July 26.
Buildings are air conditioned. A gym and other recreational facilities are available.

Charges for Room & Board

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Age 0-3 | No Charge |
| Age 4-10 | \$60 per week or \$12 per day |
| Age 11-16 | \$90 per week or \$15 per day |
| Age 17-Adult | \$150 per week or \$30 per day |
| Family Rate | \$600 per week or \$120 per day |

You will need to bring linens (single bed) towels & pillows.

Send reservations to ncsummercamp08@triad.rr.com

or Mail to:

Global Missions Regional Camp
c/o Keith Hurley
5606 Boxborough Ct.
Greensboro, NC 27407

or call: Keith Hurley - 336-294-2607

Flight arrangements should be made to Charlotte's Douglas International Airport (CLT).

For airport pickup contact Kim Kaufman at 704-583-0651 or e-mail: lkaufman@comporium.net

PINELOW SUMMER CAMP AUGUST 4-10, 2008

GREETINGS EVERYONE!

On Monday, August 4 Saints from all over North America will come together to Worship the Lord and learn more of him at the beautiful setting of Pinelaw Park. We invite one and all to come for this great week of Fellowship.

Please send your reservations to me as soon as possible by e-mail, martz@shelbrook.com, or phone 604-858-9009.

Please state date & time of arrival, and children including their ages.

I will confirm your reservation so you will know that you have been registered.

The check-in time begins Monday, August 4th at 4:00 p.m. and the camp concludes with breakfast on Sunday morning August 10th.

The camp is located on North Deer Lake Road, just a short 45 minute drive North of Spokane Washington on Highway 395.

For Canadians please remember to bring proper identification for the U.S. Border crossing.

On the Monday, dinner (supper) will be served at 6:00 p.m. and please advise me if you plan to be there for the dinner (supper) meal.

Rates are:

Adults - \$100.00 US funds

Children age 3-11 - \$50.00 US

Families (children up to age 18) \$300.00 US

Please bring bedding, toiletries, bibles, musical instrument etc., and a heart prepared for a great spiritual week.

May the Lord Bless You All. Daryl Martz.

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
Sharon Children's Homes and Schools
Box 878, North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada, S9A 2Z3

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