

# essentials: big questions

Bernard V Palmer asks why we are Christians



Bernard V Palmer is a retired consultant surgeon in Hertfordshire

*'I am the true vine... Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.'* (John 15:1,4)

*'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.'* (John 15:8)



Catherine Booth, wife of the founder of the Salvation Army was giving a talk in an established church when she said, 'Is this all you do for God; you go to church?'

The vine in the Old Testament represents Israel.<sup>1</sup> In John 15, Jesus unhesitatingly puts himself at the centre of this picture. 'I am the true vine' is Jesus' claim that God's people are dependent on him. The significance of this staggering passage doesn't stop here; it emphasises that we are in Christ in order to produce fruit. This concept is repeated seven times in the first, eight verses – so presumably the Lord wants us to be very clear about this. But what exactly does he mean by, 'to bear fruit'?

There was a caring, conscientious GP who, when a young man, had been active in his medical school Christian Union. But now, in the 'real world', he realised that to suggest that others must take Jesus seriously could cause considerable tension and loss of popularity. 'I now have a responsible position in society', he argued, 'and I do not think it is my gift to point people to the Bible or to talk about the Lord. I major on the fruit of the Spirit, on love, joy, peace and patience instead.' He now appears as a very kind doctor, but is not recognisable as one of 'those who belong to Jesus Christ' (Galatians 5:24).

In John 15, there are several clues as to what Jesus really means by bearing fruit.

- It is not something within ourselves but an effect outside, 'I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.' (John 15:16). The mission of the church is to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19).

- 'This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.' (John 15:8) This verse seems to equate 'bearing fruit' with showing ourselves to be disciples.

We are meant to show our faith to others.

Jesus wants his followers to see him as the focus for the whole world and to make this obvious to others. Christians must show, both by the way they live and the way they speak, that they are devoted to Jesus. This, after all, is the purpose of his creation, 'to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ' (Ephesians 1:10).

The last nine verses of John 15 make it abundantly clear that this is what Jesus means. Christians are not persecuted for being loving, or joyful or patient. It is an uncompromising allegiance to Jesus that many react against.

Verse 26 conclusively proves that this is what 'bearing fruit' (John 15:16) means in this context. We so desperately need the Holy Spirit to keep us living God's way, according to his truth. A major part of this is to testify openly to others about our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Why do so many Christian doctors drift away from their 'first love' (Revelation 2:4) – an open devotion to the Lord Jesus – into a socially acceptable, easy, sterile Christianity?

Let us all beware lest we fail to remain in Christ, not testifying about him, for God can easily discard doctors! ■

## REFERENCES

1. See Psalm 80:8,16; Isaiah 3:14, 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21
2. John 15:27