

## Lovers of God, Part Three

By

Ginny Menard

Lovers of God! This article is number three of a multi-series of articles concerning the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Before I begin to “examine” the fruit, I feel it necessary, and share with you the relationship that Jesus the Christ set forth to His Apostles before the final hours of His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven to be with His Father. I refer you to John, Chapter 15. From reading this portion of Scripture, we can see that Jesus set some definite guidelines for the Apostles in this relationship with God. Even though Jesus was talking just to his apostles, there is something to be learned and practiced by all believers. In these instructions Jesus established three relationships: 1) The relationship of the believer to his Lord, 2) The relationship of the believer to other believers, and 3), The relationship of the believer to the world. To understand in greater detail what Jesus was teaching his Apostles, I suggest you also read John, Chapters 14, 16 and 17. Once this material is understood, then one can know and begin to work on these relationships. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “Put on that which is Christ.”

Some people (I should say most) believe it is impossible to be like Christ. These people will act good on Sunday, or worship on Sunday, only because *tradition demands it*, and maybe they will work their little hearts out because it looks good to their leaders. And again, because *tradition demands some sort of repentance*, they fail to realize what relationship Jesus wants because they are ignorant of what he said. These same people want one foot in heaven but they also want to “act like the devil” here on earth. They deceive themselves into thinking they can earn their way to heaven with their own wisdom, knowledge and labor. It takes submission to Jesus and submission to the power of the Holy Spirit, if that spirit is within one, to enable them to become Christ-like. Granted, it is not an over-night process to develop the relationship that Jesus talked about in John 15. When I find it hard to do things in God’s way, I am reminded by this Scripture in Philippians 4:13 which says “I can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens me.” There are many Scriptures that tell me I am never alone and without help, but that God sent through the prayer of Jesus (see John 17) the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church (that is you and I folks!) to help, to teach, to guide, to strengthen and equip us to do the things God want us to in the Name of Jesus the Christ! One cannot go wrong with the Holy Spirit leading, if, and I repeat, if we allow the spirit to lift, mold and guide us to become like Christ. Until this submission takes place, one will not bear healthy fruit. Think about it!

### 1. The believer and his Lord

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman,” Jesus said. “Every branch in me that bears no fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:1–2). Jesus used an occupation extremely common for that part of the world. One summer and early fall I lived in southern California. My cousin took me to see many orchards, but what I enjoyed most were the trips we made to the grape fields. I watched as the farmer terraced the hillsides; preparing

and repairing their fields. Some had stone hedges around them to prevent any washouts from sudden cloudbursts of rain. I also noticed towers here and there, and I was told later that these were watchtowers to allow the farmers to scan the fields to watch the vines during the time of fruitfulness.

The vines were usually planted about 8 or 9 feet apart. I began to wonder, “can any fruit come out of a little stump 2 or 3 feet long?” But to my delightful surprise, in the fall during the harvest season I could see what seemed like miles and miles of great clusters of grapes hanging on those few branches. I then began to realize the husbandman knew exactly what he was doing; he was at work producing fruit. I watched as the farmer “examined” each vine. He was very careful to spot the leafy vine with little or no fruit. He lifted the vine up, then cut-away most of the leafy growth; propping a forked stick under each branch to help hold it up. Because the leafy growth was taken away, the sap or the life-giving juice was allowed to go into the fruit instead of the leaf. In a very short time these vines produced more and more fruit.

Jesus brought out to his disciples that God is going to be working with the believer as the husbandman works with the vine, lifting up, cutting back, so that in the end there will be fruit—much fruit! This is what the verb here in verse two means when it says, “takes away.”

What kind of fruit was Jesus expecting? The secret of fruit-bearing is in the word “abide.” It is mentioned nine times in the passage. The verb is active and speaks about an unbroken connection. It means to continue to be consistent. In that unbroken connection the life or fruitfulness can flow-through. And therein is the secret of the believer’s relationship with his Lord—that abiding, unbroken relationship. When that relationship is established and well cared for, then we can anticipate fruit being produced.

Jesus said, “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (John 15:7). The prayer life becomes the first fruit that comes in an abiding relationship. I know when prayers are not answered in my own life, that it will not go unanswered forever, but will bear fruit—maybe in the life of an unsaved person I have once talked to. All I need do is to check out my abiding relationship.

Furthermore, Jesus said, “Abide in my love” (John 15:10). We should bear the fruit of love. The only way Christ’s love can be manifested to our world is through our capacity to be fruitful. The vine does not have the fruit; the branch bears the fruit. The fruit of love produced in us will establish us as witnesses of His love.

Again, Jesus said, “If you keep my commandments” (John 15:10). The obedient life is another fruit that grows out of this abiding relationship. Abraham, for example, exhibited this fruit long before Christ came amongst us. By faith he went to a land he knew nothing of, but he obeyed. He was a believer and a doer in his abiding relationship with God.

And Finally, Jesus said there will be joy: “My joy might remain in you” (John 15:11). The fruit of joy is what indicates the abiding and unbroken relationship with the vine. After Philip’s ministry at Samaria, “there was a great joy in that city” (Acts 8:9). They had established a new relationship with the Source of Life after hearing and believing the word of God. It is a joy that the world can not give. It is a joy when all seems to be going wrong, that you find joy knowing the Lord Jesus gives you inner strength to carry on—to walk the second mile, and still be joyful.

## **2. The Believer and Other believers**

Jesus began his instructions, “Love one another” (John 15:12). He ended it, “Love one another (John 15:17). Love becomes the hallmark of the relationship between believers. And Jesus knew his disciples needed that. One was a zealot, desirous of throwing off the Roman yoke. There was a Herodian, a tax collector who had personally benefited from collecting the tax. Then there were those three; Peter, James and John, who had attitude problems. Jesus knew if they were disunited they would not give an effective witness for his Kingdom. Thus he said, “Love one another.”

Acts 2:42–47 tells us that the church astounded those who looked upon them because of the love they showed for one another. Our work must not be just for unity, but a love relationship for one another—unity is a result of love! Jesus established the standard for that love: “Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12–13). There it is: “Sacrificial love!” This is where the true Christian spirit of love comes forth. When we have to sacrifice to express, to give, to meet the need—often times with no return of thanks: that is sacrifice!

In Matthew 5:43–48, Jesus’ sermon on the mountain, one can read what he said concerning what the standard of our love must be towards friends and enemies. In verse 44 Jesus said, “But I say unto you”—these five words are very important because they reveal the authority of the Son of God and they serve to stand as a “stop sign” against the harshness of people towards one another. Jesus, in this same verse, gives the command to love, to bless, to do good, and to pray for those that curse, hate, use, and persecute you.

In verse 45 Jesus explains the “Why?”—“that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.” As one looks at this verse closer, it is seen that Jesus reminded his hearers of the goodness, the providence, and the impartiality of God the Father toward all of his creation. Jesus goes on to say in verses 46 and 47 that being good to friends merits nothing—because the heathens do the same thing! The true believer is one who is good to all people, just as the heavenly Father is good toward all of his creation. Jesus then ends this point of his sermon with this command: “Be therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

In reference to John 15:14–15, even though Jesus was talking only to his apostles, we can see the ultimate relationship. Jesus said, “You are not servants, not slaves; you are friends.” I believe this is the love relationship we are to have with all people.

As one makes a quick scan of this chapter, there is a two-lettered word that is repeated many times. It is a very important word because our whole attitude or submission of our will rests on this word—that word is IF. IF we would but follow in the instruction of our Lord, we would be able to demonstrate this loving relationship. It would demand submission, sacrifice, and initiative on our part from time to time, if not all the time. However, the end product will be a fruit of love that will mark us as children of the heavenly Father and as brothers and sisters of Christ. People will not have to ask us IF we are Christians. They will know us by how we demonstrate a love for all people.

## **3. The Believer and the World**

And finally, Jesus said, there is a relationship to the world: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world

would love his own; but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my words, they will keep yours also” (John 15:18–20)

Jesus is saying here that the relationship of the believer by the world is one of hostility and hatred. But he does not want us to go away into some pious isolation in an institution. He has chosen us to actively meet the needs of those around us. Yes, there will be hostility; there will be rejection. For what fellowship has light with darkness? (See 1 John 1 5–7.)

Second, because the Apostles had been identified with the Christ through his message of redemption, there was hostility. The book of Acts contains records of hostility toward those who accepted the Gospel message. Many believers today are confronted with hostility from family members, friends and co-workers. My husband and I had to make a very hard decision as to whether or not we should remain active with our married couples group. We sensed resentment from most the couples because we did not go along with the so-called “off-color jokes” nor did we partake of any alcoholic drinks. We were soon left out of other ‘social’ affairs other than the regular group meetings. It is very hard to stand in the name of Jesus and be rejected because of it. But Jesus said we should expect that.

And finally he said: “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they seen and hated both me and my Father” (John 15:24). Because of the works of Christ in the midst of the world, there is hostility. It would seem to a lot of people when real goodness is demonstrated, they mistrust it, call it phony, or say, “It is too good to be real.” They lose out on the grace, love, care and glory that God wants them to share.

What is the key to the relationship of the believer to the world? Jesus said, “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, he shall testify of me: and you also shall bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26–27). Even though Jesus was only talking to the Apostles, we also receive the gift or indwelling of the Holy Spirit when we are immersed—that is, baptized. (See Acts 2:38–39, and read John 3:1–8.) When we are immersed into the watery grave, we are dead to sin. When we rise or come out of the water, we rise glorious in Christ. God the Father wants to keep us close to him in Christ his Son. He sent the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we would not be alone and that we would be powerful witnesses to His Son, and thereby counteract the hostility of the world.

As I shared in this passage of John 15, we see that Jesus has given three important “norms” for our Christian relationships. We become fruitful as we maintain an unbroken connection, an abiding in him. Love guides our relationships with one another, and by that we give witness to God’s love to the world around us!

---

Copyright © 1982 by Christ For Catholics. This article may be copied freely for wider distribution, providing that the source from which it is taken is suitably acknowledged. (Acknowledgment: Christ For Catholics, Volume 2, Number 1, 1982; published by Christ For Catholics, Farmington, MN.) This notice must remain with the article.

.....