The Word Made Flesh

Introduction to the Holy Spirit Part Three

The Holy Spirit, the True Vine, and the Real Measure of a Disciple

JOHN 15:1-14

Where We Are

We're on to our series on the Gospel of John, and we have found ourselves in the upper room with Jesus the night before He is crucified. It is the upper crescendo of three years of ministry. Jesus is going to die. The disciples will soon be alone, confused, afraid, and under immense social and political pressure to recant their faith. So Jesus does what He can to fortify them and give them instructions to remember.

It is in this moment that Jesus begins to teach, for the first time in His ministry, on the Person of the Holy Spirit.

We have been intentional to walk through this teaching with a specific lens. Many of us come from backgrounds where teaching on the Holy Spirit begins and ends in the book of Acts, with an emphasis on power, signs, wonders, and experiences. Yet as we have said often in this series, the first teachings given on scripture are always the most important, because they set the foundation for all that follows.

Jesus does not begin with signs and wonders. He does not begin with encounters or experiences. He does not begin with power evangelism. He begins with what is most important.

What Jesus Has Said So Far

The Holy Spirit is your **Helper**. In contrast, this portion is helping you love your fellow Christian, no matter how immature or frustrating they are.

The Holy Spirit is the **Spirit of Truth**. He guides us into truth, enables us to live in truth, speak the truth, and rejoice in the truth. He brings the Word of God to our remembrance.

The Holy Spirit does not just dwell with us, He dwells in us. We become the house of God, the temple of God, and we carry a priestly responsibility to keep the temple clean and holy.

Today we lay one more foundation stone for our understanding of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

The Importance of Fruit

I want to put an idea in front of you. The most important thing to measure in your life is your fruit.

I do not mean fruit in a generic sense. Not how much money you made. Not the impact you had. Not how successful or how gifted you are.

I mean how *fruitful* you are. Fruit picks up the language from Jesus when he writes Galatians, and he lays it out plainly:

> GALATIANS 5:22-23
>
> Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Often the mistake we make is thinking that a Spirit-filled person is the one who speaks in tongues, rather than the person who walks in peace in the midst of tragedy. Or the person who is patient when they have been wronged.

We mean reframe the way we think about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He clearly wants to produce fruit in us. If He had to choose between producing fruit in us or giving us spectacular spiritual gifts, fruit wins every time.

But the problem is, we tend to get most excited about gifts more than fruit. We get so confidence about the prophetic. I am unaware of a major Christian conference on gentleness.

Along that line, we often judge the maturity of a believer, or even of ourselves, based on how spiritually gifted we are rather than how fruitful we are. *I just gave an accurate prophetic word. I can minister healed. I preached a sermon that moved thousands. I must be growing. I must be good. God used me, which means God approves of me and approves of my lifestyle.*

That could not be farther from the truth.

> CORINTHIANS 13:1-3
>
> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

We are in a painful and encouraging moment in Church history in the West. We are coming off of a hundred year season in which the gifted have been elevated over the fruitful, and we are reaping the consequences of it.

Gifts are deceptive. Fruit is telling.

The Fig Tree in Leaf

Spiritual gifts are deceptive because they can be seen from a mile away. They can be seen from the stage. Fruit ripens over time, and it takes time to grow and personal.

The inherent weakness of the way we do church in the West is that you can be moved by my sermons and never know whether I am willing to love, pray, persevere, have kindness, goodness, gentleness, or self-control. But you are supposed to know that. You are actually supposed to know if your leader is fruitful.

Jesus specifically says there are gifted people who will lead you astray. They are called false prophets. And you will know them by their fruit. Not by their gifts. Not by their intentions. By their fruit.

Pastor Chris and I speak of this often, and the passage that continually comes to our minds is Mark 11, where Jesus curses the fig tree.

> MARK 11:12-14
>
> On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

It is an odd moment, but commentators are largely entitled on this. From a distance, the tree looked like it should have fruit. It was full of leaves, the very sign of health and fruitfulness. But up close, there was nothing.

That is the half-hearted believer. Full of Christian activity. Full of the gifts of the Spirit. Void of the fruits of the Spirit.

Matthew 7

Now you may ask, can that really happen? It absolutely can. Matthew 7 is clear. There are false prophets, and you will know them by their fruit. And many will come to Him on that day saying, *Lord, Lord, we not cast out demons, prophesy, and perform miracles in your name?*

Those are gifts. Not fruit.

Our giftings and our Christian activity should never surpass our fruit. And they should never fool us into thinking we are something we are not.

> A MOMENT OF EXAMINATION
>
> **How Are You Doing?**
>
> *Close your eyes. Do not go distracted. Sit with each one honestly.*
>
> *Love*
> Not just the easy ones. Your enemies.
>
> *Joy*
> Even in painful situations. Not happiness, but the inner hope that lifts the countenance.
>
> *Peace*
> When things are hard, when life is hearty, do you walk in peace?
>
> *Patience*
> Walk your kids. Your spouse. Your hem. Your church.
>
> *Kindness*
> Are you a kind person?
>
> *Goodness*
> Does right and wrong matter to you? Do you choose what is good for others?
>
> *Gentleness*
> Dads, husbands, wives, moms. Are you gentle?
>
> *Faithfulness*
> Do you have the grit to follow through? To stay the course?
>
> *Self-Control*
> Who is in charge of your actions? Your Spirit, or your flesh?

The Text

> JOHN 15:1-14
>
> I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 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. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.
>
> 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 is what 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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.
>
> 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
>
> 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.

The True Vine

Jesus is the Vine. The Father is the Vinedresser. We are the branches. And the Holy Spirit is the Core that produces the fruit in the branch.

The Father shapes and guides the vine. He is the Vinedresser.

The Vine provides nourishment and connects all of the branches together, ensuring the branch has everything needed to bear fruit.

So often we detach ourselves from the vine and try to bear fruit on our own. That is foolishness.

The Holy Spirit is everything needed to bear fruit.

The branch has one job: stay connected to the Vine. So long as the branch stays connected, it will not die, and it will bear fruit.

Apart from me you can do nothing.

How to Abide

By this point in the sermon, hopefully every one of us wants to bear fruit. So how do we do that?

Abide in Jesus. That can sound vague, so let me make it as practical as I can.

I. Unveiled Communion

Authenticity. Coming to Him honestly, with right posture, with confession, with truth.

II. Uninterrupted Fellowship

Staying with Him always. Praying without ceasing. Turning your inner dialogue toward Him through the day.

III. Unwavering Assembly

Being part of the church. Not the distance universal body, but the organized, structured gathering of the saints around the word, prayer, and communion, under the oversight and care of qualified, fruitful elders.

I recognize that may sound self-serving coming from a pastor, but please hear me. The Bible is clear on this. We cannot forsake the assembly. To be in Jesus is to be in His body, the church.

> HEBREWS 10:24-25
>
> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Fruit is not given to us in isolation. We are receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Pruned, Heard, Glorifying

The Branch That Does Not Bear Fruit

Jesus had already said in 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.

So bear this. If you do not bear fruit, you will be cut off and thrown into the fire. In other words, if you do not bear fruit, you prove to have never been attached to the Vine in the first place.

If you do bear fruit, you will be pruned. And pruning can feel as painful as life being cut off.

Here is what that means in practice. You will bear fruit, and then the Lord will turn up the heat on the very situations that produced that fruit. You bear the fruit of love, and you do it well. Then the Lord, in His sovereign hand, may by a much more unlovable person into your life so that you will bear more fruit.

Ask Whatever You Wish

This is not a blank check. There is a qualifier. He does not say, *whatever you ask, I will give you.* He says, *if you abide in me, and my words abide in you, then ask.*

Those two qualifiers ensure that you are asking according to the will of God, not your own.

By This My Father Is Glorified

He does not say, *by this my Father is glorified, that you preach really well.*

He does not say, *by this my Father is glorified, that you prophesy.*

He does not say, *by this my Father is glorified, that you give your life in ministry.*

He says, **that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.**

Abide in His Love

As the Father has loved Jesus, so He has loved us. Our calling is to abide in that love. To keep His commandments. To let His joy be in us, and our joy be made full.

This is His commandment: that we love one another as He has loved us. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. We are His friends if we do what He commands.

The Holy Spirit is at work in you for one chief purpose. Not to make you spectacular. To make you fruitful. Stay connected to the Vine. Let Him produce in you what only He can produce. And by that fruit, the Father will be glorified, and you will prove to be His disciple.