

## The True Vine

John 15:1-17

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. -John 15:1*

History tells us that above the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple was a magnificent vine with large clusters of grapes made of pure gold. Wealthy Jews would sometimes contribute gold to add another clump of leaves or even a single grape. That decorative vine was one of the reasons that the temple was considered one of the most impressive monuments in the world at that time. Jesus and many of those that had heard Him speak had seen that impressive piece of work. Jesus and His disciples certainly recognized the significance of the vine imagery in the traditions and history of the nation of Israel. Repeatedly, Israel was pictured as the Lord's vine. Isaiah tells us that God was so disappointed with the failure of Israel as His carefully nurtured vineyard that He would tear it up. - *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:* -Isaiah 5:4-5. Jeremiah told the people of Judah they had turned from a noble vine into a strange vine. - *Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?* -Jeremiah 2:21. The prophet Ezekiel gives us a parable of the vine tree in chapter 15, and called Israel a useless and unproductive vine. The prophet Hosea said that Israel was an empty vine. - *Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images.* -Hosea 10:1. The psalmist also spoke of Israel as being a vine. - *Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.* -Psalm 80:8.

So when Jesus spoke of Himself as the true vine, those that heard Him could immediately make the connection. Jesus was using this symbolic term concerning Israel to refer to Himself. Everything that God had intended for His chosen people, Israel, was realized in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same can be said for all of us today; all of the goodness of God for us is centered in Christ. But Jesus is going to add some important new meanings to the image of the vine. When Jesus says that He is the true vine, the Greek word translated "true" also means "genuine". Something can be true as compared to being false, or it can be true as compared to being a counterfeit. It is used here as the latter, true as compared to a counterfeit. The disciples that Jesus is speaking to were Jews, and they thought as Jews. Their thought patterns were dictated by the Old Testament writings, and they had been taught that the vine represented the nation of Israel. Jesus is telling them that He is the genuine vine, not the nation of Israel. He is letting them know that their identification and relationship with the nation of Israel and the Jewish religion is not the most important thing. The most important thing is to be identified with and have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus made it very clear in His teachings that being part of a religion, ceremony, or an organization is not essential, but what is essential is being identified with Christ. We are placed in Christ the very second

that we trust Him as our Savior and are born again as a child of God. In Old Testament Scripture and also in the New Testament parables, God is represented as the Owner of the vineyard. Here Jesus says that His Father is the husbandman, the vinedresser or farmer; the One who takes care of the vineyard. Jesus is the true or genuine vine, and the Father takes care of Him. He not only takes care of the Vine, but He also takes care of the branches.

As Jesus continues with the allegory of the true vine, we need to notice the key phrase “in me” in order to understand the truth that Jesus is teaching in this passage of Scripture. - *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.* -John 15:2. He says “in me”; that is “in Christ”. That’s what it means to be saved; to be “in Christ”. There are many words that are used to talk about particular aspects of salvation - propitiation, reconciliation, redemption, and others; but all of salvation is covered by “in Christ”. Teachers can teach about it for hours, and preachers can preach on it for hours, but the Holy Spirit sums it all up with the term “in Christ”. There are only two groups of people in this world; those that are “in Christ” and those that are not “in Christ”. This passage of Scripture is directed to believers, those who are already in Christ. Jesus is not talking about how a person gets saved here. Actually, He is not talking about salvation here at all, but He is talking about fruit bearing. The main truth that Jesus is teaching here is the importance of abiding in Him in order to bear fruit. In these first seventeen verses of John chapter 15, the word fruit is used eight times; and the Greek word for abide, although not translated as abide every time, is used fifteen times. The main point of the teaching here is fellowship and not sonship. It says that He takes away the branches that do not bear fruit. Where does He take them? He takes them away from the place of fruit bearing. - *If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.* -John 15:6. Some teach this to mean that you lose your salvation, but we have to remember that this passage is not talking about salvation but fruit bearing. It is talking about that which is the result of being saved. To teach that a Christian loses his salvation and is burned in hell if he fails to bear fruit twists the meaning of this passage of Scripture. It would contradict the teaching of the Bible as a whole and the plain teaching of other Scripture. - *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.* -John 6:27. - *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.* -John 10:27-29. Furthermore, the branch that Jesus speaks of in verse 6, withers after it is cast forth. If it were a picture of a backslidden Christian who could lose his salvation, he would “wither” before it is cast forth. Then he would fail to bear fruit and be cast out.

Jesus tells us to abide in Him; so just what does abiding in Christ mean? It does not mean to keep ourselves saved. We can do no more to keep ourselves saved than we can to save ourselves. It is Christ who saves us, and it is Christ who keeps us saved. Jesus tells us in this passage of Scripture what abiding in Christ means. It means to live in His

Word and to pray. - *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.* -John 15:7. It means to obey His commandments. - *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.* -John 15:10. It means to keep our lives clean through His Word. - *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.* -John 15:3-4. It also means that we cannot bear fruit if we do not abide in Him. - *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 15:4-5. The Christian who fails to abide in Christ becomes like a useless branch, or like salt that has lost its taste and is good for nothing. All of the Christian's works will be tested by fire. - *If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.* - I Corinthians 3:15. The Christian who doesn't use the gifts and the opportunities that God gives to them will lose them. - *Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.* -Luke 8:18. *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.* -II John:8.

Jesus tells us that we are to bear fruit; so just what is the fruit that we are to bear? Many people talk about people producing results, and look for people to produce results. But it doesn't say to bear results; it says to bear fruit. A machine can produce results, but it takes a living organism to produce fruit. It also takes time, work, and cultivation to produce fruit. A good crop doesn't come over night. Most people immediately think that this fruit refers only to soul winning. The Bible does tell us that we bear fruit in that respect. - *Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.* -Romans 1:13. Being a soul winner is a by-product but not the fruit itself. We have to remember that the branches produce the fruit, but they do not eat the fruit. We are to produce fruit, not to please ourselves, but to serve others and to serve the Lord. We should be the kind of person that feeds others by our words and our works. - *The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.* -Proverbs 10:21. There are several different kinds of spiritual fruit mentioned in the Bible. We, as saved, born again children of God, are part of the harvest. - *Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.* -John 4:35-38. We also bear fruit as we grow in holiness and obedience to the Lord. - *But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.* -Romans 6:22. The apostle Paul tells us that Christian giving is fruit from a dedicated life. - *For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the*

*Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain. -Romans 15:26-28. But it is the fruit of the Spirit that gives us the kind of Christian character that glorifies God and makes Christ real to others. This is fruit in the life of a Christian. - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. -Galatians 5:22-23. Our good works and our service to the Lord grow from our abiding in Christ. - That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; -Colossians 1:10. Even the praise from our hearts and lips is really fruit to the glory of God. - By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. -Hebrews 13:15. To be a branch in the vine means that we are united to Christ, and that it is His life that flows through us and produces fruit. Notice in verse 2 that it says the fruitful branches are purged so that they can produce more fruit. The word used for purged is the same word translated as clean in verse 3. God cleans us through the Word, and sometimes has to chasten us to make us more fruitful. This helps explain why sometimes dedicated Christians have to suffer in some way.*

Notice the progression of fruit in these verses. It goes from no fruit to producing fruit to more fruit in verse 2, and then to much fruit in verse 8. As a Christian goes through that “fruit producing” progression, it brings glory to the Father. - *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. -John 15:8. Jesus also gives us the evidence of an “abiding life” here: a sense of the Savior’s love in verse 9, obedience to His Word in verse 10, answered prayer in verse 7, and joy in verse 11. - As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. -John 15:9,11.*

In the first eleven verses of this passage of Scripture, Jesus has talked about the relationship of Christians to Himself; and now in verses 12 through 17, He talks about the relationship of Christians to each other, and gives us a commandment. - *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. -John 15:12-17. He commands us to love one another. Love for the brethren, or other Christians, is a mark of a true disciple of Christ. Now, Jesus calls His disciples friends, but He says, “if ye do whatsoever I command you”. He is commanding us to love one another as He loves us. He says in verse 13 that it is a love that is so great that one would lay down his life for his friends. Jesus is about to go to the Cross, and His disciples are going to be scattered. He is going to prove His love for them, and for us, and He wants us all to know what kind of love that He is talking about. He says that He calls us friends and no longer servants. The word*

that is translated friend means “a friend at court”, and it describes the inner circle of people around a king or emperor. The friends of the king would be very close to him, know his secrets, and have an intimate relationship with him. However, they would still be subject to him and have to obey him. So, we can see that there is no conflict between being a servant and a friend. Then Jesus reminds us that we have not chosen Him, but He has chosen us - to bring forth fruit!