

VIRAL WEEK 2 – IS THERE SOMETHING MORE I SHOULD BE DOING (JOHN 15)?

GETTING STARTED

Today's Question: Is there something that I should be doing that I am not doing?

Answer: The gospel is called "Good News" – News is either believed or rejected, never worked for. *But if you believe you will bear fruit.*

- What plant best describes you now: Towering oak? Weeping willow? Tumbleweed? Crab apple tree? Other?

DISCUSSION

Read John 15:1-17

- What is the context? What just happened in John 13 with Judas? Jesus is now walking toward the Mount of Olives and has a teaching moment in a vineyard.
- Who are the characters in this allegory/metaphor that Jesus shares?
 - The True Vine:
 - The Gardener:
 - The branches that bear fruit:
 - The branches that don't bear fruit:
- What is the point of pruning/cleaning the branches that do bear fruit? How might God even use trials, suffering, and divine discipline in our lives to be more fruitful for His glory showing ourselves to be His disciples?
- Based on John 15, what does it mean to abide/remain in Jesus?
- What might be examples of the *fruit*, *much fruit*, *fruit that will last* that Jesus is saying will be present in the life of every Christian?
 - As a branch on Jesus' vine, how would you describe the fruit in your life?
 - How would you rate yourself on laying down your life for your friends? (John 15:12-14)
 - Do you feel more like Jesus' servant or His friend? What helps to develop the friendship? (John 15:15-17)
- There are a number of possible meanings for the branches that don't bear fruit. What are your thoughts based on the context of this passage?
 - Christians who lose their salvation. This is doubtful since it would contradict many other Scriptures. We looked at a number of these last week in John's gospel - John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:37, 39; 10:28-29.
 - Some commentators view these "branches" as either Christians who are no longer useful to God because of habitual sin or possibly Christians who commit the "*sin that leads to death*" mentioned in 1 John 5:16, in which case the "*burning*" (15:6) may refer to the "*bema*" judgment of believers (see 1 Corinthians 3:10-17, 11:27-34).
 - Most commentators view these "branches" as professing Christians, who are finally severed from their superficial connection with Christ (e.g., Judas).

If a true Christian cannot lose salvation, why warn about falling away? The best explanation is that these warnings are directed toward professing Christians who appear, at least outwardly, to be connected to the Vine. They are branches in the vicinity of the Vine, but there is a disconnect. Judas Iscariot is a good example of a false professor. The parable of the seed and the soils (Matthew 13) presents young plants that seem to start out well but then wither away. The book of Hebrews, with its many warning passages, seems to be directed at those who have made an initial positive response to Jesus but are considering turning back.

Based on outward appearances at any given moment, it may be difficult to tell genuine believers (connected in vital unity with the True Vine) from those who have merely attached themselves to some of the trappings of Christianity. However, time will tell the difference, because the genuine believer attached to the True Vine will bear fruit. A false professor appears to be attached but does not bear fruit, and it's the lack of fruit that shows a branch is not receiving the fruit-bearing energy that comes from attachment to the Vine. Regardless of how attached this branch may appear to be on the surface, it is lacking the one absolute evidence of attachment—fruit! That "branch" should not console himself with false notions that he is attached, because his lack of fruit bears condemning evidence against him. In this case, the branch was never really attached in the first place. The metaphor (or allegory) of the vine and the branches can only be pressed so far. – GotQuestions.org

- The primary truth from this passage is that bearing fruit is the essence of the Christian life as we abide in Jesus. This should be a source of great joy (see John 15:9-11)! How have you experienced the joy that flows from walking in obedience as you abide in Christ?

PRAYER

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-40

Each year many of us will go through a physical check-up, perhaps do a financial check-up at year's end or at tax time, and perhaps do a performance review at our workplace. But how often do we take time to review our spiritual life? Those who are saved by grace are called to grow in grace (2 Peter 3.18). As disciples of Jesus, we are to live a life of love – love for God and love for our neighbor, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Too often, in the busyness of our day-to-day lives, we let other priorities crowd out the two highest priorities Jesus gave us. The questions on the next page are designed to help you examine your spiritual life and to prayerfully seek God's help in areas where you desire to grow. (Adapted from the Annual Spiritual Check-up developed by the C.S. Lewis Institute)

During your prayer time thank the Lord for how He has been at work in your life and for the evidence of fruit, more fruit, fruit that will last for the Father's glory. Pray for growth in the areas where the Holy Spirit is nudging you.

Loving God with all your heart, soul and mind

1. How is my personal relationship with God?
 - Do I have a growing desire to spend more time with God? Am I spending appropriate time praying, reading and meditating on the word?
 - Am I growing in my desire to obey and please God? Do I obey out of gratitude for God's love? Or from guilt or fear?
 - Have I fully surrendered to the Holy Spirit? Do I ask God to fill me each day with the Holy Spirit?
 - Are there areas I am holding back from God? Which ones? Why?
 - Am I more aware of the sins in my life? Do I repent on a daily basis and receive forgiveness and cleansing from God. Have I fully, truthfully repented of all past and current sins?
2. Am I actively serving God in some way?
 - Volunteering at church?
 - Praying regularly for the pastor, staff, missionaries and volunteers?
 - Am I seeking to make others feel welcome in my church?
3. Am I growing in my desire and actions to give sacrificially to God's work in the church and other ministries? Am I teaching my children about sacrificial giving and putting God before materialistic desires?
4. Am I living in humility before God, my family, friends and co-workers?
5. Is there evidence of grace growing in my life? Do I thank God every day for his love, grace and mercy and saving me from what I deserve? Am I learning to see others through the mind of Christ? Am I treating others with the same grace God has shown me?

Loving Your Neighbor

6. Am I loving my family as I should?
 - Husbands, are you loving your wives? How, specifically?
 - Wives, are you respecting your husbands? How, specifically?
 - Parents – are we teaching our children the Bible, how to pray, and how to please God?
 - Am I managing my time in a way that reflects God's priorities and honors my family relationships? What specific changes are needed?
 - Are there any outside influences that are harming my family relationships? If so, what will I do about them?
7. Am I forgiving others? Is there anyone among my family, friends, neighbors or coworkers that I refuse to forgive? Do I fully trust that God has forgiven my sins?
8. Am I growing in fellowship with other believers?
 - Am I part of a small group? Is it making a difference in the lives of participants?
 - Do I have a Godly mentor to help me grow in my walk with Christ?
 - Am I mentoring/discipling another person?
9. Have I personally witnessed to anyone in the past year? In my neighborhood? In my workplace? Am I prepared to share my testimony? To share the Gospel?
 - Am I fervently praying for and planning opportunities to witness in this coming year?
 - Am I being salt and light in my neighborhood, workplace and social groups?
10. Am I focusing part of my time and money to help the poor and disadvantaged? Am I teaching my children about the importance of helping the poor? How?

Jesus says that if we love him, we will obey him (John 14:15; 15:10), and he calls us to grow in grace and love. Do you have a plan for growing in your love for God and love for your neighbor for this next year?