

Chapter 30: The Fruit of Jesus

John 15:1–17

In the allegory of the vine (John 15:1–17), Jesus continues to explain how he will continue completing his mission after his departure. To describe this work, Jesus uses the agricultural metaphor to describe himself as a vine that will bear much fruit in the world. The intriguing aspect of this allegory, though, is not so much in the fact that Jesus will bear much fruit in the world, for that fits with the thrust of the rest of the Gospel. Instead, the surprising aspect of this allegory is that Jesus will not bear the fruit directly, but through his branches—that is, through his disciples. They will bear fruit through Jesus alone, and Jesus will bear fruit through them alone. The rest of the mission will depend on the fruit-bearing vitality of Jesus himself, but the rest of the mission will be carried out by the disciples and through the Holy Spirit. To this day, and until he returns, *Jesus bears fruit through his people.*

The Reality of Fruit-Bearing (John 15:1–6)

John 15:1–17 brings us to the last of the seven “I am” statements in the Gospel of John: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1). As with the “I am” statements about the door of the sheep and the shepherd (John 10:1–18), Jesus teaches through an allegory, weaving the imagery of the vine, vinedresser, branches, and fruit together with the spiritual interpretation of that imagery.¹ The details of Jesus’ allegory are intricate, so we must make several initial observations before attempting to interpret this allegory as a whole. Nevertheless, the basic point of the allegory is clear. As John Calvin puts it, “The general meaning of this comparison is, that we are, by nature, barren and dry, except in so far as we have been engrafted into Christ, and draw from him a power which is new, and which does not proceed from ourselves.”²

Still, we must pay special attention to the specific way in which Jesus claims to give life to those who abide in him: *as the true vine*. The Old Testament regularly depicts Israel as a vine (Ps. 80:8–16; Isa. 27:2–6; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:2–6; 17:5–10; 19:10–14), or as a vineyard (Isa 5:1–7).³ Notably, whenever God speaks of his people as a vine, he does so to condemn their fruitlessness.⁴ Ezekiel 15 is representative in this regard. There, the word of the Lord comes to Ezekiel to ask what use anyone could get from a fruitless vine: “Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel” (Ezek. 15:3–4). In the same way, Jesus says that branches that do not produce fruit will be “gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (John 15:6). If those branches do not produce fruit, what good are they except as fuel for the fire? Jesus is the *true* vine who will succeed at bearing fruit where Israel failed. On this point, D. A. Carson writes, “Jesus has already, in principle, superseded the temple, the Jewish feasts, Moses, various holy sites; here he supersedes Israel as the very locus of the people of God.”⁵

Still, the origins of the idea that God’s people must be “fruitful” extends back further than just the

nation of Israel. This is an idea that God has pursued since the beginning when he commissioned the first man and woman to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...” (Gen. 1:28). Also, in the Genesis 2 account of creation, God instructed the man to cultivate the garden of Eden and to keep it (Gen. 2:15), which probably suggests that Adam’s job was to extend the boundaries of the garden, bit by bit, until the fruit-bearing garden (Gen. 2:16) filled the entire world.⁶ After the Fall of Adam and Eve, God cursed the ground so that it would no longer produce food bountifully, but instead would bring forth “thorns and thistles” (Gen. 3:18). This curse certainly affected the agricultural fruitfulness of creation, but it also describes the spiritual fruitlessness of humanity in general and Israel in particular. God has sought a fruitful people from the beginning, but that plan has been marred by sin. Here, Jesus says that a new reality is coming: God’s people will finally bear fruit!

The Vinedresser

George Beasley-Murray points out that this is the only “I am” statement in the Gospel of John where Jesus assigns an allegorical role to his Father: “and my Father is the vinedresser.” Certainly, Jesus speaks about the Father when he states that he is the bread of life (John 6:37–40, 44–46, 57), the light of the world (John 8:16, 19), the door of the sheep and the good shepherd (John 10:15, 17–18), the resurrection and the life (John 11:41), and the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6–7). Only here, though, does Jesus pull the Father into the *imagery*, and not only into the *interpretation*. Jesus is the vine, and the Father is the vinedresser.

It is the Father’s work as the vinedresser that Jesus describes first: “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2). Jesus, therefore, describes the vinedressing work of the Father in entirely negative terms.⁸ Life-giving, fruit-bearing vitality courses through *Jesus* into those who abide in him (John 15:4–6), while the Father only *takes away* fruitless branches and *prunes* the fruitful branches. In this allegory, it is the Father who assists the Son in the *Son’s* life-giving work to his people.

The Father does two very different—yet related—kinds of work. First, he takes away every branch that does not bear fruit. This is equivalent to the judgment in the Old Testament that God brings against Israel when his people bear no fruit or wild (idolatrous) fruit (Isa. 5:1–7; Ezek. 15:1–8; 17:9–10; 19:10–14). Second, the Father prunes every branch that does bear fruit, “that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:3). The Father’s unyielding priority is fruitfulness. The word *fruit* “occurs eight times in [John] 15:1–16, and only twice in the rest of the Gospel ([John] 4:36; 12:24).” Whatever does not bear fruit will be taken away, and whatever does bear fruit will be pruned so that it can bear yet more fruit.

“Already You are Clean”

Next, Jesus says, “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). Although it is not obvious in English, the Greek words for “takes away” (*airō*) and “prunes” (*kathairō*) are closely related. Furthermore, the latter word, *kathairō*, can either mean “prune” or “clean,” so that when Jesus says “Already you are *clean* (*katharoi*)” (John 15:3), he is still using the same word. God’s acts of judgment and his work of discipline are related, although different. The Father’s judgment is against those who bear no fruit whatsoever. But when the Father brings his loving, corrective, redemptive discipline to those who do bear fruit, this pruning may feel like judgment. Nevertheless, his design is not to harm his people, but to bring about *more* fruit. Hebrews

12:11 makes the same point: “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”¹⁰ Jesus speaks these words to encourage his disciples in the midst of the many pruning experiences that they will encounter, especially during his looming crucifixion.¹¹

Jesus says that this cleanness/pruning comes not only by the work of the Father, but through the word of Jesus: “...because of the word that I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). The immediately preceding passage (John 14:15–31) provides important context to help us interpret this idea. First, Jesus said that the Father and the Son will come and make their home in anyone who keeps his word (John 14:23), which the Father and the Son do through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17) who will bring Jesus’ words to remembrance after their departure (John 14:25–26). Second, Jesus said, “And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me” (John 14:24). So, when Jesus says that they are already clean because of the word that he has spoken to them, he does not mean that his word cleanses them magically like some kind of incantation. The cleansing power of word is instead related to the action of pruning. Therefore, the word of the Father that Jesus spoke is the *instrument* (the vinedresser’s knife?) that the Holy Spirit uses to cleanse God’s people.¹²

“Abide in me”

Jesus continues:

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” (John 15:4–6)

In these verses, Jesus ties together the imagery by clarifying the relationship between him, his disciples, and the fruit-bearing of the disciples. Earlier, Jesus implied that the branches referred to his disciples (John 15:2), but now he makes this connection in his allegory explicit. Importantly, when Jesus says that “the branch cannot bear fruit *by itself* (*aph’ heautou*),” he uses a phrase that he has used in relation to himself many times throughout the Gospel of John. This is the phrase that is commonly translated “of my own accord” or “of his own accord” (if Jesus speaks of himself in the third person), and Jesus uses it to stress what he can or cannot do by himself, apart from his Father. So, Jesus can do nothing “of his own accord” (John 5:19), and he has not come “of my own accord” (John 7:28, 8:42), but he lays down his life “of my own accord” (John 10:18). Just as Jesus can do nothing apart from his Father (except to lay down his own life), so also we, the branches, can do nothing apart from Jesus.

The only way that the disciples will bear fruit, then, is through abiding in Jesus, and having Jesus abide in them (John 15:4). Again, the immediately preceding passage spoke of the Father, Son, and Spirit making their home in the disciples who love Jesus and keep Jesus’ word (John 14:17, 23–24). This idea of abiding captures the same idea, but extends it by adding the idea of fruitfulness.¹³ In the previous passage, Jesus described indwelling his people through his Spirit as the consolation for his departure. And indeed, God’s dwelling with his people is one of the main themes running through

the entire Bible, culminating in the new heavens and the new earth with the triumphant cry, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’” (Rev. 21:3). When the Father and the Son sent the Spirit to indwell God’s people, that was a major step forward in salvation history on the road toward the new heavens and the new earth—a new heavens of earth that will bear “twelve kinds of fruit” (Rev. 22:2). In the meantime, Jesus says that we must abide in him, and he in us, in order for us to bear any fruit. He is the vine, and we are the branches—that is, fruit-bearing vitality flows only through him (cf. John 14:6). Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing, because only in him do we have access to the life that bears fruit.

We should notice in Jesus’ specific language that he does not speak of his disciples eking out a little fruit here and there. Jesus wants us to bear more fruit than only the bare minimum. Instead, Jesus says that the Father must prune us so that we may bear “more fruit” (John 15:2), and by abiding in him, we will bear “much fruit” (John 15:5, 8): “For this is no ordinary vine but one with unlimited life and vitality. Thus throughout the assumption is that its branches will bear with the greatest possible abundance. This is the glory of the vine, and no true branch will attempt to make it less.”¹⁴ As Jesus explained elsewhere, he has not come only to give life, but to give life *abundantly* (John 10:10).

The inverse is also true. Just as an abiding connection with Jesus gives life, so also the disconnected failure to abide leaves nothing but death. Apart from Jesus, we wither and die like branches severed from the vine. Eventually, the vinedresser must gather these dead, lifeless, withered branches, throw them into the fire, and burn them. As mentioned earlier, this is the same judgment that the Ezekiel prophesied against Israel’s fruitless vine in Ezekiel 15:3–4. At the end of the day, the Father will judge on the basis of fruitfulness, and fruitfulness can only come through a vital, abiding connection to Jesus. Whoever does not bear fruit through abiding in Jesus will be cast out into the fires of judgment.

Interpreting the Allegory

With these initial observations of the imagery of the allegory, let’s begin to interpret the spiritual meaning behind Jesus’ words. First, Jesus is drawing a stark contrast between, on the one hand, those who bear more and much fruit, and, on the other hand, those who do not bear fruit. Jesus does describe the fruitless branches as branches that are “in me” (John 15:2), but this is not describe the same kind of spiritual union with Christ as those who *abide* in Jesus. Jesus goes on, then, to say that “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). *Anyone* who abides in Jesus, and Jesus in him, will bear much fruit. There is no way to abide in Jesus and yet fail to bear fruit. Those who fail to bear fruit demonstrate not the failure of Christ to produce fruit in them (this is impossible), but only the fact that they have never actually been united to Christ. John Calvin writes that “many are supposed to be in the vine, according to the opinion of men, who actually have no root in the vine.”¹⁵

We find an additional reason to read this allegory as a binary contrast in the phrase “you are clean” (*humeis katharoi este*). This phrase is identical to the words that Jesus spoke to Peter during the foot-washing: “‘The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And *you are clean (humeis katharoi este)*, but not every one of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’” (John 13:10–11).¹⁶ There, the contrast

was between the eleven disciples whom Jesus cleaned/pruned by his word, on the one hand, and Judas Iscariot who only appeared to abide in Jesus, but actually betrayed and abandoned Jesus, on the other hand. There are no other options—either Jesus makes you clean through faith in his word so that you bear fruit in him, or you only *appear* to be in Jesus but never bear any fruit because you have no actual union with him. William Hendriksen explains this contrast well:

In no sense whatever do such passages as 15:2 and 15:6 suggest that there is a falling away from grace, as if those who were once actually saved finally perish. *This allegory plainly teaches that the branches which are taken away and burned represent people who never once bore fruit, not even when they were “in” Christ.* Hence, they never were true believers; and for them the in-the-vine-relationship, though close, was merely outward. There is, accordingly, nothing here (in 15:1–11) that clashes in any way with 10:28....The true believers of chapter 15 are represented by those branches which, abiding forever in the vine, bear fruit, more fruit, much fruit. *These never perish!*¹⁷

Hypocrites may seem to flourish for a time, but they will ultimately fall away, while God will not fail to bring his elect into great fruitfulness over time.¹⁸

While this passage should continually drive us back to Jesus as we seek to continue abiding in him, this passage is meant for our encouragement, not our despair. If we cannot find any fruit, then we should repent and look to Jesus in faith for salvation. But if we find some fruit, then we have reason to believe that we are in Christ, even if the fruit is not as great in quantity as we would like. Jesus' contrast is not between those who produce much fruit and those who only produce a little, but between those who produce much fruit and those who produce no fruit. Herman Ridderbos is also worth quoting on this passage:

What makes Jesus the true vine is that, as the one sent by God, he gathers a community, a fellowship of life, in which his word exerts a redeeming, life-creating, continually purifying, and dividing effect (cf. 14:23f.). For that reason he can say to his disciples, “You are already clean,” which does not mean that they have already attained a degree of spiritual or moral perfection, but that he has so deeply bound them to himself by his word that in virtue of that fellowship they are able and ready to do his word and to bear fruit.¹⁹

Be encouraged: Jesus, the true vine, will not fail to bear much fruit in and through you. This has nothing to do with your limitations, but with his infinite life.

Second, Jesus teaches that he is the true vine, rising up out of Israel to form a new people in himself. Adam failed to cultivate fruit *in* the vines of the garden of Eden, and Israel failed to cultivate fruit *as* the vine of the Old Testament. These failures do not lead God to reject Israel altogether, but to raise up a Messiah out of Israel (“salvation is from the Jews”; John 4:22) to be the *true* vine (John 15:1) who will bear fruit through his people from all nations, tribes, languages, and peoples.²⁰ In regard to Israel, this is not a *replacement* theology, but a *pruning* theology. With the coming of Jesus, the Father has pruned away all the fruitless branches of the original vine that he planted in order that his *true* vine may bear more fruit. Jesus is the true vine growing up out of the vine of Israel, and all those branches who abide in him will bear much fruit. All those branches who are outside of him, on

the other hand, will wither away, be gathered up, and burned in the fire.

Third, we abide in Jesus through Spirit-wrought faith and obedience to his word. Ridderbos writes, “Therefore, ‘remaining in him’ is not a state of rest, an adherence to what the disciples have already received in Jesus solely to conserve it (cf. Mt. 25:24f.), but an adherence to *him* as the vital source of help and strength, in order to bear much fruit.”²¹ This was not easy for the original disciples, and it will not be easy for us. Jesus very purposefully explained that his Father must prune us so that we would understand the work of discipline that he must accomplish in our lives. John Calvin writes, “believers need incessant culture that they may be prevented from degenerating; and that they produce nothing good, unless God continually apply his hand; for it will not be enough to have been once made partakers of adoption, if God do not continue the work of his grace in us.”²²

But while the work of pruning will be painful at times, this is much better than the alternative of fruitlessness. The temptation that the church has faced throughout her history, then, has been a tendency to pursue “growth” apart from the vine. Whether through grasping at and clinging to political power, social prestige, or wealth, or by selling out to the techniques for church growth that come apart from the word of God, Jesus patiently reminds every generation of Christians that true fruitfulness only comes by abiding in the true vine and his word. D. A. Carson writes, “The Christian or Christian organization that expands by external accretion, that merely apes Christian conduct and witness, but is not impelled by life within, brings forth dead crystals, not fruit.”²³

The Requirement of Fruit-Bearing (John 15:7–11)

Jesus has more to say about what it will mean to abide in him: “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). Notice again the great emphasis that Jesus places on his *word*: we must abide in him, and his *words* must abide in us. The word of Jesus functions as his representative during his absence. Jesus does not dwell *among* us bodily after his ascension, but he dwells *in* us by his word.

This emphasis on the indwelling presence of his words helps to explain the powerful promise that he makes about prayer: “ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” This does not give us a *carte blanche* to “name it and claim it.” When Jesus’ words dwell in us as the pruning tool to cleanse us (John 15:2–3), then Jesus’ words shape our prayers. His word will train us not to pray for the cravings of the world, but for true fruit. The more that we recognize that we can do nothing apart from Jesus, the more we will return to Jesus in prayer to ask him to bear the fruit that we cannot squeeze out of our branches by ourselves.²⁴

Glorifying the Father

For Jesus, cultivating fruit through the branches of his people is not of secondary importance. Rather, the work of bearing fruit glorifies the Father: “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” (John 15:8). Jesus has come to glorify the Father (John 12:28; 13:31–32; 14:13; 17:1, 4). While Jesus glorifies the Father primarily through his humble obedience even to the point of death on a cross, he also glorifies the Father by bearing fruit through his disciples. Discipleship, therefore, consists in learning to follow Jesus and bearing fruit in the process. Fruit-bearing is not exhausted at a one-time event during our conversion, but is something that we grow into continually through the course of our lives. As Leon Morris writes, “discipleship is

not static, but a growing and developing way of life. Always the true disciple is becoming more fully a disciple.”²⁵

Abiding in Love

Jesus, though, is not a slave driver. He does not demand fruit production from his disciples in the way that Pharaoh demanded bricks from the Israelites. He leads his people by love, not by force and fear: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:9–10). Once again, we see the relationship between the Father to the Son functioning as a template for the relationship of the Son to the church.²⁶ As the Father has loved Jesus, so Jesus has loved us. Therefore, Jesus urges us to abide in his love by keeping his commandments—just as Jesus kept the Father’s commandments to abide in the Father’s love. That is, Jesus calls us to an ongoing practice of “rejoicing in its reality, depending on its support, doing nothing to grieve it, but on the contrary engaging in that which delights the Lover.”²⁷

We should not think that this means that we must accomplish this commandment-keeping apart from Jesus or the power of the Holy Spirit to give us life through faith in the gospel. Such an interpretation would contradict the whole point of Jesus’ allegory in this passage: “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Yes, Jesus calls us to keep his commandments, but keeping Jesus’ commandments is not a work of our flesh, strength, and power. Rather, Jesus’ exhortation here should drive us to pray to *him* from our need and weakness, asking that *Jesus himself* will supply the strength that we need.²⁸ This is where Jesus’ earlier promise becomes so critical: “ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). Jesus’ requirement is that we abide in him—and in his love—as we ask *him* to bear the fruit in us that we cannot bear for ourselves. Jesus promises that he will answer such prayers!

Full Joy

The purpose of all this fruit-bearing, commandment-keeping, and love-abiding is not the drudgery of slavery, but the fullness of joy: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). Jesus seeks to give us his joy, that it may become *our* joy through our abiding in him. That is, Jesus is the Author and the Cause of the joy as the true vine, and we come to possess his joy personally through our vital connection to him.²⁹ As though participating in the fruit-bearing work of Jesus and abiding in his love were not enough, Jesus gives us abundant joy as well through the things he has spoken to us—that is, through his word.

The Result of Fruit-Bearing (John 15:12–17)

Jesus has used a variety of language in this passage to describe his *word*: not only “word” (*logos*; John 15:3), but also “words” or “utterances” (*hrēmata*; John 15:7), and “commandments” (*entolai*; John 15:10). While each of these words express different aspects of Jesus’ word, they all refer to the word of the Father that Jesus speaks (John 14:24), the word that the Holy Spirit will bring to remembrance for the disciples (John 14:26). Now, Jesus makes explicit the content of his word/utterances/commandments: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do

what I command you” (John 15:12–14).

Friends of Jesus

What this means is that Jesus’ commandments do not consist of a long list of regulations, rules, and procedures for living in God’s kingdom. Rather, Jesus’ commandment *is* that we love one another, just as Jesus has loved us (John 15:12). Jesus emphasized this same point earlier after washing the feet of his disciples: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). Where that statement primarily pointed *back* to Jesus’ humble act of washing his disciples’ feet (John 13:1–11), this statement in John 15:12 primarily points *forward* to Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus makes this explicit in John 15:13, when he says that there is no greater love than for a man to lay down his life for his friends. Just as Jesus will lay down his life for *his* friends, Jesus says “You are my friends if you do what I command you” by laying down their own lives for one another.

Jesus then adds, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). The contrast that Jesus makes is between slavish obedience to the demands of a tyrant and the full disclosure of a servant-leader with his friends. In terms of God’s own relationship to his people, the master-slave relationship would be far more appropriate than the leader-friend relationship. By saying “No longer do I call you servants,” Jesus is acknowledging that God’s relationships with his people *has* been a master-slave relationship up to this point, but that a new day is dawning in salvation history.³⁰ Adam failed to produce fruit in the garden of Eden, and Israel failed to produce fruit in the law, types, and shadows of the old covenant. Now, though, the union that God’s people enjoy with Jesus himself will produce the result of fruit in and through the true vine of the Second Adam and of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus Christ. With that new day comes a new way for God’s people to relate to their God: as friends of Jesus.

Still, this friendship with Jesus does not lessen the obligations that Jesus lays on his disciples. Obedience is still at the heart of the relationship: “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). As Keener writes, “friendship means not freedom to disobey but an intimate relationship that continues to recognize distinctions in authority.”³¹ The contrast that Jesus is drawing, therefore, is not between varying levels of obligations for obedience, but between various levels of *revelation*. While “the servant does not know what his master is doing,” the friend does, “for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). Certainly, this does not mean that Jesus revealed absolutely *everything* that he knew in his omniscience as the Son of the Father, but only that he revealed everything necessary for the Father to convey to his people through his Son for the sake of our salvation.³² The Father did not only send the Son to accomplish *deeds* for the sake of our salvation, but also to preach to us *words* that will instruct us in the way of our salvation (John 14:24).

Chosen for Love

Jesus takes this theme of friendship one additional step by speaking of his election of his disciples: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (John 15:16). Jesus makes plain that the disciples did not befriend Jesus, who then accepted their

friendship; rather, Jesus chose the disciples to become his friends. Furthermore, he appointed them that they should go and bear fruit that will abide through their prayers to the Father in the name of Jesus. The call and election of Jesus is not merely for salvation, but for a commission to go into the world for bearing fruit.

The doctrine of election is everywhere in the Gospel of John. From the beginning, John has contrasted Jesus' own people who rejected him with those who were born again from the will of God (John 1:11–13) by the new birth of the Spirit (John 3:5–8). The Father has given a people to the Son, and the Son has come to save the people whom the Father has given him (John 6:35–40). Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and lays down his life for them, and whose sheep listen to his voice (John 10:1–18). For all those who are not his sheep, Jesus' preaching and signs only blind them further (John 12:37–43). Jesus came to love *his own*, even to the end (John 13:1). This does not mean that there is some kind of good thing in us that causes God to choose us, for God chooses his own *in spite* of us. His election is wholly from God's undeserved mercy and free grace toward us. We receive God's grace only through faith that recognizes our own unworthiness and inability, and then looks to Christ alone for salvation.³³

Furthermore, this is true not only of these first disciples, but for all of Jesus' disciples. Yes, Jesus called and appointed these eleven disciples to a specific fruit-bearing activity, but Jesus calls and appoints *all* his disciples to bear fruit in the world.³⁴ The call to salvation is a call to discipleship, and Jesus brings this out in the word *appointed*, which is the same verb used for Jesus' "laying down" (or, perhaps better, "setting aside") his own life for his friends (John 15:13). Elsewhere, Jesus calls us to take up our cross to follow him (Matt. 16:24), and this perhaps shows how we take up our cross when we do not actually die. George Beasley-Murray writes:

As always in the Bible, the election was for a purpose: "I set you aside that you should go forth and yield fruit..." The verb ἔθηκα [*ethēka*], "set aside," is used in v 13 of Jesus "setting aside" his life for others. The term appears in Num 8:10 for the ordination of Levites; in Num 27:18 for Moses setting aside Joshua for his task; in Acts 13:47 it denotes the setting aside of the Servant of the Lord for his ministry as light and salvation of the nations (a citation from Isa 49:6), and in 1 Tim 1:12 it is used of Paul's being set aside for the apostolic ministry.³⁵

All Jesus' disciples are chosen and set aside for the work that he appoints for them (Eph. 2:8–10).

Still, we never grow beyond our need for the power of God to do this work. Instead, Jesus says insists that our success relies on God alone. Furthermore, Jesus teaches us to seek that power through prayer to the Father in his own name. On this verse, John Calvin writes, "whoever acknowledges that the success of his work depends on God alone, will offer his labor to him with fear and trembling. On the other hand, if any one, relying on his own industry, disregard the assistance of God, he will either throw away his spear and shield, when he comes to the trial, or he will be busily employed, but without any advantage."³⁶ We *must* pray, but Jesus does not leave us to approach the Father on our own. Rather, he offers us his own place, position, authority, and credentials to use as we approach the Father. When we pray anything in his name (anything, that is, driven by the abiding of Jesus' words in us; John 15:7), then the Father will give it to us.

Love as Fruit

Jesus' final words pull the entire passage together: "These things I command you, so that you will love one another" (John 15:17). Thus far, Jesus has spoken of fruit (e.g., John 15:16), but without actually defining it. Does this refer to the evangelistic fruit of winning souls for Christ, as it did in John 4:36: "Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering *fruit* for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together"? Here, Jesus clarifies that while that missionary work may be a *part* of the fruit-bearing that he has in mind, the larger result Jesus seeks is related to the cultivation of *love*.³⁷ Jesus has spoken all these things about the true vine, the vinedresser, the branches, and the fruit to drive his disciples to love one another, just as he has loved them. *Love* among the people of God is the fruit that God has wanted since the beginning and now becomes a new reality for God's people in and through Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of fruit does God demand in the garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28; 2:15)? What kind of fruit does God demand from Israel? What kind of fruit does God demand in and through our union with Jesus? What kind of fruit will God produce in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 22:1–2)?
2. Why is Jesus able to produce fruit when both Adam and Israel failed to do so? Why does Jesus want to produce his fruit *through us*? What does that fruit look like in our lives, practically speaking? Why does Jesus focus specifically on love as the fruit he seeks?
3. Explain the Father's role of vinedresser (John 15:1–2). What does the work of pruning/cleaning look like? What does it feel like? How should we evaluate the Father's pruning work in our lives? Does a theological framework of "pruning" help us in the midst of suffering?
4. What does it mean to abide in Jesus? How does abiding in Jesus involve his word? How does abiding in Jesus involve prayer? How is the Holy Spirit involved in our abiding in Jesus? What does it mean practically for us to seek to continue abiding in Jesus? In what areas of our abiding in Jesus do we need to repent, seek forgiveness, and pursue new obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit right now?

Notes

1. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1025.
2. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 106. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.i.html>>
3. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 991.
4. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 272.
5. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 513.
6. John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 186.
7. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 271.

8. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1030.
9. Köstenberger, *John*, 452.
10. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 514.
11. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 595.
12. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 108–09. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.i.html>>
13. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 988.
14. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1035.
15. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 108. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.i.html>>
16. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 295.
17. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 296.
18. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 110. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.i.html>>
19. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 517.
20. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1027.
21. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 517.
22. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 108. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.i.html>>
23. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 516.
24. “This conformity between the Head and the members ought to be always placed before our eyes, not only that believers may form themselves after the example of Christ, but that, they may entertain a confident hope that his Spirit will every day form them anew to be better and better, that they may walk to the end in newness of life.” (Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 111. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.ii.html>>)
25. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 597.
26. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 114. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.ii.html>>
27. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 273.
28. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 113. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.ii.html>>
29. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 115. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.ii.html>>
30. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 523.
31. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 1015.
32. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 118. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.iii.html>>
33. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 118–22. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.iv.html>>
34. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 308.
35. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 275.
36. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 122. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.v.iv.html>>
37. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 521–22.