

To Be Fruit-Bearing Stewards for Jesus Christ

An Editorial on Stewardship and Fruitfulness

Article Parables and the Teaching of Jesus The Scroll, June 2022

Genesis 1:28

John 15:1-5

At a time when the Stewardship Ministry of our church is on its launch pad, we thought it appropriate to bring out a special electronic edition of the Scroll on this very apt theme. I am confident that the thoughtful and well-informed articles by our Pastors and church members, included in this edition, will give the readers not only an in-depth understanding of this important ministry, but will lead them, in obedience, to the fulfilment of the Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus was emphatic about the need for His followers to be fruit-bearing. He did not introduce this concept as He preached during His time on this planet; this was His creation mandate for us. In Genesis 1:28 we read, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

God, our Creator, gave man and woman, whom He created, the ability to create, to be co-creators with Him. But He did not stop there; He gave us dominion over all living things. He put us in charge of everything He created, and thus we became stewards of God's gifts. The gifts He has bestowed on us are the abilities and talents we are expected to use in His mission.

This blessing came with a caution about the low-hanging, forbidden fruit. Forbidden fruit is where man's spiritual battle began: rather than depending on God, man tried to be God. The result was an eternal death from which Jesus repossessed us, shedding His holy blood. Forbidden fruits, you see, make many jams.

The Gospel according to John tells us that as disciples of Jesus, we are appointed to go and bear fruit that will remain. So how do we bear good fruit? We do it through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Christian moral life is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives each of us seven gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, or holiness. As we try to live a Christ-centred life, these virtues become more perfect in us. The result is the fruit of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity.

The most profound of these statements of Jesus can be found in John 15:1-5. Jesus declares:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:1-5)

The caution we read in Genesis is repeated here, with an added avowal that we can do nothing on our own unless we remain a healthy branch of the vine, Jesus Christ.

As we read John chapter fifteen again, we must notice that Jesus uses the word "abide" again and again — there is a significant difference between producing and bearing fruit. The former focuses on our work for God; the latter, on God's work through us. Unless we remain intimate with Jesus, He cannot work through us, and devoid of the presence of His Holy Spirit within us, we wither away. Eleven times Jesus uses this word. There is an undeniable link between remaining in an intimate relationship with God and the extent to which our lives will bear good fruit. As His Spirit works in and through us, our lives will bear love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Finally, the impact of this fruit on the people we lead will result from what God is doing in us and through us, and not just from what we are doing for Him.